

Consent Myths and Norm Violation Responses: Reconceptualizing Rape Myth Theory in Sexual Assault Sentencing in China

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Abstract: Criminal sentencing in sexual assault cases exhibits systematic disparities based on victim-offender relationships, yet existing theoretical explanations remain inadequate for understanding the underlying cognitive mechanisms. This study reconceptualizes rape myth theory by distinguishing between two distinct cognitive structures: consent myths that operate through everyday cultural reinforcement, and norm violation responses that activate through moral boundary violations. Analyzing 7,701 Chinese rape case judgments (2012-2020), we demonstrate that these mechanisms produce opposing sentencing effects. Consent myths lead to sentencing discounts of 5-9% for acquaintance and intimate partner cases, while norm violation responses trigger 25% longer sentences for familial cases. This dual-structure framework explains previously puzzling cross-cultural patterns, including why Chinese courts impose harsher punishment on family members than strangers. We identify two critical moderating factors that interact differently with these myth types. Lay juror participation produces “accidental equity” through generalized punitiveness, compressing relationship-based disparities via universal severity rather than bias correction. Provincial modernization demonstrates contradictory effects: reducing consent myth influence through changing gender norms while simultaneously amplifying norm violation responses through heightened moral sensitivity. Crucially, female educational advancement proves more effective than general economic growth in reducing rape myth influence.

Keywords: Rape myth, sentencing, sexual assault

Introduction

Criminal sentencing in sexual assault cases has long been recognized as susceptible to extra-legal influences that systematically deviate from the formal equality principles under-

lying modern legal systems. A substantial body of empirical research demonstrates that judicial outcomes in rape cases are significantly shaped by the nature of the victim-offender relationship (VOR), with non-stranger assaults consistently receiving more lenient treatment than cases involving unknown perpetrators (Kingsnorth, MacIntosh, and Sutherland 2002; McCormick et al. 1998; Cassia Spohn and Holleran 2001). This pattern has been documented across multiple jurisdictions and legal systems, suggesting a robust and persistent bias in how courts process sexual violence cases (Sumalla et al. 2024; Han and Lee 2024; Doncel and Moreno 2021; Rinde et al. 2024).

However, this extensive literature is heavily concentrated in Western jurisdictions, with remarkably limited empirical investigation of these dynamics in Chinese legal contexts (Bond and Jeffries 2014; Jung, Faitakis, and Cheema 2021; Bielen, Dimitrova-Grajzl, and Grajzl 2022; Uhl, Porębski, and Ilczuk 2024). This geographic concentration represents a significant gap given China's distinct legal system, cultural context, and rapid social transformation. Recent scholarship has begun to address this lacuna, with Chen et al. (2025) making an important contribution through their "sexual distance" framework applied to Chinese court data. Their analysis reveals that sentencing in rape cases does not follow a simple logic of social proximity, demonstrating instead that family members receive harsher sentences than strangers—a finding that challenges conventional assumptions about social distance effects (Chen, Xin, and Cai 2025). While such work is vital for documenting the "what" of sentencing disparities in the Chinese context, it leaves largely unanswered the fundamental question of the underlying mechanisms driving these judicial decisions.

Existing theoretical explanations for these disparities, while valuable, suffer from critical limitations that this study addresses through a fundamental reconceptualization of rape myth theory. Traditional applications of rape myth theory have primarily focused on a unidirectional bias—the tendency to question victim credibility and rationalize perpetrator behavior in non-stranger cases (Burt 1980; LaFree 1980). However, this conventional understanding fails to explain the full spectrum of sentencing patterns observed across different victim-offender relationships, particularly the enhanced punishment often seen in familial cases.

We argue that rape myths operate through two distinct but interconnected cognitive structures that have been conflated in previous research. The first, which we term *consent myths*, encompasses the familiar territory of victim-blaming stereotypes that question credibility and assume victim precipitation in acquaintance and intimate partner cases. The second, which we term *norm violation responses*, represents a fundamentally different cognitive script that activates moral outrage and enhanced punishment when sexual violence violates fundamental social taboos—particularly in familial relationships.

What distinguishes these two types of myths is not merely their content but their mode of cultural transmission and cognitive activation. Consent myths are sustained through everyday reinforcement—the pervasive, routine cultural narratives that normalize ambiguous consent in dating and intimate relationships. These myths are "immersive" in na-

ture, embedded in cultural scripts about romance, courtship, and sexuality that suggest “no means yes” or that sexual coercion in intimate contexts is less serious than violence between strangers (Burt 1980; LaFree 1980; George and Spohn 2018; Grubb and Turner 2012; LaFree 1980; Spohn, Beichner, and Davis-Frenzel 2001; Sumalla et al. 2024; Han and Lee 2024). Their power derives from their ubiquity and cultural naturalness, making them nearly invisible as biases.

Norm violation responses, by contrast, operate through situational activation of moral boundaries. These myths lack everyday cultural rehearsal precisely because they concern behaviors that society explicitly prohibits and rarely discusses. When activated, they trigger intense emotional and moral condemnation—responses captured in language like “subhuman” or “morally bankrupt”—that can actually enhance rather than mitigate punishment (Featherstone and Kaladelfos 2014; Chen, Xin, and Cai 2025). Their power derives from their capacity to evoke immediate moral revulsion and their alignment with widely shared prohibitions.

This dual structure explains the paradoxical findings in Chinese courts: acquaintance and intimate partner cases activate deeply embedded consent myths sustained by everyday cultural reinforcement, leading to sentencing discounts, while familial cases activate norm violation responses that trigger moral condemnation and sentencing premiums. This effect may be particularly pronounced in China, where the narrow legal definition of rape (except in statutory cases, usually require evidence of force or violence (Cao, Huang, and Yu 2023)), means that prosecuted cases likely represent egregious conduct with few mitigating circumstances available to defendants.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that myth activation is not uniform but is systematically moderated by institutional and social contexts in ways that previous research has not fully explored. We examine two critical moderating factors: the presence of lay jurors and levels of social modernization, both of which interact differently with the two types of rape myths.

Lay juror participation represents what we term “accidental equity”—not through sophisticated bias correction, but through generalized moral outrage toward sexual violence that compresses the differential treatment typically seen across relationship types. Research on public punitiveness suggests that lay persons often reflect generally more punitive attitudes toward crime (Yang 2016; Pan and Pu 2024). Meanwhile, provincial modernization reveals a double-edged relationship with myth activation: while it may reduce consent myth influence through changing gender norms and sexual attitudes (Siegel 1995; Wu and Dong 2019), it simultaneously strengthens norm violation responses through heightened sensitivity to moral boundaries and protection of vulnerable groups (Li and Wang 2021).

This research makes three primary theoretical contributions to understanding judicial bias in sexual assault cases. First, we provide a dual-structure reconceptualization of rape myth theory that explains both leniency and severity patterns across victim-offender relationships through distinct cognitive mechanisms. Second, we demonstrate the double-

edged effects of modernization on judicial bias, showing how social change can simultaneously reduce some forms of bias while amplifying others. Third, we reveal how institutional design can produce accidental equity through generalized punitiveness, offering insights into how lay participation might serve as an inadvertent check on relationship-based disparities.

By moving from the “what” of sentencing disparities to the “why” of cognitive bias activation, this research provides a theoretically grounded foundation for understanding how extra-legal factors systematically influence judicial decision-making. Our findings offer precise targets for bias reduction through judicial training, institutional design, and legal reform—interventions that would be difficult to design without understanding the specific cognitive mechanisms underlying disparate treatment.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. We first elaborate our theoretical framework, developing the dual-structure model of rape myths and hypotheses about institutional and social moderation. We then describe our data collection and coding methodology, including the construction of our myth severity measure. Our results section demonstrates the explanatory power of the dual-structure approach and reveals how context shapes bias activation. We conclude by discussing the implications for both scholarly understanding of judicial decision-making and practical efforts to achieve more equitable justice outcomes.

I. Theoretical Foundation and Hypotheses

A central challenge for the sociology of law is to explain how informal social biases penetrate formal legal processes, creating systematic disparities in judicial outcomes. While existing research has documented the robust pattern whereby victim-offender relationship influences sentencing in sexual assault cases, theoretical explanations for these patterns remain limited. Social distance theory, which posits that greater social distance correlates with more formal and severe social control responses (Black 1976), offers one structural framework for understanding why strangers might receive harsher sentences than acquaintances or intimate partners.

However, structural frameworks like social distance theory function primarily as descriptive proxies that identify a defendant’s position on a social map without fully explaining the judicial reasoning that converts that position into specific sentencing outcomes. These explanatory limits become particularly apparent when confronted with cross-cultural contradictions and complex patterns. Chen et al’s (2025) findings that familial assaults receive harsher sentences than stranger assaults in China directly challenge simple inverse relationships predicted by distance-based models. Their proposed “sexual distance” framework, while a valuable refinement, still relies on structural metaphors rather than specifying the underlying cognitive processes at work.

We argue that a reconceptualized rape myth theory provides the necessary mechanistic explanation that structural proxies cannot offer. Traditional applications of rape myth theory, originating in feminist legal scholarship and cognitive psychology, have focused primarily on “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” that systematically disadvantage victims and excuse perpetrators (Burt 1980: 217). However, this conventional understanding treats rape myths as a unidirectional bias toward leniency, failing to explain why certain relationships trigger enhanced rather than reduced punishment.

Our reconceptualization distinguishes between two fundamentally different types of cognitive biases that operate through distinct mechanisms: consent myths and norm violation responses.

Consent myths encompass the familiar territory of victim-blaming stereotypes but are characterized by their mode of cultural transmission through everyday reinforcement. These myths are sustained by pervasive, routine cultural narratives embedded in dating scripts, romantic comedies, courtship rituals, and intimate relationship norms (Grubb and Turner 2012; Hockett et al. 2016). They include beliefs that resistance is part of seduction (

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), that “no means yes” in intimate contexts, that victims in dating relationships likely consented, or that intimate partners have presumed sexual access rights (Gray 2006; Frohmann 1991).

The power of consent myths derives from their cultural ubiquity and apparent naturalness. They are “immersive” biases that permeate everyday social interactions, making them nearly invisible as biases while simultaneously making them extraordinarily resistant to conscious correction. Because these myths are rehearsed and reinforced through routine cultural practice—in media representations, social conversations, and personal relationship experiences—they operate as deeply embedded cognitive scripts that judicial actors may not even recognize as biased reasoning.

When acquaintance or intimate partner rape cases are processed, they activate these pre-existing cultural scripts that question the severity of the offense, the credibility of the victim, or the culpability of the perpetrator (LaFree 1980; Spohn, Beichner, and Davis-Frenzel 2001). The result is systematic sentencing discounts that reflect not conscious bias but the unconscious application of culturally reinforced assumptions about consent and relationships.

Norm violation responses represent a fundamentally different cognitive structure that operates through situational activation of moral boundaries rather than everyday reinforcement. These myths concern behaviors that society explicitly prohibits and rarely discusses in routine cultural contexts (Featherstone and Kaladelfos 2014). They include beliefs about the fundamental wrongness of intrafamilial sexual violence, the betrayal of trust and responsibility, and the exploitation of inherent vulnerability and dependency.

Unlike consent myths, norm violation responses lack everyday cultural rehearsal precisely because they concern taboo behaviors. Their power derives not from ubiquity but from their capacity to trigger immediate and intense moral revulsion. When activated, they produce responses captured in language like “*qinshou buru*” (worse than beasts) or “*sangjin tianliang*” (utterly conscienceless) that reflect fundamental violations of human morality rather than mere legal transgressions.

The absence of everyday reinforcement means that when familial sexual assault cases are processed, they activate cognitive scripts that are primarily condemnatory rather than exculpatory. These cases align with no familiar cultural narrative that might mitigate blame or question victim credibility. Instead, they trigger powerful schemas about the violation of sacred social boundaries, betrayal of the most fundamental trust relationships, and exploitation of acute vulnerability (Spohn and Holleran 2001; Chen, Xin, and Cai 2025). The result is systematic sentencing premiums that reflect the activation of moral condemnation scripts.

The distinction between these two types of myths turns on their relationship to everyday cultural practice and cognitive rehearsal. Consent myths are continuously reinforced through routine social interactions, media consumption, and personal relationship experiences. This constant reinforcement makes them cognitively accessible and seemingly natural, allowing them to influence judicial reasoning without conscious awareness of bias. Norm violation responses, by contrast, are rarely rehearsed in everyday contexts precisely because the behaviors they address are culturally taboo. This absence of routine reinforcement means that when these myths are activated, they operate more as situational responses to moral boundary violations than as deeply embedded cognitive scripts. However, their very rarity and intensity can make them powerful drivers of enhanced punishment when triggered.

The reinforcement mechanism may explain why consent myths are so resistant to conscious correction—they feel like common sense rather than bias—while norm violation responses produce more variable responses depending on the specific circumstances that trigger moral boundary activation.

China’s rapid and uneven provincial modernization offers a unique context for examining how social change interacts with these two types of rape myths in contradictory ways. We theorize that modernization, measured through economic development and gender equality in education, has fundamentally different effects on the two types of cognitive biases we have identified.

Regarding consent myths, modernization is often associated with declining traditionalist, patriarchal attitudes and changing norms around women’s sexual autonomy and dating relationships (Siegel 1995; Wu and Dong 2019). Economic development and increased female education should weaken the everyday reinforcement of consent myths by challenging traditional gender scripts and promoting more egalitarian relationship norms. This suggests an “enlightenment effect” that should reduce myth-based leniency in acquain-

tance and intimate partner cases. However, modernization simultaneously operates to strengthen norm violation responses through heightened moral sensitivity and civilization discourse. As economic prosperity elevates concerns with civilized conduct and moral boundaries (Li and Wang 2021), violations of family sanctity and child protection become increasingly salient as markers of social progress. Modernization can thus amplify the condemnation triggered by norm violation responses, leading to enhanced punishment for familial cases precisely because they represent failures of civilizational progress.

This creates a double-edged effect where modernization simultaneously reduces some forms of judicial bias while amplifying others, depending on which type of rape myth is activated by the specific victim-offender relationship.

The use of lay assessors in Chinese courts presents a theoretically complex case for understanding how institutional design interacts with cognitive bias. Unlike professional judges who may have developed sophisticated but unconscious applications of both consent myths and norm violation responses, lay jurors bring generalized moral intuitions about sexual violence that operate differently across the two types of cases. Lay jurors, lacking legal training, may be more susceptible to pervasive cultural rape myths than professional judges (Leverick 2020; Ellison and Munro 2013), potentially amplifying sentencing disparities driven by myth-activating relationships.

Based on well-documented public punitiveness (Yang 2016; Pan and Pu 2024), we, however, theorize that lay juror presence produces what we term “accidental equity”—not through sophisticated bias correction or legal training, but through generalized emotional and moral revulsion toward sexual violence that compresses the differential treatment typically seen across relationship types. Lay jurors’ responses to rape cases are likely dominated by visceral moral reactions that condemn sexual violence regardless of victim-offender relationship, leading to uniformly harsh sentences across all case types. This generalized punitiveness differs from the professional judicial reasoning that might distinguish between different types of cases based on consent myths or norm violation responses. While lay jurors may still be influenced by cultural biases, their lack of legal training and their emotional engagement with cases may lead them to impose severe sentences based on the fundamental wrongness of sexual violence rather than sophisticated applications of relationship-specific cognitive scripts.

The result is not bias correction per se, but rather a compression of sentencing ranges that reduces relationship-based disparities through universal severity rather than universal fairness. This represents an inadvertent form of equity that operates through emotional rather than analytical processes.

We thus develop three primary hypotheses:

H1 (Dual Structure Hypothesis): Sentencing outcomes in rape cases reflect the activation of two distinct types of cognitive biases. Cases involving relationships associated with consent myths (acquaintances and intimate partners) will receive significantly shorter sentences than stranger cases, while cases involving relationships that activate norm violation

responses (familial relationships) will receive significantly longer sentences than stranger cases,

ceteris paribus.

H2 (Accidental Equity Hypothesis): Lay juror presence will compress relationship-based sentencing disparities through generalized punitiveness rather than bias correction. Cases with lay juror participation will show uniformly harsh sentences across all relationship types, reducing the differential treatment patterns predicted in H1 through universal severity rather than universal fairness.

H3 (Double-Edged Modernization Hypothesis): Higher levels of provincial modernization will have contradictory effects on the two types of rape myths. Modernization will reduce sentencing discounts associated with consent myths (in acquaintance and intimate partner cases) while simultaneously increasing sentencing premiums associated with norm violation responses (in familial cases), reflecting the simultaneous weakening of traditional gender scripts and strengthening of moral boundary protection.

II. Data and Methodology

Our analysis draws on comprehensive court judgment data from the China Judgments Online (CJO) website, collected in 2021 and covering archived rape case judgments from 2012-2020. The CJO platform was officially launched by the Supreme People’s Court of China in 2014, providing public access to Chinese judicial decisions across multiple levels of courts and jurisdictions (Liebman et al. 2020). However, many courts retroactively uploaded judgments from prior years, allowing us to include cases from as early as 2012.

The temporal distribution of our data reflects this rollout pattern. Our sample includes 71 cases from 2012 (0.9%) and 140 cases from 2013 (1.8%), representing retroactively published judgments. Case numbers increase substantially from 2014 onwards, coinciding with the platform’s official launch, with peak years in 2017 (21% of cases) and 2019 (22% of cases). This distribution suggests that while early years have fewer cases due to the retroactive nature of publication, the overall sample captures meaningful variation across the study period.

We obtained structured judgment data through systematic extraction of rape cases from the platform, supplemented by large language model (LLM) analysis to identify victim-perpetrator relationships. Additionally, we merged our judicial data with provincial-level socioeconomic indicators from the National Bureau of Statistics of China to control for regional contextual factors that may influence sentencing outcomes.

The final analytical sample contains 7,701 cases with complete data spanning 2012-2020. The aforementioned temporal variation is controlled for in our statistical models through flexible time trend specifications.

Our initial dataset contained comprehensive information on rape cases, from which we applied several filtering criteria to ensure analytical coherence. First, we restricted our analysis to first-instance trial cases to avoid complications arising from appellate proceedings. Second, we focused exclusively on single-defendant cases where rape was the sole charge, eliminating cases involving multiple defendants or concurrent charges that could confound sentencing patterns. Third, we excluded attempted rape cases to maintain consistency in offense severity.

Regarding potential selection bias in the CJO data, rape cases are typically not publicly disclosed due to privacy protection requirements under Chinese law (Peng 2024). However, some courts may nevertheless publish these judgments, potentially due to administrative upload procedures. Importantly, our sample includes cases across the full spectrum of victim-perpetrator relationships and offense severity, including incestuous relationships, death penalty cases, and cases involving minor victims. This diversity suggests that the publication pattern is unlikely to be systematically related to the key variables of interest in our analysis—namely, the victim-perpetrator relationship or sentencing severity. We therefore treat any potential missingness as random and unlikely to bias our core findings.

The central innovation of our study lies in the construction of a comprehensive rape myth severity measure that captures the extent to which different victim-perpetrator relationships activate harmful stereotypes about sexual assault. We employed a multi-stage process combining automated text analysis with manual coding to classify relationships and assess their alignment with prevalent rape myths.

First, we utilized large language model analysis to extract and categorize victim-perpetrator relationships, case location, education of the defendant, whether victim is young girl and whether victim is mentally ill from judgment texts. We tested and optimized the LLM code through several iterations using randomly selected samples of 10-20 cases each time to refine the classification accuracy. This approach allowed us to process relationship descriptions systematically across thousands of cases while maintaining consistency in classification. The LLM analysis identified relationship types ranging from complete strangers to intimate partners, family members, and various categories of acquaintances.

We then developed our myth severity classification drawing on theoretical understanding of how certain relationship types are more likely to trigger victim-blaming attitudes and assumptions about consent, resistance, and credibility. The resulting categorical measure includes five levels. The reference category “None” encompasses complete stranger relationships, where traditional rape myths have minimal applicability. The “Low” category includes family relationships such as parent-child and other family members, where social taboos provide some protection against myth activation. “Medium” severity encompasses authority relationships, community acquaintances, and casual acquaintances, where power dynamics or social connections may moderate myth effects. “High” severity includes close acquaintances, cohabiting non-romantic relationships, and online-to-in-person relationships, where assumptions about consent and victim behavior become more

prominent. Finally, “Very High” severity captures current intimate partners, former intimate partners, and casual sexual relationships, where rape myths about consent within relationships are most strongly activated.

Our primary outcome variable is sentence length, measured in months and transformed using $\log(\text{sentence} + 1)$ to address skewness in the distribution. We converted diverse punishment options into a unified metric following Hou and Truex (2022) standards: fixed-term imprisonment calculated directly from stated years and months, life imprisonment as 264 months, immediate death sentences as 360 months, suspended death sentences as 288 months.

The control variables include legal factors specified in sentencing guidelines (prior criminal record, recidivism status, confession, surrender, victim forgave/settled, injury severity, victim young or mentally ill), court composition factors (presence of lay judges, relative number of lay judges to professional judges), geographic indicators (urban/rural location, province), and temporal controls (year of judgment with flexible functional forms).

We employ mixed-effects regression models with province-level random intercepts to account for unobserved heterogeneity in judicial practices across China’s diverse regional contexts. This modeling approach allows us to estimate the effect of rape myth severity while controlling for both observed case characteristics and unobserved provincial factors that may influence sentencing patterns.

Our analytical strategy proceeds through several stages. We first establish the baseline relationship between myth severity and sentencing length. We then examine potential moderating factors, including court composition effects (testing whether lay judge participation alters myth influence), temporal trends (examining whether myth effects change over time), and provincial contextual factors (testing whether regional socioeconomic conditions moderate myth influence). To ensure robustness, we test alternative model specifications including different functional forms for temporal trends, alternative outcome transformations, and sample restrictions to address potential outliers.

III. Results

Descriptive Results

【Insert Table 1 here.】

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for key variables. The average sentence length was 49.5 months, with considerable variation across cases. The distribution of victim-offender relationships reveals important patterns: 71% of cases involved relationships that should theoretically trigger minimal rape myth activation (strangers and neutral authority figures), while 29% involved relationships expected to activate either consent myths or norm violation responses. However, it is important to note that this distribution may not represent the actual incidence rate of rape cases in the population, but rather may reflect differential reporting and prosecution patterns. Most cases (88%) included lay jurors on the sentencing

panel, and in 56% of cases, lay jurors outnumbered judges. Nearly one-third of victims (29%) were classified as young girls, while 15% involved victims with mental illness—representing two categories of vulnerable. Victim forgiveness or settlement occurred in 24% of cases.

Regression Results

Our core regression findings provide strong support for **H1**, demonstrating that the dual-structure reconceptualization of rape myth theory effectively explains sentencing variation through relationship-specific cognitive scripts. Table 2 reveals the predicted non-linear pattern where different victim-offender relationships activate fundamentally different types of cognitive biases among judicial decision-makers.

Cases involving relationships associated with consent myths receive significantly shorter sentences than stranger cases, as predicted. Very high-severity myth cases (intimate partner relationships) show sentences that are approximately 5.3% shorter ($\beta = -0.054$, $p < 0.01$), while high-severity myth cases (close acquaintances and online relationships) receive sentences that are 8.9% shorter ($\beta = -0.093$, $p < 0.001$). These findings confirm that when victim-offender relationships activate cognitive scripts questioning victim credibility, resistance, or consent—such as in intimate partner or close acquaintance contexts—courts impose more lenient sentences relative to stranger cases that serve as the reference category.

Conversely, cases involving relationships that activate norm violation responses receive significantly longer sentences than stranger cases. Low-severity myth cases (family relationships) show sentences that are approximately 24.6% longer ($\beta = 0.220$, $p < 0.001$). This pattern confirms that family relationships—including parent-child and other familial contexts—trigger heightened moral condemnation due to violation of trust and social taboos, translating into substantially harsher punishment.

Medium consent myth cases (authority figures and casual acquaintances) show no significant deviation from stranger cases ($\beta = 0.001$, $p > 0.05$), meaning that these relationship types produce sentences similar to stranger cases. This pattern suggests that authority figures and casual acquaintances occupy a cognitive “neutral zone” where they fail to strongly activate either type of biased reasoning. Unlike intimate partners, these relationships are not embedded in everyday cultural scripts about romance and consent that would trigger myth-based leniency. Unlike family members, these relationships do not violate fundamental moral boundaries that would provoke norm violation responses. Authority cases may involve competing cognitive scripts—condemnation for abuse of power versus myths about victim compliance—that can effectively cancel each other out, resulting in sentences similar to the baseline stranger category.

[Insert Table 2 here.]

Table 3 provides strong support for **H2** regarding “accidental equity” through lay juror participation, revealing the predicted pattern of generalized punitiveness rather than sophisticated bias correction. The findings clearly demonstrate well-documented public

punitiveness, with the presence of jurors compared to judge-only panels associated with significantly longer sentences overall ($\beta=0.187$, $p<0.001$).

[Insert Table 3 here.]

The analysis reveals the theorized compression effect when examining interactions between jurors and different relationship types. In judge-only courts, cases involving norm violation responses (familial relationships) already receive substantially longer sentences ($\beta=0.394$, $p<0.001$), reflecting professional judicial responses to taboo violations. The introduction of jurors significantly attenuates this specific effect, as indicated by the negative and statistically significant interaction term ($\beta=-0.192$, $p<0.01$). Notably, this compression effect is specific to norm violation responses cases. The interaction terms for consent myth categories are not statistically significant, likely suggesting that jurors' generalized moral outrage affects all types of sexual violence relatively uniformly, thereby reducing the differential treatment that professional judges exhibit across relationship types.

It shows the predicted dual effect: the generalized punitiveness of jurors (reflecting well-documented public punitiveness) raises the overall sentencing baseline, creating a “ceiling effect” that limits the available room for the dramatic sentence enhancements that judges would otherwise impose in norm violation cases. Hence, while juror presence leads to harsher sentences generally, it also selectively moderates the exceptional punitiveness of judges in familial cases—producing accidental equity through universal severity rather than universal fairness.

Moreover, the second model (“Myth $\times$ Both Juror Types”) confirms that the crucial factor is juror presence, not their proportion. The results demonstrate that whether jurors outnumber judges has no statistically significant effect on sentence length, either as a main effect or through its interactions with any myth category.

Table 4 provides support for **H3**, revealing that provincial modernization creates the predicted contradictory effects on the two types of rape myths. Economic development and female educational attainment demonstrate the hypothesized double-edged pattern where modernization simultaneously weakens consent myths while strengthening norm violation responses.

[Insert Table 4 here.]

Provincial wealth significantly amplifies norm violation responses in the predicted direction: the interaction between familial cases and GDP per capita ($\beta = 0.054$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that higher modernization increases sentencing premiums for intrafamilial sexual violence. This suggests that economically developed provinces demonstrate heightened sensitivity to family trust violations, consistent with modernization's emphasis on civilizational progress and moral boundary protection.

Female educational attainment shows a parallel pattern. In provinces with higher female college enrollment rates, the sentence-enhancing effects for familial relationships are sig-

nificantly strengthened ($\beta=0.064$, $p<0.05$). This reflects modernization's emphasis on protecting vulnerable groups and maintaining civilized moral standards, making violations of family sanctity particularly egregious in more developed contexts. Simultaneously, modernization shows tentative signs of weakening consent myth influence. The interaction between female educational attainment and high consent myth cases (close acquaintances, cohabiting partners, online contacts) shows significantly reduced sentence-mitigating effects ($\beta=0.042$, $p<0.05$). This suggests that areas with greater gender equality in education may be developing cultural scripts that challenge the everyday reinforcement of consent myths, making judicial actors less susceptible to relationship-based leniency in non-stranger cases.

This polarization effect strongly confirms the theoretical prediction that modernization does not uniformly reduce bias but rather reshapes how different types of relationship-based cognitive scripts are activated. The same social processes that weaken traditional gender scripts and reduce consent myth influence simultaneously heighten moral sensitivities and strengthen norm violation responses. Also, the findings indicate that to reduce the influence of rape myths, advancing female education is more critical than general economic growth.

Table 5 examines how the dual-structure myth effects evolved over the study period (2012-2020). The effects are quite stable over time, with relationship $\times$ year interaction terms failing to reach statistical significance. This suggests that the cognitive mechanisms underlying both consent myths and norm violation responses represent deep-seated psychological processes rather than surface-level cultural attitudes that might shift rapidly with social change.

[Insert Table 5 here.]

The models also reveal some important temporal patterns. Overall sentence lengths declined significantly over time ($\beta = -0.011$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a general trend toward more lenient sentencing. The triple interaction model shows that juror influence itself evolved over time ($\beta = 0.069$, $p < 0.001$), with lay participants becoming increasingly punitive relative to professional judges.

Table 6 confirms that our core findings are robust across alternative model specifications and sample restrictions. The non-linear pattern of myth effects holds consistently whether we examine untransformed sentence months, square-root transformations, or restrict analysis to moderate sentences under 180 months.

[Insert Table 6 here]

Across all specifications, norm violation responses (familial relationships) consistently increase sentences, while consent myths (acquaintance and intimate partner relationships) consistently reduce sentences. The robustness across transformations rules out concerns that our findings are artifacts of the log transformation or driven by extreme outliers. The untransformed model provides intuitive substantive interpretations: norm violation re-

sponses activation increases sentences by approximately 16 months, while consent myth activation reduces them by about 5 months.

IV. Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings provide compelling evidence for a fundamental reconceptualization of how cognitive biases operate in judicial decision-making for sexual assault cases. The dual-structure model of rape myths offers a theoretically grounded explanation for the complex and seemingly contradictory patterns of sentencing disparities. By distinguishing between consent myths and norm violation responses, we move beyond descriptive accounts of relationship-based disparities toward a mechanistic understanding of the cognitive processes that drive judicial reasoning.

The results demonstrate that judicial bias cannot be adequately explained by simple “distance” frameworks (Black 1976; Chen, Xin, and Cai 2025). Our findings reveal that “high” myth cases (online relationships) receive even more lenient treatment than “very high” myth cases (intimate partners). This counterintuitive pattern suggests that cognitive bias activation depends not merely on relational/sexual proximity but on the specific cultural script different relationships trigger.

The particularly severe leniency in “high” myth cases likely reflects the activation of especially pernicious victim-blaming narratives. Online dating relationships, for instance, may trigger cultural assumptions that victims who meet strangers online are “asking for trouble” or engaging in inherently risky behavior that diminishes perpetrator culpability (Arrojo et al. 2024). Similarly, cohabiting non-romantic relationships may activate scripts about sexual availability and ambiguous consent that are even more deeply embedded than those affecting established intimate partnerships. These relationships occupy a cultural gray zone where traditional protective scripts (like marriage) are absent, but proximity suggests victim complicity—creating the most fertile ground for consent myth activation.

Importantly, female educational advancement specifically reduces sentence discounts in these “high” myth cases, suggesting that gender equality in education directly challenges the cultural narratives that blame victims for placing themselves in “compromising” situations. This targeted effect confirms that different types of consent myths require different interventions: while general relationship-based leniency can be hard to change, interventions addressing gender equality and sexual autonomy can be very helpful to reduce the most pernicious victim-blaming attitudes.

Our investigation of moderating factors reveals three critical patterns that illuminate how context shapes bias activation. First, lay juror participation produces “accidental equity” by compressing relationship-based disparities through generalized punitiveness rather than sophisticated bias correction. The finding challenges conventional wisdom about lay par-

tipication potentially amplifying bias, instead suggesting that emotional engagement with cases can inadvertently promote more uniform treatment across relationship types.

Second, provincial modernization demonstrates fundamentally double-edged effects that previous research has not adequately recognized. While female educational advancement reduces consent myth influence through changing gender norms, the same modernization processes simultaneously amplify norm violation responses through heightened moral sensitivity to family boundary violations. This creates a polarization effect where modernization simultaneously makes courts more equitable in some cases while more punitive in others.

Third, while overall sentencing severity declined significantly during our study period, the relative magnitude of relationship-based disparities remained remarkably consistent, indicating that these cognitive biases operate at a deeper level than the policy reforms and social changes that influenced general punitiveness trends.

By distinguishing between everyday-reinforced consent myths and situationally-activated norm violation responses, we provide mechanistic explanations for patterns the structural theories cannot address. This framework suggests that bias reduction requires targeted interventions addressing specific cognitive mechanisms rather than general awareness training.

Several limitations suggest caution in generalizing these findings. First, our categorical measure of rape myth severity, while empirically validated, cannot capture the full complexity of relationship-based cognitive activation. Regression analysis necessarily simplifies the rich variety of victim-offender relationships into discrete categories, potentially missing important nuances in how specific relational contexts trigger different cognitive scripts.

Second, our focus on China limits immediate generalizability to other legal systems with different institutional structures and cultural contexts. The specific patterns we observe—particularly the severity of norm violation responses to familial cases—may reflect cultural values that vary significantly across jurisdictions. Comparative research examining dual-structure rape myths across different societies could illuminate universal versus culture-specific aspects of these cognitive mechanisms.

Third, while our provincial modernization measures capture broad socioeconomic trends, they may not fully represent the complex cultural changes affecting judicial reasoning. Local variations in gender norms, family structures, and sexual attitudes could create more nuanced patterns than our aggregate measures detect.

Future research should pursue several promising directions. Experimental studies could test causal mechanisms by manipulating relationship descriptions while holding other factors constant, providing stronger evidence for theorized cognitive processes. Cross-national comparative research could examine how different legal traditions, cultural contexts, and institutional arrangements moderate dual-structure effects. Such research

would be particularly valuable for understanding how norm violation responses vary across jurisdictions with different cultural attitudes toward family structure and sexual morality.

Longitudinal research following the same jurisdictions over extended periods could better establish causal relationships between modernization and bias reduction. Intervention studies evaluating targeted bias reduction programs based on our theoretical framework could provide practical guidance for reform efforts. Research examining other crime types (

e.g.

murder) could test whether dual-structure cognitive bias extends beyond sexual assault to other offenses where victim-offender relationships activate cultural scripts.

This study demonstrates that judicial bias in sexual assault cases operates through distinct cognitive mechanisms that respond differently to institutional and social contexts. Our dual-structure framework provides both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for achieving more equitable justice outcomes. The patterns we identify reveal Chinese courts as complex institutions navigating competing pressures of legal rationality, cultural tradition, and modernizing values.

Most importantly, our findings suggest that reducing judicial bias requires understanding its cognitive foundations rather than treating it as a unitary phenomenon. Different types of bias require different interventions: consent myths demand cultural change through education and media representation, while norm violation responses require careful institutional design to moderate excessive punitiveness. Furthermore, even within consent myths, our findings reveal important variations—the particularly severe leniency in ‘high’ myth cases suggests that some victim-blaming narratives are more deeply entrenched than others, requiring more targeted educational interventions that specifically address assumptions about sexual risk-taking and victim responsibility in ambiguous relational contexts.

The path toward more equitable justice lies not in eliminating human judgment from legal decision-making, but in understanding how cultural cognition shapes that judgment and designing institutions that channel cognitive processes toward fairer outcomes. Our research provides a foundation for this more nuanced approach to justice system reform, one that recognizes the irreducible complexity of human decision-making while working systematically to minimize its most harmful biases.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Characteristic	N = 7,701 ¹
Sentence Length (Months)	49.5 (27.4)
Rape Myth Severity Category	
None	5,495 (71%)
Low	505 (6.6%)
Medium	335 (4.4%)
High	516 (6.7%)
Very High	850 (11%)
Injury Severity	
None	7,560 (98%)
Minor Injury	82 (1.1%)
Light Injury	26 (0.3%)
Serious Injury	22 (0.3%)
Death	11 (0.1%)
Recidivist	615 (8.0%)
Surrender	1,843 (24%)
Confession	3,478 (45%)
Location Type	
Rural	2,259 (29%)
Urban	5,442 (71%)
Victim Young Girl	2,257 (29%)
Victim Mentally Ill	1,158 (15%)
Victim Forgave/Settled	1,814 (24%)
Has Jurors on Panel	6,806 (88%)
Jurors Outnumber Judges	4,349 (56%)
Year of Judgment	
2012	71 (0.9%)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Characteristic	N = 7,701 ¹
2013	140 (1.8%)
2014	687 (8.9%)
2015	792 (10%)
2016	1,120 (15%)
2017	1,602 (21%)
2018	1,216 (16%)
2019	1,732 (22%)
2020	341 (4.4%)
¹ Mean (SD); n (%)	

Table 2: Effect of Rape Myth Severity on Sentencing Length

	Log(Sentence Length + 1)		
	Linear Time	Quadratic Time	Spline Time
Myth Category (Low)	0.220 ^{***}	0.220 ^{***}	0.220 ^{***}
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Myth Category (Medium)	0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Myth Category (High)	-0.093 ^{***}	-0.093 ^{***}	-0.093 ^{***}
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Myth Category (Very High)	-0.054 ^{**}	-0.054 ^{**}	-0.054 ^{**}
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Recidivist (Yes)	0.259 ^{***}	0.259 ^{***}	0.259 ^{***}
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Confession (Yes)	-0.062 ^{***}	-0.062 ^{***}	-0.062 ^{***}
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Surrender (Yes)	-0.183 ^{***}	-0.183 ^{***}	-0.183 ^{***}
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Injury Severity (Minor Injury)	-0.017	-0.018	-0.018
	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)
Injury Severity (Light Injury)	0.250 ^{**}	0.249 ^{**}	0.249 ^{**}
	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.088)
Injury Severity (Serious Injury)	0.438 ^{***}	0.438 ^{***}	0.438 ^{***}
	(0.096)	(0.096)	(0.096)

Table 2: Effect of Rape Myth Severity on Sentencing Length

Injury Severity (Death)	1.462 ^{***}	1.461 ^{***}	1.459 ^{***}
	(0.136)	(0.136)	(0.136)
Victim Young Girl (Yes)	0.326 ^{***}	0.326 ^{***}	0.326 ^{***}
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Victim Mentally Ill (Yes)	0.114 ^{***}	0.114 ^{***}	0.114 ^{***}
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Victim Forgave/Settled (Yes)	-0.291 ^{***}	-0.291 ^{***}	-0.291 ^{***}
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Urban Location	-0.039 ^{**}	-0.039 ^{**}	-0.039 ^{**}
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Has Jurors (Yes)	0.157 ^{***}	0.156 ^{***}	0.157 ^{***}
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Jurors Outnumber Judges (Yes)	0.008	0.009	0.008
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Year (Centered)	-0.008 [*]	0.000	
	(0.003)	(0.012)	
Year (Squared)		-0.001	
		(0.001)	
Natural Spline (Year, df=3) - Basis 1			-0.024
			(0.025)
Natural Spline (Year, df=3) - Basis 2			-0.109
			(0.078)

Table 2: Effect of Rape Myth Severity on Sentencing Length

Natural Spline (Year, df=3) - Basis 3		-0.058 ^{**}	
		(0.021)	
Constant	3.731 ^{***}	3.719 ^{***}	3.743 ^{***}
	(0.026)	(0.031)	(0.040)
Time Specification	Linear	Quadratic	Spline (df=3)
Random Effects	Province Intercept	Province Intercept	Province Intercept
Observations	7701	7701	7701
Log Likelihood	-4,773.456	-4,773.223	-4,772.957
Akaike Inf. Crit.	9,588.913	9,590.445	9,591.914
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	9,734.844	9,743.326	9,751.743
<i>Note:</i> * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001			
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001			
Mixed-effects models with province-level random intercepts.			
Reference category: None (Stranger relationship).			

Table 3: Juror Effects on Rape Myth Influence

Log(Sentence Length + 1)		
	Myth × Juror	Myth × Both Juror Types
Myth Category (Low)	0.394 ^{***}	0.394 ^{***}
	(0.071)	(0.071)
Myth Category (Medium)	0.093	0.093
	(0.066)	(0.066)
Myth Category (High)	-0.047	-0.047
	(0.059)	(0.059)
Myth Category (Very High)	0.038	0.038

Table 2: Effect of Rape Myth Severity on Sentencing Length

	(0.052)	(0.052)
Has Jurors (Yes)	0.187 ^{***}	0.189 ^{***}
	(0.021)	(0.021)
Recidivist (Yes)	0.259 ^{***}	0.259 ^{***}
	(0.019)	(0.019)
Confession (Yes)	-0.063 ^{***}	-0.062 ^{***}
	(0.011)	(0.011)
Surrender (Yes)	-0.182 ^{***}	-0.182 ^{***}
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Injury Severity (Minor Injury)	-0.017	-0.017
	(0.050)	(0.050)
Injury Severity (Light Injury)	0.252 ^{**}	0.253 ^{**}
	(0.088)	(0.088)
Injury Severity (Serious Injury)	0.444 ^{***}	0.442 ^{***}
	(0.096)	(0.096)
Injury Severity (Death)	1.477 ^{***}	1.476 ^{***}
	(0.136)	(0.136)
Victim Young Girl (Yes)	0.326 ^{***}	0.326 ^{***}
	(0.012)	(0.012)
Victim Mentally Ill (Yes)	0.115 ^{***}	0.115 ^{***}
	(0.016)	(0.016)
Victim Forgave/Settled (Yes)	-0.292 ^{***}	-0.292 ^{***}
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Urban Location	-0.039 ^{**}	-0.038 ^{**}
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Jurors Outnumber Judges (Yes)	0.008	0.004
	(0.012)	(0.014)

Table 2: Effect of Rape Myth Severity on Sentencing Length

Year (Centered)	-0.008 [*]	-0.008 [*]
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Myth Category (Low) × Has Jurors (Yes)	-0.192 ^{**}	-0.202 [*]
	(0.074)	(0.079)
Myth Category (Medium) × Has Jurors (Yes)	-0.107	-0.119
	(0.072)	(0.078)
Myth Category (High) × Has Jurors (Yes)	-0.052	-0.080
	(0.063)	(0.069)
Myth Category (Very High) × Has Jurors (Yes)	-0.102	-0.093
	(0.055)	(0.060)
Myth Category (Low) × Jurors Outnumber Judges (Yes)		0.018
		(0.045)
Myth Category (Medium) × Jurors Outnumber Judges (Yes)		0.021
		(0.055)
Myth Category (High) × Jurors Outnumber Judges (Yes)		0.045
		(0.046)
Myth Category (Very High) × Jurors Outnumber Judges (Yes)		-0.013
		(0.038)
Constant	3.704 ^{***}	3.704 ^{***}
	(0.027)	(0.027)
Juror Interactions	Has Jurors	Has + Outnumber
Random Effects	Province Intercept	Province Intercept
Observations	7701	7701

Table 2: Effect of Rape Myth Severity on Sentencing Length

Log Likelihood	-4,767.965	-4,767.269
Akaike Inf. Crit.	9,585.931	9,592.538
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	9,759.658	9,794.062
<i>Note:</i> * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001		
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001		
Mixed-effects models with province-level random intercepts.		
Reference category: None (Stranger).		

Table 4: Provincial Factors Moderating Rape Myth Influence

	Log(Sentence Length + 1)	
	Myth	Myth
Myth Category (Low)	0.220 ^{***}	0.218 ^{***}
	(0.021)	(0.022)
Myth Category (Medium)	-0.000	0.003
	(0.026)	(0.027)
Myth Category (High)	-0.102 ^{***}	-0.096 ^{***}
	(0.022)	(0.021)
Myth Category (Very High)	-0.052 ^{**}	-0.061 ^{***}
	(0.017)	(0.018)
GDP per Capita (Standardized)	-0.038 ^{**}	
	(0.012)	
Female College Ratio (Standardized)		-0.023
		(0.012)
Recidivist (Yes)	0.259 ^{***}	0.261 ^{***}
	(0.019)	(0.020)
Confession (Yes)	-0.061 ^{***}	-0.064 ^{***}
	(0.011)	(0.011)

Table 2: Effect of Rape Myth Severity on Sentencing Length

Surrender (Yes)	-0.182 ^{***}	-0.185 ^{***}
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Injury Severity (Minor Injury)	-0.018	-0.021
	(0.050)	(0.050)
Injury Severity (Light Injury)	0.247 ^{**}	0.246 ^{**}
	(0.088)	(0.088)
Injury Severity (Serious Injury)	0.436 ^{***}	0.439 ^{***}
	(0.096)	(0.096)
Injury Severity (Death)	1.459 ^{***}	1.446 ^{***}
	(0.136)	(0.136)
Victim Young Girl (Yes)	0.324 ^{***}	0.328 ^{***}
	(0.012)	(0.012)
Victim Mentally Ill (Yes)	0.112 ^{***}	0.108 ^{***}
	(0.016)	(0.016)
Victim Forgave/Settled (Yes)	-0.293 ^{***}	-0.294 ^{***}
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Urban Location	-0.037 ^{**}	-0.035 ^{**}
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Has Jurors (Yes)	0.157 ^{***}	0.140 ^{***}
	(0.018)	(0.019)
Jurors Outnumber Judges (Yes)	0.007	0.007
	(0.012)	(0.013)
Year (Centered)	-0.007 [*]	-0.005
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Myth Category (Low) × GDP per Capita (Standardized)	0.054 [*]	
	(0.022)	

Table 2: Effect of Rape Myth Severity on Sentencing Length

Myth Category (Medium) × GDP per Capita (Standardized)	-0.017	
	(0.028)	
Myth Category (High) × GDP per Capita (Standardized)	0.038	
	(0.020)	
Myth Category (Very High) × GDP per Capita (Standardized)	-0.016	
	(0.017)	
Myth Category (Low) × Female College Ratio (Standardized)		0.064 [*]
		(0.026)
Myth Category (Medium) × Female College Ratio (Standardized)		-0.001
		(0.035)
Myth Category (High) × Female College Ratio (Standardized)		0.042 [*]
		(0.021)
Myth Category (Very High) × Female College Ratio (Standardized)		-0.009
		(0.022)
Constant	3.731 ^{***}	3.739 ^{***}
	(0.025)	(0.026)
Provincial Moderator	GDP per Capita	Female Education
Random Effects	Province Intercept	Province Intercept
Observations	7701	7360
Log Likelihood	-4,763.789	-4,537.003
Akaike Inf. Crit.	9,579.578	9,126.006
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	9,760.254	9,305.506

Table 2: Effect of Rape Myth Severity on Sentencing Length

<i>Note:</i>	* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001
	* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
	Mixed-effects models with province-level random intercepts.
	Provincial variables are standardized within each year.

Table 5: Temporal Trends in Rape Myth Influence on Sentencing

	Log(Sentence Length + 1)		
	Myth × Year (Linear)	Myth × Year (Quadratic)	Myth × Year × Juror
Myth Category (Low)	0.117	0.114	0.259
	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.157)
Myth Category (Medium)	-0.009	-0.009	0.215
	(0.066)	(0.066)	(0.129)
Myth Category (High)	-0.129 [*]	-0.129 [*]	-0.213
	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.113)
Myth Category (Very High)	-0.120 [*]	-0.121 [*]	0.028
	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.112)
Year (Centered)	-0.011 ^{**}	-0.002	-0.071 ^{***}
	(0.003)	(0.012)	(0.009)
Year (Squared)		-0.001	
		(0.001)	
Recidivist (Yes)	0.260 ^{***}	0.260 ^{***}	0.260 ^{***}
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Confession (Yes)	-0.062 ^{***}	-0.062 ^{***}	-0.060 ^{***}
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Surrender (Yes)	-0.183 ^{***}	-0.183 ^{***}	-0.181 ^{***}
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Injury Severity (Minor Injury)	-0.017	-0.018	-0.013
	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.050)
Injury Severity (Light Injury)	0.247 ^{**}	0.246 ^{**}	0.245 ^{**}
	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.088)
Injury Severity (Serious Injury)	0.435 ^{***}	0.435 ^{***}	0.437 ^{***}
	(0.096)	(0.096)	(0.096)

Table 5: Temporal Trends in Rape Myth Influence on Sentencing

Injury Severity (Death)	1.459 ^{***}	1.458 ^{***}	1.471 ^{***}
	(0.136)	(0.136)	(0.135)
Victim Young Girl (Yes)	0.326 ^{***}	0.326 ^{***}	0.321 ^{***}
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Victim Mentally Ill (Yes)	0.114 ^{***}	0.114 ^{***}	0.113 ^{***}
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Victim Forgave/Settled (Yes)	-0.291 ^{***}	-0.291 ^{***}	-0.289 ^{***}
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.012)
Urban Location	-0.040 ^{**}	-0.039 ^{**}	-0.038 ^{**}
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Has Jurors (Yes)	0.157 ^{***}	0.156 ^{***}	-0.076
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.042)
Jurors Outnumber Judges (Yes)	0.008	0.009	-0.005
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Myth Category (Low) × Year (Centered)	0.022	0.023	0.036
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.037)
Myth Category (Medium) × Year (Centered)	0.002	0.002	-0.045
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.033)
Myth Category (High) × Year (Centered)	0.008	0.008	0.042
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.027)
Myth Category (Very High) × Year (Centered)	0.014	0.014	0.003
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.026)
Myth Category (Low) × Has Jurors (Yes)			-0.172
			(0.170)
Myth Category (Medium) × Has Jurors (Yes)			-0.333 [*]
			(0.151)
Myth Category (High) × Has Jurors (Yes)			0.091

Table 5: Temporal Trends in Rape Myth Influence on Sentencing

			(0.128)
Myth Category (Very High) × Has Jurors (Yes)			-0.183
			(0.123)
Year (Centered) × Has Jurors (Yes)			0.069 ^{***}
			(0.010)
Myth Category (Low) × Year (Centered) × Has Jurors (Yes)			-0.012
			(0.039)
Myth Category (Medium) × Year (Centered) × Has Jurors (Yes)			0.068
			(0.037)
Myth Category (High) × Year (Centered) × Has Jurors (Yes)			-0.037
			(0.030)
Myth Category (Very High) × Year (Centered) × Has Jurors (Yes)			0.015
			(0.028)
Constant	3.747 ^{***}	3.732 ^{***}	3.947 ^{***}
	(0.027)	(0.032)	(0.042)
Year Specification	Linear	Quadratic	Linear
Triple Interaction	No	No	Yes
Random Effects	Province Intercept	Province Intercept	Province Intercept
Observations	7701	7701	7701
Observations	7,701	7,701	7,701
Log Likelihood	-4,770.736	-4,770.399	-4,723.666
Akaike Inf. Crit.	9,591.472	9,592.799	9,515.332
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	9,765.200	9,773.476	9,751.601
<i>Note:</i> * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001			

Table 5: Temporal Trends in Rape Myth Influence on Sentencing

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Mixed-effects models with province-level random intercepts.
Interaction terms show how myth influence changes over time.

Table 6: Robustness Checks - Alternative Specifications

	Log(Months+1)	Total Months	$\sqrt{\text{Months}}$	Log(Months+1)
	Main	Untransformed	Sqrt	Moderate
Myth Category (Low)	0.220 ^{***}	16.148 ^{***}	0.932 ^{***}	0.222 ^{***}
	(0.021)	(1.085)	(0.069)	(0.021)
Myth Category (Medium)	0.001	1.071	0.053	0.003
	(0.026)	(1.302)	(0.083)	(0.025)
Myth Category (High)	-0.093 ^{***}	-5.253 ^{***}	-0.340 ^{***}	-0.090 ^{***}
	(0.021)	(1.063)	(0.068)	(0.021)
Myth Category (Very High)	-0.054 ^{**}	-4.906 ^{***}	-0.270 ^{***}	-0.051 ^{**}
	(0.017)	(0.864)	(0.055)	(0.017)
Recidivist (Yes)	0.259 ^{***}	13.404 ^{***}	0.917 ^{***}	0.259 ^{***}
	(0.019)	(0.971)	(0.062)	(0.019)
Confession (Yes)	-0.062 ^{***}	-3.165 ^{***}	-0.215 ^{***}	-0.060 ^{***}
	(0.011)	(0.568)	(0.036)	(0.011)
Surrender (Yes)	-0.183 ^{***}	-7.559 ^{***}	-0.579 ^{***}	-0.179 ^{***}
	(0.013)	(0.658)	(0.042)	(0.013)
Injury Severity (Minor Injury)	-0.017	1.843	0.061	-0.013
	(0.050)	(2.541)	(0.162)	(0.050)
Injury Severity (Light Injury)	0.250 ^{**}	13.067 ^{**}	0.889 ^{**}	0.253 ^{**}
	(0.088)	(4.474)	(0.285)	(0.087)
Injury Severity (Serious Injury)	0.438 ^{***}	44.899 ^{***}	2.188 ^{***}	0.319 ^{**}
	(0.096)	(4.866)	(0.310)	(0.100)
Injury Severity (Death)	1.462 ^{***}	198.538 ^{***}	8.100 ^{***}	0.129
	(0.136)	(6.883)	(0.438)	(0.257)
Victim Young Girl (Yes)	0.326 ^{***}	17.271 ^{***}	1.163 ^{***}	0.325 ^{***}

Table 6: Robustness Checks - Alternative Specifications

	(0.012)	(0.609)	(0.039)	(0.012)
Victim Mentally Ill (Yes)	0.114 ^{***}	3.331 ^{***}	0.311 ^{***}	0.119 ^{***}
	(0.016)	(0.807)	(0.051)	(0.016)
Victim Forgave/Settled (Yes)	-0.291 ^{***}	-12.478 ^{***}	-0.932 ^{***}	-0.289 ^{***}
	(0.013)	(0.635)	(0.040)	(0.012)
Urban Location	-0.039 ^{**}	-1.997 ^{**}	-0.136 ^{**}	-0.037 ^{**}
	(0.013)	(0.657)	(0.042)	(0.013)
Has Jurors (Yes)	0.157 ^{***}	2.658 ^{**}	0.357 ^{***}	0.163 ^{***}
	(0.018)	(0.919)	(0.059)	(0.018)
Jurors Outnumber Judges (Yes)	0.008	-0.895	-0.014	0.014
	(0.012)	(0.623)	(0.040)	(0.012)
Year (Centered)	-0.008 [*]	-0.280	-0.024 [*]	-0.008 [*]
	(0.003)	(0.153)	(0.010)	(0.003)
Constant	3.731 ^{***}	49.559 ^{***}	6.713 ^{***}	3.717 ^{***}
	(0.026)	(1.226)	(0.081)	(0.026)
Sample	Full	Full	Full	≤180 months
Transformation	Log(x+1)	None	Square root	Log(x+1)
Observations	7701	7701	7701	7681
Observations	7,701	7,701	7,701	7,681
Log Likelihood	-4,773.456	-34,990.110	-13,778.460	-4,677.085
Akaike Inf. Crit.	9,588.913	70,022.220	27,598.920	9,396.171
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	9,734.844	70,168.150	27,744.850	9,542.047
<i>Note:</i>	* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001			
	* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001			
All models include province-level random intercepts and full base controls.				
Reference category: None (Stranger relationship).				