

## COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN CHINA: IMPLICATIONS TO PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION WORK

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**Abstract:** Domestic violence in marital relationships is against the law in the People's Republic of China (hereafter "China" is used), where progressive development to address domestic violence began after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. In this article, domestic violence is referred to as violence against women by their male partners and the complexity of domestic violence is seen to be influenced by socio-cultural, economic, psychological, and environmental factors. Community responses to domestic violence are largely led by the "residents' committees" under the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and the All Women's Federation in China. However, literature has documented the inadequacy of these community responses to prevent and intervene on domestic violence. A feminist perspective is used to examine the prevalence and perception of domestic violence in the local context, and discusses implications for prevention and intervention work in China.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence; community responses; China

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## Introduction

Activists against domestic violence pointed out that the home was not a safe place for many women and children and that it was the patriarchal control of women that allowed this to happen (Eliasson & Lundy, 1999; Stark *et al.*, 1979). While the link between the anti-violence movement and the broader women's movement was not strong from the beginning, efforts to improve the status of women in society facilitated the work of the "battered women's movement" and the women's movement benefited from drawing on the statistics concerning domestic violence and the rise of consciousness that supported services, shelter and rape crisis centres work to be accomplished (Stark, 2007). The taking up of domestic violence as a criminal justice and social service issue, however, can be argued to have done little to reduce the prevalence (Stark, 2007) and contemporary research may also inadvertently perpetuate misconceptions (Johnson, 2008; Reed *et al.*, 2010).

A critical lens is required in research, one that is informed by critical feminist thinking and theory. Domestic violence cannot be understood outside of the social and political context in which it occurs. When efforts remove it from the social political context, the solutions are individualized and tend to remain focused on care of the victims and the perpetrators, rather than examining how and why the acts were permitted to occur in the first place. Stark (2007) argues that an individual approach fits with ideologies that want social structures unquestioned, such as the "get tough on crime" ideology. Feminist policy analysts like Carol Bacchi, however, urge an analysis of how social problems are constructed by discourses and problem representations and how this constrains what is viewed as possible for interventions (Bacchi, 1999). This is especially important in international collaborations where assumptions about shared understanding should often be tested for validity.

From a feminist perspective (Mooney, 2000; United Nations, 2006), domestic violence is perceived as an exhibit of male dominance over female. Tracing the historical roots of subordination of women in the Chinese societies, the "five cardinal relationships" has portrayed a hierarchical superiority of men over women (Keith & Lin, 2006; Woo, 2006). The latter are socialized to be obedient wives and dutiful mothers. Despite improved education and employment opportunities for women in China (Chan *et al.*, 2008; Economist, 2011) such hierarchical order has not only upheld the preference of male over female babies, but also solidified the perception that domestic violence is a family matter and should be resolved between the couple. Feminists argue that without addressing gender equality, the fundamental goal to eliminate violence against women could hardly be reached (Dekesevedy & Macleod, 1997; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). This article addresses

the disproportionate male violence against women, who are primarily victims of serious, chronic, and often fatal domestic violence in intimate relationships (United Nations, 2006). More than that, children and teenagers whose fathers are violent are more susceptible to child abuse and neglect, learning disabilities, physical and psychological health problems, and social and behavioral disturbances (Fisher *et al.*, 2007; WHO, 2005).

This article examines the prevalence and perception of domestic violence in the Chinese context, and discusses implications for prevention and intervention work in China. There are geographical and socio-economic differences between urban and rural communities in China. Welfare systems differ between urban and rural communities in China, where work units are largely responsible for welfare provision in the cities, and welfare needs are taken care of by communes in rural areas (Chen & Wang, 2007; Tan, 2006). Due to these differences, the study reported here used the context of an urban city Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province as a point of reference for discussion. Guangzhou, with a population of 12 million, is one of the fastest economically developing cities since the economic reforms began in 1978 in China (Cai *et al.*, 2003; Cai & Wu, 2007; Zhao, 2007). The question goes to whether the development of social infrastructure meets with the pace of economic growth in Guangzhou? This article is drawn from the documentation review (Neuman & Robson, 2009) and personal communications with different stakeholders to examine the prevalence and perception of domestic violence in the urban Chinese context and discuss implications for prevention and intervention work. Documentation review included published Chinese literature, government reports, government-funded and commercial newspapers, and official websites.

## Literature Review

### Domestic Violence in China

#### *Definition*

In this article, the term “domestic violence” is referred to as men’s violence against women in intimate partner relationships, including violence committed by a husband, a common-law<sup>1</sup> partner, an ex-husband, or an ex-common-law partner. The violence includes any acts or threats of such acts that result in or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women (United Nations, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to different-sex or same-sex unmarried couples.

Domestic violence is against the law and there are a number of laws intended to protect women in China, such as, the *Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women*,<sup>2</sup> amended in 2005, a unique piece of legislation for the protection of women's rights and interests. Article 46 of that law specifies, "Domestic violence against women is prohibited. The State takes measures to prevent and stop domestic violence." Another statute, the *Marriage Law*,<sup>3</sup> specifies legislation to protect married women: Article 3 affirms, "... Familial violence shall be prohibited. Maltreatment or desertion of any family member shall be prohibited"; Article 32 states, "... Divorce shall be granted if ... there is family violence or maltreatment or desertion of any family member." In the *Criminal Law of People's Republic of China*,<sup>4</sup> the legal consequences for those who committed domestic violence are set out. Article 260 specifies that "Those mistreating their family members, if the case is serious, are to be sentenced to two years or less in prison, or put under criminal detention or surveillance."

Despite the legal definitions, many individuals including the general public, social service and health care providers, still consider domestic violence a family matter and are reluctant to intervene (Chen, 2007; Foshan Shi Women's Federation, 2007; Tang et al., 2002). The Foshan Shi Women's Federation<sup>5</sup> in Guangdong conducted a survey in 2005 with a convenience sample of residents and received 4800 returned questionnaires. Results from this study indicate that 1410 respondents (approximately 30%) considered domestic violence a private matter (Foshan Shi Women's Federation, 2007). Moreover, the definition of domestic violence largely refers to physical violence that involves obvious physical injuries such as bleeding, fractures, and bruises (Chen, 2007; Wang & Peng, 2007). Other forms of physical violence such as pushing, slapping, and

<sup>2</sup> Adopted at the Fifth Session of the Seventh National People's Congress on April 3, 1992 and promulgated by Order No. 58 of the President of the People's Republic of China on April 3, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Adopted at the Third Session of the Fifth National People's Congress on September 10, 1980 and promulgated by Order No. 9 of the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on September 10, 1980; and amended in accordance with the Decision on Amending the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, adopted at the 21st Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress on April 28, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> The Amendment VI to the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, adopted at the 22nd Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Tenth National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China on June 29, 2006, is hereby promulgated and shall go into effect as of the date of its promulgation.

<sup>5</sup> All Women's Federation in China is a semi-government organization and operates by non-government officials, but is primarily funded by the government and implements the government's policy on women affairs. The All Women's Federation in China has chapters spread out to every single district and villages and addresses day to day women affairs.

slamming things, which do not cause obvious injuries, are more often considered to be *marital disputes*. In addition, psychological abuse is largely not considered a form of domestic violence. For example, less than 20% of the respondents considered “teasing the person’s disability or limitation,” “making the person embarrassed in front of others,” and “being jealous” as forms of psychological abuse (Foshan Shi Women’s Federation 2005).

### ***Prevalence of Domestic Violence***

Systematic and official data on the prevalence of violence against women is currently unavailable in China (UNFPA, 2010); however, a number of regional and small-scale studies portray a concerning picture of violence against women in Guangzhou. For example, the All Women’s Federation in China examined client in-takes to their services in 29 provinces, autonomous regions, and direct-controlled regions in the second half of year 2000. Their results show that 20,148 (7.2%) intakes involved requests for assistance in domestic violence matters. Among these intakes, 90% were from women (All Women’s Federation in China, 2003). In 2002, the Chinese Law Society conducted a study in three provinces: Zhejiang, Hunan and Gansu. Findings indicate that close to 35% of families reported the experience of domestic violence (Chen, 2007). In 2003, Guangdong Women’s Federation conducted a survey with 1589 families showing that 29.2% of these families had experienced domestic violence. Among these families, 79.4% involved violence by husbands against their wives (All Women’s Federation in China, 2003; China Court International Online, 2003). In the Foshan Shi Women’s Federation study, 25% of the participants reported experiences of domestic violence. Among these reports, over 90% of the incidences were committed by husbands against the wives (Foshan Shi Women’s Federation, 2007). Wu *et al.* (2005) conducted a cross-sectional study with 1215 women who sought induced abortion in four Northern provinces. In their study, the lifetime prevalence of men’s violence against women was 22.6%. Another cross-sectional study (Xu *et al.*, 2005) with 600 women in an outpatient gynecological clinic in Fuzhou showed that 43% of the women had experienced domestic violence during their lifetime; and 26% had experienced violence the year prior to the study. Overall, Tang and Lai (2008) conducted an empirical literature review on violence against women in China between 1987 and 2006. They reported that the lifetime average male-on-female violence was 19.7% and prevalence of past year violence was 16.8%. These statistics suggest that domestic violence against women in intimate relationships is a pressing social issue in China that requires responsive intervention. However, most previous studies focused on the

prevalence and causes of domestic violence and placed limited discussion on the extent of community responses on domestic violence (All Women's Federation in China, 2003; Foshan Shi Women's Federation, 2007; Tang *et al.*, 2002; Xu *et al.*, 2005). This article aims to fill this gap.

## **Community Responses to Domestic Violence in China**

Community resources to support victims of domestic violence is still in its nascent stage in China. To understand these responses, the authors review both informal and formal systems that are available for abused women to seek help. China strongly emphasizes communal support in which family members, relatives, and neighbors are expected to help others when they experience hardship (Family Research Center of the Family Magazine, 2001). These informal sources of support provide material help such as care giving and sharing of food and clothing, and non-material support such as emotional support and mediation in cases of family disputes (Fry & Barker, 2002). However, due to the changing family structure and economy, reliance on informal support is not always an option.

### **Informal Support**

Introduced in 1978, the one-child policy has changed the informal support system in China, where increased numbers of young women were raised in families with no other sibling or extended family network (Cai *et al.*, 2003). When the parents of these women are getting old, or have health problems, abused women are hesitant to reveal their difficulties to their parents in order not to create any burden for their aging parents (Foshan Shi Women's Federation, 2007). Moreover, the economic development in Guangdong, which has the highest GDP across China, attracted many migrant workers from inner provinces and inner cities to Guangdong, in particular, its capital Guangzhou (Cai *et al.*, 2003). These migrant workers leave behind their natural informal support system in their home towns (Tan, 2006; Wang, 2006). Some female migrant workers get married and stay. These married migrant women are particularly isolated in domestic violence, as their natural informal support is not always available (Jiang *et al.*, 2007; Zhu, 2006).

Sometimes informal systems are not a source of support, but rather a source of social pressure for the women to stay in the relationship for the sake of their children. Some parents, relatives, or friends hold traditional values on family, gender roles, or marriage; they consider family unity as more important to a complete family environment for the children than ending personal suffering

(Chen, 2007; Foshan Shi Women's Federation, 2007; Zhu, 2006). Some abused women could hardly get the needed informal support; some other abused women are hesitant to tell their story to their parents, relatives, or friends for fear of additional social pressure (Tam, 2004; Tam *et al.*, 2009; Chen, 2007). When informal support is unavailable or ineffective, abused women could seek help from formal support systems such as "residents' committees" of the Ministry of Civil Affairs or the All Women's Federation in China. The adequacy and effectiveness of these formal support systems are the focus of the following discussion.

### **Residents' Committees**

The Ministry of Civil Affairs oversees community-level affairs including family education, crime prevention, environmental issues, family planning, and mediation in family disputes. According to Chapter 5, Article 43 of the *Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women*, in the case of domestic violence, affected women can seek help from frontline officials of the Ministry of Civil Affairs such as the "residents' committees." When staff of the "residents' committees" receive reports of domestic violence, they are responsible to intervene. However, the functions of these officials are limited to meditations. According to the law, it is the police that have a law enforcement mandate to stop the violence. Documentation has shown that "residents' committees" are ineffective in response to domestic violence reports for three main reasons: (1) traditional beliefs about preserving the family unity; (2) beliefs that domestic violence is a private matter; and (3) lack of professional training among officials. As mentioned in the previous section, the cultural value on family stability still holds an important part in many people's responses to domestic violence (Chen, 2007; Rong, 2006; Woo, 2006). An old Chinese saying states, "Better advise people to discipline their children, rather than advising them to get a divorce." Moreover, many abused women choose to tolerate the violence for the sake of their children (Foshan Shi Women's Federation, 2007; Keith & Lin, 2006). Among the staff of the "residents' committees," many of them have not received any formal training in social work, counseling, or ethics on confidentiality, and lack sensitivity to the complexity of domestic violence, its impacts, and proper intervention (Chen, 2007; Niu, 2007). In one way, neighborhood watch facilitated by the "residents' committees" is considered a forefront measure for early identification of and intervention in cases of domestic violence and it represents some degree of deterrence (Chen *et al.*, 2005). In another way, close networks in the community make some abused women hesitant to seek help. This

is because the social definition places more emphasis on the unity and stability of the family as well as the “private” nature of domestic violence. Therefore, the severe nature of domestic violence is being diluted or tolerated and creates external pressures for women to stay in the relationships.

### **Women’s Federation**

The All Women’s Federation in China is a semi-government organization which has chapters throughout the entire country and is responsible for protecting women’s rights and interests, and promoting equality between men and women including intervention in domestic violence. In the past 15 years, China has been catching up with its international counterparts in the area of combating domestic violence. The All Women’s Federation in China and the China Law Society have been inviting other international experts on domestic violence from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia, the United States, and the Netherlands to share experience and train the trainers from the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Women’s Federation (All Women’s Federation in China, 2008; Guangdong Provincial Women’s Federation, 2007; Rong, 2006; Tan *et al.*, 2007). The All Women’s Federation has established legal aid centers, hotlines, and domestic violence report centers in every provincial and municipal branch. These are encouraging developments, and lay a solid foundation for future development.

However, like the “residents’ committees,” many workers in the Women’s Federation still hold traditional values on gender roles and family unity, and are not professionally trained about the complexity of domestic violence (Niu, 2007; Zou, 2007). Interventions by the Women’s Federation are more focused on information giving such as the legal procedures for a divorce, and mediation by giving a “lecture” to the abusive partner, but they lack a law enforcement mandate (Chen, 2007; Niu, 2007). Availability of other forms of professional intervention, such as children’s witness program, support group for women, or intervention programs for men are in adequately developed throughout the country, and are almost non-existent in Guangzhou (Personal Communication with staff of the Guangzhou Women’s Federation on August 14, 2007). Another limitation of the Women’s Federation is its mandate to implement the policies of the central government (Zhou, 2007). Many in the general public perceive the Women’s Federation an extended arm of the government, and an agent of social control, and are reluctant to approach it (Niu, 2007; Zhou, 2007). Moreover, the Women’s Federation lacks coordination with other government departments such as the “residents’ committees” of the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the police. Literature has documented that some abused women were being shuffled around by these government departments or the Women’s Federation. Consequently

some abused women have lost their confidence to seek external help (Chen, 2007; Niu, 2007; Wang, 2007; Zhang, 2008).

### **Emergency Shelters**

Due to different jurisdictions' administration and local economy, community responses to domestic violence vary from province to province. For example, Hubei province opened its first women's emergency shelter in 1995 (Rong, 2006); but the first women's shelter was opened in the Guangdong province in Sihui and a second one in Guangzhou only in December 2007 and November 2008 respectively (Guangzhou Daily, 2008; Sihui Shi Women's Federation, 2008). Official statistics on the number of women's shelters are unavailable, but information gathered from scattered sources show that less than 20 women's shelters existed in 33 provinces across China in 2009 (All Women's Federation in China, 2007; Center for Women's Law and Legal Services of Peking University, 2008; Chen, 2007; Ma, 2008). Moreover, records of occupancy in these shelters are seldom made available to the public. With the available literature, Niu (2007) pointed out that emergency shelters are underutilized for the reasons of lacking follow-up support service, lacking trained staff, and the traditional belief of not revealing family shame to outsiders. Niu (2007) illustrated an example of a women's emergency shelter in Nanjing, which was opened in 2000, where there was only one person admitted between 2000 and 2003. The situation of underutilization also happened in the Sihui Women's Emergency Shelter, which had no occupancy from the opening in December 2007 and to time the research team of this article made the visit in March 2008.

Considering the prevalence of domestic violence in China, the number of women's shelters is far from adequate. Moreover, underutilization reveals another concern on post-shelter service. The length of allowable stay in an emergency women's shelter ranges between three days to a week (Personal Communications with the Sihui Women Emergency Shelter in March 2008; Guangzhou Daily, 2008). The short allowable length of stay may also account for the apparent low utilization rates. On top of this, there is concern over where abused women could go after the stay in the emergency shelter, if there is a fear of further violence (Niu, 2007). In most parts of China including Guangdong province, second stage housing has not been established for abused women who do not want to stay in the relationship and are unable to afford an accommodation in the open market. Many women are financially dependent or incapable of supporting both themselves and their children to live apart, and are forced to remain or return to the abusive relationship (Cai & Wu, 2007; Wang & Peng, 2007).

## **Non-Government Non-Profit Organizations**

Non-government and non-profit organizations are registered under the Ministry of Civil Affairs. In 2005, there were 201 non-government and non-profit women's organizations in Guangdong province (Guangdong Provincial Women's Federation, 2007). Some of these women's organizations are joint ventures with well-established social service organizations (i.e., International Social Service, YWCA) from Hong Kong, or funded by international foundations (Ding, 2007; Guangdong Provincial Women's Federation, 2007). These non-government and non-profit organizations provide a wide range of community services to different populations in the community such as youth service, elder service, drug rehabilitation service, migrant worker services, etc. However, none of the approximately 70 non-government and non-profit organizations in Guangzhou contacted by the research team between July 2007 and February 2009 had a designated program developed for abused women. Three reasons were given to explain the lack of non-government and non-profit run programs for women in abusive relationships: (1) Intervention on domestic violence is the jurisdiction of the "residents' committees" of the Ministry of Civil Affairs or the Women's Federation. Non-government and non-profit organizations would refer domestic violence cases to these mandated offices or advise the woman to call the police (Personal Communications between July 2007 and February 2009); (2) These non-government and non-profit organizations are under close monitoring to ensure that their programs and activities would not fall outside their mandate. These organization would not offer any program that might overlap with the "residents' committee" or the Women's Federation without approval of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (Guangdong Provincial Women's Federation, 2007). Moreover, funding of these non-government and non-profit organizations is rather unstable as these organizations do not enjoy the mandated status as the "residents' committee" or the Women's Federation (Zhou, 2007); (3) There is a lack of sensitivity to different forms of domestic violence. As mentioned earlier, the definition of domestic violence is limited to severe physical violence (Ding, 2007; Foshan Shi Women's Federation, 2007). Some local university trained social workers employed in those non-government and non-profit organizations did not receive any training on domestic violence during their university education (Personal Communications with various social workers and social work students in Guangzhou between July 2007 and February 2009). This is consistent with the research team's review on the social work curricular of two social work programs at Zhongshan University and the South China Agricultural University in Guangzhou, China. There was not a single course that offered on domestic violence in their curricular up to March 2009.

To summarize, China's community responses to prevent and intervene in domestic violence against women in intimate relationships are far from adequate. The identified limitations of these community responses include: traditional beliefs on the private nature of domestic violence; a narrow definition of domestic violence; lack of proper training on domestic violence among service providers; lack of coordination among organizations; and lack of post emergency shelter support services for women who decide to leave the abusive relationship.

The answer to the question of what direction China should adopt in its community responses to domestic violence must include consideration of its socio-cultural and economic conditions. What role and function can social workers perform in China?

## **Discussion**

To begin the discussion, the authors applaud that China has made noteworthy development in the prevention and intervention on domestic violence since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Given China is a country which needs to provide more than basic needs to a quarter of the world's population, the challenges are enormous. Despite the identified constraints on current community responses, the authors assert there is an opportunity for international exchange of experiences and collaboration for future development.

### **Traditional Values**

A fundamental issue is the indifferent attitudes and beliefs among government personnel and the general public towards domestic violence against women. Even though the law defines domestic violence in intimate relationships as an unlawful act, many people continue to tolerate or are hesitant to intervene in cases of domestic violence against women for its "private nature." Changing one's belief takes time, therefore, education from the school age could help boys and girls develop better gender relations, and to understand the unacceptable nature of domestic violence. Education and training for government officials and direct service providers could develop responsive policies and practice guidelines, and ensure standards of practice to be followed. Moreover, community education should be launched to advocate the value of gender equality and enhance the public's awareness that violence against women is against the law, creates an enormous social cost to the society, and should be condemned. These would help discount the idea that violence in the home is "private" and make the public costs more obvious.

## Definition of Violence

The *Marriage Law* and the *Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women* state that domestic violence is against the law. However, the definition of domestic violence is limited to obvious physical violence, and the interpretation of a report of domestic violence is often subject to the discretion of the related officials. Moreover, other forms of violence are largely neglected, which limits the development of proper community response to domestic violence. In view of this, China has to broaden the definition of domestic violence to include physical, psychological, sexual, financial, and spiritual violence; and to educate the public and service providers the short-and long-term social costs of various forms of domestic violence against women and their children. More importantly, to promote to the public that domestic violence is a public matter, and is an act that against human rights.

## Community Services

A major shortfall in China is the underdevelopment of community services for women who are confronting the violence, in the process of leaving or have left the violent relationship, and the lack of support services for children who have witnessed or are being affected by domestic violence. Interventions by “residents’ committees” and the Women’s Federation are under the influence of traditional beliefs to maintain family unity through mediation or some form of “education” to the abusive partners. If the relationship is irreconcilable, legal procedures or legal aid for divorce are provided. However, various social programs like services for victims, support groups for women and children, counseling, and treatment programs for men that address the short- and long-term consequences of domestic violence and prevention are loosely developed and require further improvement and development. Moreover, there is a need to enhance the awareness of workers from these organizations to challenge such traditional values and develop prevention and intervention programs that could promote gender equality.

Furthermore, there is a lack of well trained professionals in providing those community services and the standards of practice vary. Even though social work education has seen substantial development in the past 15 years in China, the employment opportunities for these social work graduates are very limited. It was not until the central government’s commitment to develop social work as a recognized profession in 2006 that social work as a helping profession began to gain recognition (Ku & Yuen-Tsang, 2003; Law & Gu, 2008). In future, the “residents’ committees,” the Women’s Federation, and the health care sector

could hire social workers in their work force. In addition, due to the government images of the “residents’ committees,” and the Women’s Federation, abused women are reluctant to seek help. The Chinese government should consider giving more autonomy to those non-government and non-profit organizations, which maintain an arm’s length from the government and are run by professionally trained social workers to provide preventive or supportive services to victims of domestic violence, and to develop treatment programs for abusive partners.

Moreover, the number of women shelters, scope of their services (i.e., length of stay, in-house counseling programs), and their follow-up support service (i.e., second stage housing) are far from adequate. Importantly, policies must address the reasons for underutilization of women’s shelters because some women have nowhere to go after the short stay in an emergency shelter and might experience retaliation if they return to their partners as they have brought shame to the men and the family. Therefore, mandates of women shelters should be expanded to provide longer stay and beds for women with dependent children. This is because leaving their children behind to the abusive partner is the last option an abused woman would consider. Most women would rather tolerate the violence in order to stay with their children. The situation is worsened due to employment instability and disproportionate pay inequality experienced by women that have resulted in financial dependence among many women and is particularly salient among female migrant workers. Together with the increase in the cost of living, many women are struck by the fact that they are not able to financially support themselves and/or their children, so they tolerate the abusive relationships.

## **Training**

Training and re-training of government personnel on domestic violence is a recent occurrence in China. Scattered programs like workshops lectured by international speakers have been developed through the Ministry of Civil Affairs or the Women’s Federation in conjunction with the police and judiciary. One important aspect of such international exchange is that both successful and unsuccessful experiences are shared which can avoid unnecessary mistakes. These international collaboration efforts should be continued, supported by governments at difference levels and with adequate funding resources. Further to that, systematic professional training should start early in university education among helping professionals, such as social workers, medical and nursing professionals. The lack of proper training of these helping professions contributes to their lack of preparedness for early identification and intervention on domestic violence.

## Data and Research

The scattered literature and unsystematic data on domestic violence in China make it difficult to fully comprehend the nature and scope of domestic violence in China. Readers may note in the list of references that some sources are from the China News Agency, local newspapers, or online sources. In the four years of the research project development and implementation stages, collecting up-to-date and quality information, reliable statistics, or peer reviewed journal articles was extremely difficult in China. For example, websites are not up to date, and statistical reports often did not provide details of their research methods. Despite the existence of some empirical data surrounding the prevalence of violence against women, these data are mostly collected from convenience sampling or cross-sectional studies, which fail to portray a long-term picture of the problem. Therefore, the current understanding of domestic violence against women in China is fragmented. Rigorous on-going research on domestic violence, particularly impacts on children and systematic evaluation of prevention and intervention programs are necessary for a better understanding of this social problem and of how to provide needed support to affected women and their children.

## Conclusion

Even though women's movements have worked towards the ideal goal of changing society in Western democracies for 30 years (Mazur, 2002), efforts have not always been successful in achieving women's equality rights and status. In North America, in the specific area of domestic violence against women, we have seen the development of policies and procedures that recognize women's inequality in domestic relationships; the same inequalities that exist in wider North American societies. Not only that, but there now seemed to be the wider public perception that older patriarchal views about women as the chattel of their husbands are no longer accepted. Innovative initiatives such as victim services, emergency shelters and transition housing, counseling services, intervention programs for abusive partners, and prevention programs were developed, but not without limitations.

In turning to examine the domestic violence situation in China, the initial review of existing community services provides a worrying picture. While the policy at one level articulates equality intents, the actual prevalence rates, standards of practice, and accessibility and availability suggest a disjuncture between the rhetoric of equality in the statutes, on the one hand, and the reality in practice, grounded in patriarchal views and tolerance toward domestic violence, on the other. This review of the current situation is aimed at generating insights into how demands for expanded rights for women in abusive situations are responded

to in specific social, economic, governance and cultural contexts. The review facilitates an “unearthing” of “the complex causal connections between cultural context, gender, policy and the state” (Mazur, 2002, p.10). Moreover, this review provides a venue for international collaboration on specific and general social problem areas at the level of policy and advocacy development. Scholars and practitioners from different countries can benefit by drawing together their research for greater impact at the international level, for example, taking forward the research on domestic violence against women to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Further work could be done in terms of international collaboration on research, program development, training, curriculum development, and students and/or faculty exchange between academic institutions of different countries. As stated at the beginning of the paper, the milestone development in addressing violence against women in China was the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. The success of that one inspirational turning point alone suggests we need to continue coalition building and the sharing of research findings on women’s issues. Bringing the discussion into the light of international forums assures that worthwhile lessons can be positively transferred and adapted and that no country is allowed to disadvantage women in isolation.

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