

Direct and Indirect Associations between Conservative Ideological Dimensions and Child Sexual Abuse Myths

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Abstract

The current study examined conservatism's relationship with child sexual abuse myths and the mediating effect of different dimensions of conservative ideology (i.e., right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation) on the relationship between religiosity, right-wing political orientation, and child sexual abuse myths. For this cross-sectional study, convenience sampling drew 233 participants via Greek social media platform advertisements and snowball sampling. Bivariate correlations and multiple regression analysis were used to examine associations between child sexual abuse myths and predictor variables. Two parallel mediation models, where religiosity and political positioning predict child sexual abuse myths, mediated by social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism, were also examined using PROCESS macro (model 4). The current research highlights the need to acknowledge the role of conservative ideological dimensions and processes in child sexual abuse myths tolerance. It contributes theoretically and practically to our understanding of child sexual abuse myths, suggesting that social dominance orientation, as a facet of conservative ideology, may significantly predict child sexual abuse myths tolerance.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse myths, conservative ideology, right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, religiosity, Greece.

Myths concerning child sexual abuse (CSA) perpetuate false beliefs about the frequency and severity of abuse, deny or minimize the responsibility of the offender, and distort the truth about the nature of abuse (Collings, 1997; Cunningham & Cromer, 2014; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). Various components of CSA myths (CSAM) have been reported, including the denial of abusiveness, the dispersion of guilt and the accountability of the offender, and stereotypes about the perpetrators and CSA incidents (Collings, 1997; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). In particular, Collings (1997) suggests a three-factor structure for the myths surrounding child sexual abuse: (1) The concept of blame diffusion pertains to the conviction that individuals other than the perpetrator—such as the child are partially or totally responsible for the abusive encounter (e.g., "Children who do not report ongoing sexual abuse must want the sexual contact to continue"); (2) the denial of abusiveness, includes ideas that emphasize the child's consent while downplaying the abusive nature of child sexual abuse (e.g., "Sexual contact between an adult and a child that the child wants and that the child finds physically

pleasurable cannot really be described as being abusive); (3) Restrictive stereotypes are ideas that downplay the reality of child sexual abuse and their harmful effects (e.g., "Child sexual abuse takes place mainly in poor, disorganized, unstable families"; Collings, 1997). Insufficient assumptions about the victim-offender relationship, as well as the social and demographic background of the abuse, may also be part of these stereotypes (e.g., "Most children are sexually abused by strangers or by men who are not well known to the child") (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). Although there is a lot of variation among those surveyed, Rheingold et al. (2007) found that the average reaction in a community sample was disagreement with myths but not significant disagreement. These myths persist in community samples, professional contexts (Collings, 1997; Collings et al., 2009; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010), and the media (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010).

Similar to rape myths (Burt, 1980; Chappelle et al., 2008), CSA myths (CSAM) can reflect limited characteristics of abusers and victims, deny the existence of CSA, harm victims by reducing awareness of CSA and the resources available to prevent it, and assist victims, and/or discourage victims from reporting abuse (Somer & Szwarcberg, 2001).

Acknowledging that perceptions of CSA myths are susceptible to changes in the local environment (Machia & Lamb, 2009), that the significant prevalence rates of CSA may make people uneasy (Lindblom & Carlsson, 2001) and that further research on individual differences linked to CSAM acceptance is required to comprehend how these ideas are maintained and prevalent (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010) the current study examines the association between social psychological variables, including religiosity, political positioning, social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, and CSA myths tolerance, advancing our knowledge on an issue in which empirical research is scarce (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). Since there is scarce data on CSAM, incorporating research on rape myths into the current literature review will be beneficial to justify our study rigorously.

Conceptual Framework

According to Marion (2006), ideology is "a set of shared beliefs integrated into the institutions, committed to action and thus rooted in [material] reality". Political ideology is essential for comprehending people's conduct since it reflects psychographic variations (Jung & Mittal, 2020). Previous research emphasized conservatism as a measure of political ideology (Jost, 2006; Kidwell et al., 2013). Conservatism refers to the tendency of people to uphold the established status quo and values. Grounded on this perspective, we adopt conservatism as the metric for political ideology (Farmer et al., 2021; Lisjak & Ordabayeva, 2022).

Conservative ideology includes ideas that oppose progressive societal changes (Becker, 2020; Everett, 2013). Conservatives, for example, frequently oppose the welfare state, the rights of sexual minorities, and illegal immigration. They usually back the death penalty and are against abortion. This ideology converges with right-wing political support (Osborne & Sibley, 2020), religiosity (Stankov, 2021), populism (Annisson & Guiney, 2022), and authoritarianism (Nilsson & Jost, 2020).

More tolerant attitudes toward CSAM can originate from stereotypes, false beliefs, and denial of abuse. Individuals who maintain stereotypes in other domains might also extend them to victims of sexual assault. Aosved and Long (2006) showed that individuals with stereotyped views about rape were also more likely to exhibit ageist, racist, and homophobic

views, as well as intolerance for other religions. In turn, people who are highly intolerant of diversity may be less inclined to help or intervene on behalf of the victim because intolerance for diversity in other domains can also translate into intolerance toward victims (de Roos & Curtis, 2021). This overlap of intolerance across various domains could signify an authoritarian worldview. However, limited research has explored the social psychological factors underlying tolerant attitudes toward CSA (de Roos & Curtis, 2021).

Since scarce research exists on the relationship between child sexual abuse and conservatism (conceptualized as religiosity and right-wing political support, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation) in the broader community context (Breyer & MacPhee, 2015), the body of research on attitudes toward aggressive sexual behavior and rape is more prosperous than that on child sexual abuse (Skorpe Tennfjord, 2006). Thus we use the rape-focused literature since the underlying mechanisms that explain the association between rape-myth acceptance and rape behavior also explain the origins of sexual abuse (Skorpe Tennfjord, 2006)

Fitzpatrick et al. (2004) reported that university students who held more conventional views on gender roles were more tolerant of the use of violence against women than those who held non-traditional views. That is consistent with the findings of Johnson et al. (1997), who found that respondents who had more conservative views on gender roles were more accepting of rape myths than respondents who held more liberal views. Simonson and Subich (1999) showed that less traditional gender role preconceptions were associated with higher assessments of the seriousness of rape scenarios and lower likelihood of victim blaming. According to Simonson and Subich (1999), gender role views are acquired through socialization, which means that society's values and norms may significantly influence rape acceptability. Therefore, social and cultural aspects (e.g., religious conservatism and conservative political ideology) may have a crucial role in the prevalence and maintenance of rape and sexual abuse (Beech & Ward, 2004). The findings mentioned above lend credence to the idea that conservative worldviews (conceptualized as religiosity and right-wing political positioning, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation) may affect CSAM tolerance.

Religiosity

While religious affiliation is a categorization form of religious classification based on denomination, religiosity reflects one's religious beliefs, practices, involvement, or importance and is frequently measured as a continuous variable (Steensland et al., 2000; Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2014). Religious affiliation and religiosity significantly impact culture and socialization, shaping political, cultural, and social attitudes (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Sapienza et al., 2006).

Previous research data indicate that increased religiosity and religious affiliation are associated with higher rape myth acceptance (Barnett et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 2011; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). In addition, religiosity has a positive correlation with the acceptance of rape myths and also interacts with gender; religious women are more likely to sympathize with the victim, while religious men are more likely to expect the woman to take responsibility for the rape (Freymeyer, 1997). Several scholars (Franiuk & Shain, 2011; Mir-Hosseini, 2006) suggest that specific passages in religious texts endorse patriarchal attitudes and rape myths. It has also been suggested that distorted or selective interpretations of these texts may have an impact on the endorsement of rape myth acceptance (Barnett et al., 2016).

According to Sheldon and Parent's (2002) research, many clergy members seem to support rape myths.

Religion has a significant impact on patriarchy and women's status (Albee & Perry, 1998). Since the church functions as a socialization agent similar to the family and school, religious values affect how people view women and how they feel about rape (Boakye, 2009). Religion is a highly significant social-cultural institution that supports patriarchy, hierarchy, and rape myth acceptance (Barnett et al., 2016); Accordingly, it is logical to assume that religiosity would be a strong predictor of CSAM.

Political Positioning

Even though religion has a conservative influence in society, and religious individuals generally have more conservative views, non-religious people also adopt conservative political views (Renzetti & Curran, 1995). There is a positive correlation between the endorsement of the rape myth and conservative political ideals (Anderson et al., 1997).

Conservatives are more tolerant of "rape myths" than liberals are; these include justifications like "She asked for it," "It wasn't really rape," or "She lied." (Barnett & Hilz, 2017; Hockett et al., 2015). That relates to the idea that moral principles like justice and averting harm are more critical to leftists than rightists, who are more motivated by in-group loyalty and respect for authority. While conservatives are more prone to take the stability of the group into account, liberals typically prioritize the rights of the individual. These distinctions aid in the explanation of the connection between political ideology and acceptance of the rape myth; politically liberal people engage less in victim stereotyping and more in the injustice and harm done to each rape victim (Barnett & Hilz, 2017; Hockett et al., 2015).

Conversely, more politically conservative people would try to preserve traditional family values, which could result in victim blaming and the linking of deviant sexual practices to victimization (Goren, 2005). Politically conservative individuals are more likely to defend existing power structures (Jost et al., 2004). Examples of these structures include patriarchy (Hunnicut, 2009) and the church's increased involvement in politics and people's sexual conduct (Gaskins et al., 2013). Grounded on the notion that a rightist mindset relates to the acceptance of rape myths (Barnett & Hilz, 2017), we also examined conservative political ideology's role (i.e., right-wing political leaning) in CSAM tolerance.

Both theoretical and empirical data support the multidimensionality of political ideology. The concepts of right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) put forth by Altemeyer (1981, 1988) and social dominance orientation (SDO) put forth by Pratto et al. (1994) are used by Duckitt's (2001) dual process model of ideology and prejudice as ideological variables that underpin political ideology. People who score highly on social conformity (as opposed to autonomy) typically pursue security and social control. This tendency is reflected in high RWA scores (i.e., authoritarian submission). Conversely, those with high SDO scores pursue the motivational goals of dominance, power, and superiority over others (as opposed to caring, sharing, and helping). SDO is hence referred to as authoritarian dominance. Based on the DPM model (Duckitt et al., 2002; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009), RWA and SDO scales derive from various situational factors, personality traits, and societal worldviews and reflect two separate and largely independent ideological attitude dimensions (Duckitt et al., 2002; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009). Accordingly, in the current study, we examined both authoritarian submission (i.e., RWA; Altemeyer, 1981, 1988) and authoritarian dominance (i.e., SDO; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993, 1999) for a more nuanced evaluation of the association between conservative ideology, and child sexual abuse myths.

Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Rape Myth Acceptance

Research data provide evidence of the relationships between prejudice, discrimination, and hatred toward members of exogroups and the right-wing authoritarianism Scale (RWA). Individuals with high RWA have prejudices against groups that threaten security, stability, and social order (Altemeyer, 1998; Duriez & van Hiel, 2002). Several studies have examined the link between ideological factors and how rape is considered (Aosved & Long, 2006; Canto et al., 2014; Ferrao & Goncalves, 2015). In particular, average correlations between rape myth acceptance (RMA) and RWA have been found (Canto et al., 2014; Sussenbach & Bohner, 2011). Grounded on the notion that right-wing authoritarianism is associated with the endorsement of rape myths (Gerger et al., 2007; Hockett et al., 2009; Sussenbach & Bohner, 2011), we hypothesized right-wing authoritarianism's link with CSAM.

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) and Rape Myth Acceptance

According to Pratto et al. (1994), SDO is the degree to which individuals favor unequal, hierarchical intergroup relations positioned toward one social group's domination, laying the groundwork for developing biases and conservatism. SDO reflects people's propensity to support policies that uphold social inequality and categorize social groups along two poles of superiority and inferiority. In contrast to egalitarian principles, SDO is an individual variable that directs interest on a general propensity in favor of myths and stories that justify the hierarchy and encourage group inequities (Canto et al., 2020). Research in this domain has revealed positive associations between SDO and conservative attitudes, including prejudice against certain ethnic groups, economic and political conservatism, and right-wing political leaning (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius et al., 1996). People with high SDO scores have a strong desire to preserve the superior status of the in-group, which drives them to disparage those in the out-group who support equal rights (organized ethnic minorities, feminists, groups that defend sexual minorities' rights, etc.) to strengthen their status further.

Research indicates that SDO predicts negative attitudes and prejudice toward minorities and vulnerable groups in general (Moore et al., 2012; Shih et al., 2013). In addition, SDO supports the maintenance of hierarchical social structures in which dominant groups use their status and power to pressure marginalized and victimized groups, potentially leading to social exclusion (Bjärehed et al., 2019; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). According to previous studies (Baekstrom & Bjorklund, 2007; Graca et al., 2018), women are less likely to exhibit unfavorable attitudes toward disadvantaged groups because they support non-hierarchical and egalitarian intergroup relationships. Stereotypes validate beliefs individuals with high SDO employ to defend their unfavorable opinions (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Kelly et al. (2015) provided evidence that males with higher SDO were more likely to support rape myths and to favor lowering the legal age of sexual consent. Sussenbach and Bohner (2011) contend that research data conform with the feminist perspective on rape, which holds that "rape and rape myths are a form of male dominance aimed at maintaining existing power hierarchies in which men dominate over women" (p. 376). SDO has recently been linked to a decreased perceived credibility of CSA charges made by victims (Alcantara et al., 2019). Given the research on the detrimental effects of not believing victims of CSA, this is troubling (Magalhães et al., 2021).

Reviewing this literature suggests that SDO may be related to attitudes concerning tolerance of CSAM. In agreement with

this, it is to be expected that individuals scoring higher on SDO are more tolerant of CSAM since not doing so would challenge the established hierarchies.

This Study

CSA myths deny or rationalize the sexual exploitation of children, just as rape myths deny or legitimize sexual violence against women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). These misconceptions represent a crucial field for more research. The breadth of the CSA myth literature, however, is narrower than that of the rape myth literature (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). In addition, so far, the majority of research on CSA has examined relationships with sociodemographic characteristics (Canan et al., 2016; Russell & Hand, 2017) or with gender roles and sexism (Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Thus, little attention has been given to the role of other social-psychological factors that may be important for comprehending CSAM tolerance. To deepen knowledge concerning the endorsement of CSAM, we here rely upon (and extend) findings about rape myths and negative views toward vulnerable groups, i.e., groups in danger of social exclusion. Regarding CSAM tolerance, testing religiosity and political ideology and whether different aspects of conservative ideology mediate their relationship may yield significant insights into which indices of conservatism are more closely related to CSAM tolerance.

Greece was our research region of choice. Greece offers a compelling example for assessing political ideology's impact because of Greek politics' polarizing nature. For decades, Greece has maintained a significant political division between right-wing/conservative and left-wing/progressive ideas (Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2019). The 2011 economic crisis exacerbated this polarization even more, creating a clear division between the political left and right (Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2019). This political division is evident in many current issues; Greek conservatives, for example, tend to be skeptical of science (Rutjens et al., 2022), have unfavorable attitudes toward sexual minorities (Grigoropoulos, 2021a, b, 2022d), and attribute global crises to foreign institutions (Davvetas et al., 2022). As in other Western European nations, conservatism and right-wing political inclination are associated in Greece (Aspelund et al., 2013). Greece's low representation in comparable studies examining the effect of political ideology on CSAM further highlights the need to integrate Greece as a study setting.

Surprisingly, despite the expansion of scholarly research on fundamentalism pertaining to all world religions, Orthodox Christianity has received relatively little scientific attention, with a few notable exceptions in recent years (Demakopoulos, 2015; Hovorum, 2021; Stoeckl, 2017). This observation also holds for the Greek Orthodox Church, about which scarce research has been done (Grigoropoulos, 2020, 2022c; Makrides, 1991, 2016). Beginning in the 1980s, the Greek orthodox church produced public discussions and proceeded to various activities that went against important modern issues, particularly social, political, moral, and scientific challenges (Sakellariou, 2022).

In a study conducted in Greece, we examined conservatism's (i.e., religiosity, right-wing political orientation, RWA, and SDO) relationship with CSAM and also the mediating effect of different indices of conservative ideology (i.e., RWA and SDO) on the relationship between religiosity, right-wing political orientation, and CSAM. We hypothesized a direct association between conservatism and CSAM, such that increased religiosity, right-wing political leaning, and higher

levels of RWA and SDO would be linked to CSAM tolerance. In addition, we predicted indirect effects of both RWA and SDO, such that each would independently mediate the relationship between religiosity, political positioning, and CSAM.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Between February 03 and March 30, 2022, 233 individuals living in Greece participated in an online project. For this cross-sectional study, convenience sampling drew participants via social media platform advertisements and snowball sampling. The World Medical Association's Helsinki Declaration from 1964 was followed in this research project. Before completing the surveys, informed consent was acquired, which contained the following details: the study's description; b) the participation's voluntary nature, anonymity, and confidentiality; c) the option to withdraw at any time without providing a reason. The study was entirely voluntary. There were no rewards for participation. The majority of the sample, 79.7% (185), identified as female. The sample's mean age was 30.97 years ($SD = 10.21$; range 18–56). The sample's ethnicity was Greek. In addition, all participants were Christian Orthodox. Most of the respondents were university students. 42.1% (98), whereas 29.2% (68) and 9.4 (22) held university and postgraduate degrees respectively. Also, 19.3% (45) of the participants had a high school diploma. An a priori power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) determined that a sample size of 230 participants was needed for a modest effect size ($f^2 = 0.05$) at an alpha of 0.05 to obtain a power of 0.80.

Materials

Demographics

Age, gender, and educational level were the demographic data gathered in the current study. Participants were asked to indicate their age in years. People were asked, "With which gender do you identify?" and given the option to select "man," "woman," "gender non-conforming," or "not listed" to indicate their gender.

Child Sexual Abuse Myths (CSAM).

The level of belief in CSA myths among participants was measured using the 15-item Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (CSAM scale; Collings, 1997). A 5-point Likert-type scale, with one denoting "strongly disagree" and five denoting "strongly agree" (example items: "Most children are sexually abused by strangers or by men who are not well known to the child", "Children who do not report ongoing sexual abuse must want the sexual contact to continue"). The three components of CSAM evaluated by the CSAM scale are blame diffusion, the denial of abusiveness, and restrictive stereotypes (i.e., minimization of the effects of CSA). Every participant received a total scale score based on the sum of their item responses. Higher scores reflected a higher support for CSAM. According to Collings (1997), the CSAM scale has strong test-retest reliability ($\alpha = 0.87$) and acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.76$). Adequate internal consistency

was found in the current study ($\alpha = .82$).

Political Positioning

Respondents were asked to place themselves on a political self-categorization ranging from left-wing political positioning (1) to right-wing political positioning (5) in a single question. Higher scores indicated greater right-wing leaning. Previous research has demonstrated sufficient validity and consistency for one-item self-placement evaluations of political orientation (Jost, 2006).

Religiosity

The "Duke Religion Index" (DUREL; Koenig & Bussing, 2010) served as the source for the questions used in the current study. Specifically, two questions (i.e., how often they attended religious services and prayed (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*)) measured religiosity and showed a strong association ($r = .618$, $p < .001$). As a result, they were combined into a single religiosity measure.

Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO)

Individuals' tendency to favor social inequality and group-based hierarchy was measured using the Greek version of the four-item Short Social Dominance Orientation scale (SSDO; Pratto et al., 2013; example item "Superior groups should dominate inferior groups"). The responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), using a 5-point Likert-type scale. Internal consistency in the present sample was .74, which is considered satisfactory.

Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWASS; Zakrisson, 2005).

RWA was measured using the Greek version (Grigoropoulos, 2023c) of the Zakrisson (2005) scale, which assesses authoritarian views without naming specific social groups. On a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), respondents answered 15 statements (example item "The old-fashioned ways and old-fashioned values still show the best way to live"). Higher scores signify a stronger endorsement of RWA.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics 21 software was used to examine and analyze the data. Tests of normality assumptions were carried out on scale variables. Negatively skewed ratings for CSAM (skewness = 0.621, SE = 0.129 and kurtosis = -0.462, SE = 0.318) were evident from visual inspections of histograms and boxplots as well as skewness and kurtosis (Pallant, 2020). Even though the skewness results were expected (i.e., high CSAM support should be unusual), a bootstrapping procedure was used for the bivariate correlational analysis and hierarchical regression to address any issues of non-

normality shown. Statistical results were generated using 1000 bootstrapped samples drawn from the sampling distribution.

CSAM and Predictor Variables

Bivariate correlations and multiple regression analysis were used to examine associations between CSAM and predictor variables (i.e., age, gender, education, religiosity, political positioning, RWA, and SDO), shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation Matrix for Study's Variables ($n = 233$)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	α
Variables											
1. Age	30.97	10.21	—								
2. Gender			-0.078 [-.091, .018]	—							
3. Educational Level			0.091 [-.040, .241]	0.014 [-.118, .145]	—						
4. Political Positioning	2.95	0.81	-0.057 [-.169, .054]	0.108 [-.023, .236]	.157* [.013, .291]	—					
5. Religiosity	2.97	1.03	0.476** [.377, .564]	-0.136* [-.258, -.010]	-0.008 [-.123, .111]	0.035 [-.094, .164]	—				
6. RWA	3.08	0.44	0.145* [-.006, .290]	-0.033 [-.163, .100]	-0.127 [-.234, -.016]	0.184** [.044, .323]	.482** [.392, .565]	—			.73
7. SDO	1.83	0.62	0.088 [.037, .221]	0.337** [.198, .468]	0.063 [-.087, .206]	0.150* [.010, .284]	.239** [.113, .362]	0.374** [.258, .447]	—		.75
8. CSAM	1.60	0.42	0.064 [-.053, .177]	0.233** [.080, .387]	-0.138* [-.272, .022]	0.040 [-.113, .192]	0.210** [.088, .309]	0.207** [-.088, .309]	0.385** [.244, .518]	—	.82

Note. CSAM = Child Sexual Abuse Myths; In parentheses, 95% bias corrected and accelerated intervals. Confidence intervals and standard errors are

based on 1000 bootstrapped samples. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Men with lower levels of education were more likely to endorse CSAM. CSAM was also significantly associated with higher religiosity, RWA, and SDO levels. The association between political positioning and CSAM did not reach significance. A multiple regression analysis was performed to examine whether study variables had a unique impact on CSAM. There were no strongly associated predictors. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was less than 5 (Pallant, 2020). The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.94, which falls within the acceptable range of one to three, demonstrated the independence of errors. Bivariate correlations were inspected to test the assumption of multicollinearity. All correlations were less than 0.85, and all Tolerance and Variance inflation factors were $>.10$ and $<.10$, respectively, meeting this assumption.

SDO had the highest predictive power ($\beta = .204$, $p < .001$, $s^2 = 0.257$), followed by educational level ($\beta = -.074$, $p = .013$), gender ($\beta = .161$, $p = .019$), and religiosity ($\beta = .067$, $p = .037$). Contrary to our hypothesis, political positioning ($\beta = -.003$, $p = .935$) and RWA ($\beta = .003$, $p = .963$) did not significantly predict CSAM (see Table 2).

Table 2. Standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients for the Study's variables predicting Child sexual abuse myths (CSAM)

Predictors	B	SE b	β	t	95%CI	VIF
Age	-.001	.003	-.015	-.224	-.006, .005	1.32
Gender	.161	.068	.155*	2.366	.027, .294	1.21
Educational Level	-.074	.029	-.155*	-2.518	-.132, -.016	1.08
Political Positioning	-.003	.032	-.005	-.082	-.066, .061	1.09
Religiosity	.067	.032	.163*	2.099	.004, .129	1.71
RWA	.003	.070	.003	.047	-.135, .141	1.55
SDO	.204	.047	.304**	4.327	.111, .297	1.40

Note: 95% bias-corrected and accelerated intervals are reported in parentheses. Confidence intervals and standard errors are based on 1000

bootstrapped samples. ** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

Mediation Analysis

We examined two parallel mediation models, where religiosity and political positioning predict CSAM, mediated by SDO and RWA. The PROCESS macro assessed the models (Hayes, 2018, model 4).

Two indirect effects are involved in each model. The first indirect effect assessed whether RWA mediated the relationship between religiosity and CSAM and was insignificant (indirect effect = .004, $bootSE = .012$, $bootCI [-.021, .028]$). The second indirect effect assessed whether SDO mediated between religiosity and CSAM and was significant (indirect effect = .034, $bootSE = .013$, $bootCI [.012, .065]$; Figure 1).

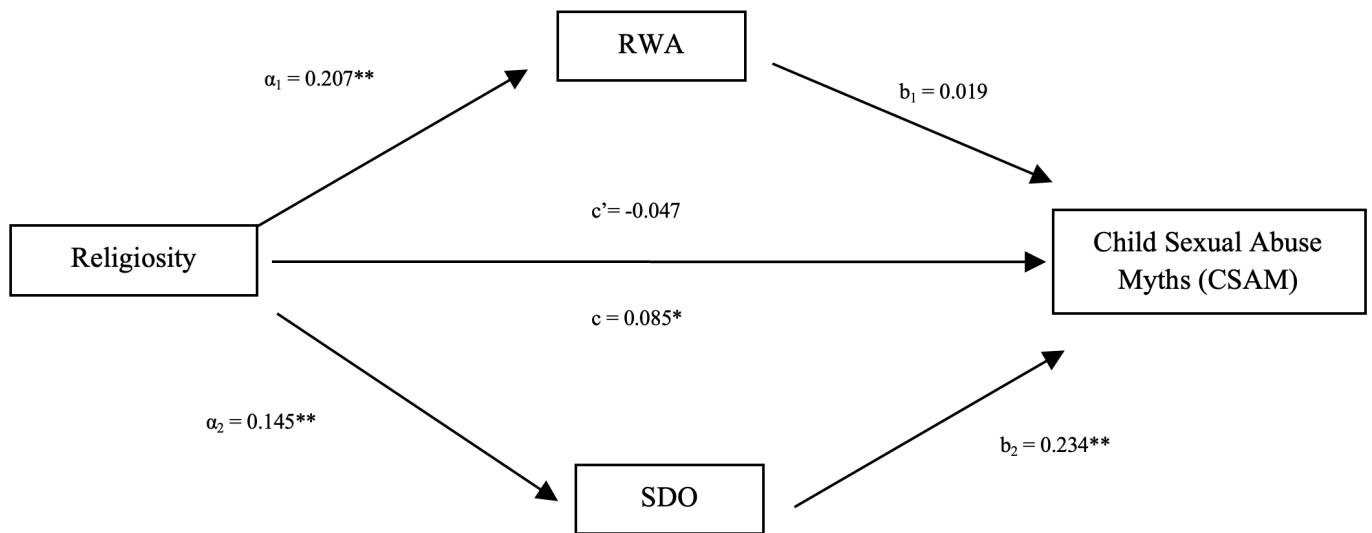


Figure 1. Indirect effects of RWA and SDO on CSAM.

Parallel mediation analysis results indicated that religiosity is indirectly associated with CSAM through its relationship with SDO. Figure 1 shows that higher religiosity was related to higher endorsement of SDO, and higher SDO was subsequently associated with more tolerance to CSAM. In contrast, RWA's indirect effect was not different from zero (Figure 1 shows the impact related to these pathways). Moreover, the direct effect of religiosity on CSAM in the presence of the mediators was found insignificant ($b = .047, p = .092$). Hence, SDO fully mediates the relationship between religiosity and CSAM.

In the next model, the first indirect effect assessed whether RWA mediated the relationship between political positioning and CSAM and was insignificant (indirect effect = .007, $bootSE = .007, bootCI [-.004, .024]$). The second indirect effect assessed whether SDO mediated between political positioning and CSAM and was significant (indirect effect = .027, $bootSE = .015, bootCI [.001, .060]$; Figure 2).

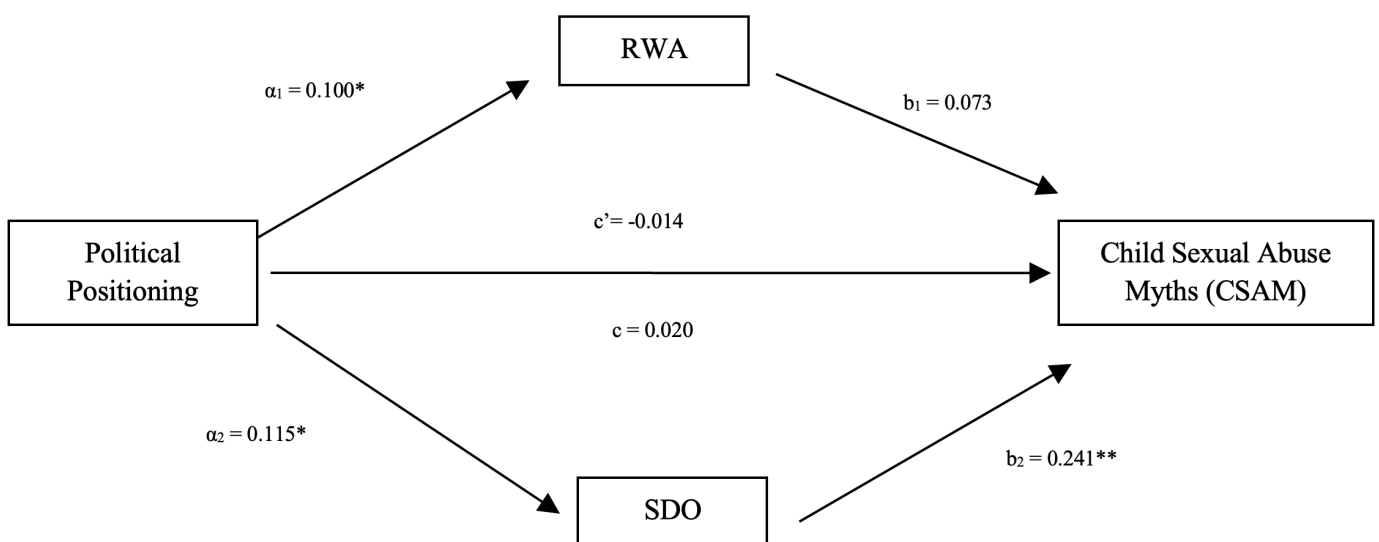


Figure 2. Indirect effects of RWA and SDO on CSAM.

Thus, the results indicated that political positioning is indirectly associated with CSAM through its relationship with SDO. Figure 2 shows that right-wing political positioning was related to higher endorsement of SDO, and higher SDO was subsequently associated with more tolerance to CSAM (Figure 2 shows the impact related to these pathways). Moreover, the direct effect of political positioning on CSAM in the presence of the mediators was found insignificant ($b = -.014$, $p = .649$). Hence, SDO fully mediates the relationship between political positioning and CSAM.

Alternative Models

Based on our hypotheses and to strengthen our tested model, we evaluated two alternative models in which the independent, dependent, and parallel mediator variables were ordered at different levels.

Thus, we looked at RWA as the IV (Alternative model 1), religiosity and political positioning as the parallel mediators, and CSAM as the DV. The alternative model's results indicated no significant indirect impact for either of the mediators (religiosity mean estimate = 0.066, $S.E. = 0.038$, $CI [-0.006, 0.143]$, political positioning mean estimate = 0.001, $S.E. = 0.014$, $CI [-0.024, 0.035]$). The direct effect of religiosity on CSAM in the presence of the mediators was found insignificant ($b = .128$, $p = .070$).

In the second alternative model, SDO was entered as the IV, religiosity and political positioning as the parallel mediators, and CSAM as the DV. Again, results showed that the indirect effect was non-significant, religiosity mean estimate = .020, $S.E. = .011$, $CI [-.002, .044]$ and political positioning mean estimate = .001, $S.E. = .007$, $CI [-.013, .015]$. The direct effect of SDO on CSAM in the presence of the mediators was significant ($b = .239$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Even though, as previously discussed, theoretical and empirical grounds exist to support the significance of conservative ideological dimensions in explaining CSAM tolerance, to our knowledge, limited empirical studies have contrasted the strengths of these factors' effects in explaining public perceptions of CSAM. Thus, in the present study, we sought to examine the social-psychological underpinnings of CSAM, focusing on conservative ideological dimensions.

The results of this study provide evidence that high SDOs exhibit more tolerance to CSAM. This suggests that a desire for inequality per se may foster more tolerance to CSAM. Religiosity's significant influence coincides with previous studies showing that sexual abuse and rape myths derive from social environments that support their growth (Brown et al., 2010). As mentioned, Greece's life and culture heavily rely on religion (Grigoropoulos, 2022a, b, 2023a, b; Sakellariou, 2022). Ideological frameworks can justify the status and power disadvantages attributed to specific groups of people. In our case, people might use conservative ideologies to be more tolerant and justify the mistreatment of sexually abused children. According to Crandall (2000), justification ideologies are systems of morality, values, and beliefs that provide a framework for understanding the world. People might use a variety of ideologies to defend discriminatory practices. One example is social dominance orientations (personal preferences for social group hierarchies). This framework encourages the belief in the social hierarchy, facilitating justification of mistreatment (Crandall, 2000).

Previous research supports this study's findings concerning the relationship between SDO and CSAM. These studies include rape myths and preference for lowering the legal age of sexual consent linked to high SDO (Fraser et al., 2015; Kelly et al., 2015; Kteily et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2012). Several models have been proposed to support the theory that people who adhere to stereotypes about social hierarchy—such as traditional gender roles—are more likely to accept the rape myth acceptance (Hammond et al., 2011). The hierarchical worldview framework may also provide insight into the apparent correlation between conservative ideological dimensions (i.e., SDO) and CSAM. This study also coincides with previous research' findings showing a correlation between SDO and the level of blame placed on a woman who has been raped (Canto et al., 2018; Gerger et al., 2007; Hockett et al., 2009). People with strong SDO have prejudices toward groups that they consider to be low-status. These groups must be discounted for social hierarchies and intergroup supremacy to be maintained and justified (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

The significant role of SDO may be explained by the fact that SDO relates to intragroup processes, while RWA applies to in-group norms (Altemeyer, 1998; Duckitt, 2002; Pratto et al., 1994; Whitley & Lee, 2000). Grounded on the Dual Group Process (DGP) model of individual variations in prejudice (Kreindler, 2005), individuals with high SDO tend to denigrate members of out-groups that they view as competing with them. Pratto et al. (1994) showed that support for women's rights, progressive racial policies, and social welfare programs—all promoting equality across social groups—were adversely associated with endorsing SDO. In addition, SDO was positively associated with the notion that males should dominate sexually, and this association was significant for both male and female individuals (Rosenthal et al., 2012). Conservative ideology can justify stigmatization by strengthening internal attributions for individual outcomes and appreciating hierarchies among groups of individuals (Crandall, 2000). Regardless of the cause of the "undesired differentness" (Major & O'Brien, 2005, p.5), those who carry the "mark" belong to low-status/power social categories and are more likely to face unfavorable expectations and reactions from others. Jackson et al. (1999) showed that conservative sociopolitical ideology was linked to views that undervalued children and increased support for the use of physical punishment in a nationally representative sample of parents. Overall, this study's results coincide with previous research showing that high SDOs tend to be less receptive to claims of child sexual abuse (Alcantara et al., 2019). Also, as in other studies, the male gender was associated with higher SDO (Graca et al., 2018).

In the current study, SDO fully mediated the association between religious conservatism, political conservatism, and CSAM, suggesting that increased orientations for anti-egalitarianism and dominance can explain religious and political conservative individuals' tendency toward CSAM acceptance. In other words, these results propose that religiosity's and political conservatism's association with CSAM, can be explained (i.e., mediated) by opposition to equality. According to Altemeyer (1998), groups that are viewed as weak are good targets for dominance and the exercise of power. In their study of religious orientation and abuse, Rodriguez and Henderson (2010) found that Biblical literalism and social conformity were substantially correlated with high scores on the Child Abuse Potential Inventory.

When designing programs to prevent CSAM, it may be helpful to consider the relationship between SDO and CSAM. These programs could have information intended to minimize social dominance orientation that supports discriminatory myths about child sexual abuse. Clinicians and researchers may be able to evaluate CSAM more thoroughly if they are

aware that SDO predicts those who may be more or less inclined to endorse these myths. The influence of rape and abuse prevention programs may be beneficial and long-lasting if more people are educated about sex, gender equality, and the rape culture we live in. Especially in Greece, few social institutions have the power and influence the Greek Orthodox church has and, in turn, the ability to significantly affect the rape and abuse culture. One option is to work with children; after all, studies indicate that children (boys and girls alike) are taught from a young age to value masculine characteristics over feminine ones and to value gender-based differences (a phenomenon known as femmephobia; Hoskin, 2019). Hoskin and Serafini (2023) claim that the development of femmephobic attitudes occurs early in life and that social institutions and systems, including school, popular culture, and religion, reinforce these attitudes. However, it should be noted that every situation also serves as a potential point for these attitudes to be "unlearned."

To sum up, SDO explained more variation than the other study variables. Considered in association with other predictor variables in interaction, it increased the explanatory power. SDO is a significant and understudied ideological dimension that deserves more in-depth analysis.

Limitations

A limitation of the current study is the convenience of online sampling, which raises concerns about self-selection bias and reduces external validity. In addition, this study's sample was skewed toward female participants and higher educational attainment. Given that men (Davies & Rogers, 2009) and individuals with lower levels of education (Abeid et al., 2015) often exhibit more permissive views regarding CSA, it is critical to examine these associations in larger, more balanced samples regarding gender and education. On the other side, self-reporting continues to be one of the best indicators of actual behavior in the future, and the online, anonymous format of the survey probably lessened the prominence of social desirability cues (Carnahgi et al., 2007).

Since our data were not experimental, we advise against drawing causal links between SDO, religiosity, political positioning, and CSAM. Furthermore, using a one-item indicator of political positioning may be problematic. Future research could look at these relationships with more detailed measures of political positioning to better assess the nuances specific to each political ideology and consider other spectrums of political positioning that we may not have covered here.

Conclusions

The current research highlights the need to acknowledge the role of conservative ideological dimensions and processes in CSAM tolerance. It contributes theoretically and practically to our understanding of CSAM, suggesting that SDO, as a facet of conservative ideology, may significantly predict CSAM tolerance.

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