



**Hard Struggles in Times of Change:
A Qualitative Study on Masculinities and Gender-Based
Violence in Contemporary China**



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Published by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) China Office

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Foreword

In March this year, at the 57th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the Member States renewed their commitment to end violence against women and girls, yet millions of women and girls around the world continue to suffer from physical, emotional and/or verbal abuse. They are denied access to sexual and reproductive health services which poses threat to their health and well-being.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has been at the forefront of efforts to end violence against women and girls worldwide. On the occasion of the 14th International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of UNFPA, reaffirmed the Fund's commitment to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls, and underlined the importance of engaging men and boys in imparting social change that upholds gender equality and women's empowerment.

Gender-based violence (GBV) results from gender-based discrimination and inequality. While global evidence shows that men are the primary perpetrators of violence, there is a palpable lack of knowledge about men who tend to perpetuate violence. The research on GBV through the lenses of masculinity is scarce. This qualitative research, supported by UNFPA China and Partners for Prevention, was undertaken as part of the Asia-Pacific regional study on GBV – the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence. It aims to understand the links between the dominant notions of masculinity ('what it means to be a man') and the GBV occurrence in China. The qualitative findings complement data generated from the quantitative research and contribute to building a comprehensive evidence base for effective programming and advocacy to eliminate GBV in China.

Life stories reveal multiple masculinities described in this report. The variety of masculinities shows that gender norms are not static and are amendable to change. It proves that violence is preventable. The in-depth real-life interviews provide valuable insights into root causes of GBV, calling forth for measures that can effectively prevent GBV and promote more gender-equitable masculinities.

Gender equality cannot be achieved without engagement and participation of men and boys. In collaboration with other UN Agencies, government, civil society groups, researchers and media, UNFPA China is committed to engage more men and boys, together with women and girls, to prevent and end GBV and to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in China.

Arie Hoekman
UNFPA Representative to China
25 November 2013

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all respondents who generously shared their life stories, happiness and sorrow, love and hatred, life and passions with us. Without their support, this report would not be able to be produced, though our appreciation still needs to remain anonymous.

There are eight research assistants involved in this research project, however only three of them have their names on the front page. Here we would like to acknowledge the contributions from our research assistants Xiaojun Dong, Xingcan Pi, Ji Gong, Shuang Ma, Sen Cui, Sun Wang from Beijing Normal University, Chenyang Wang from Tsinghua University and Meng Luo from the Beijing LGBT center.

We wish to express our profound thanks to UNFPA China, which provided financial and technical support. Special thanks go to Arie Hoekman, Zeljka Mudrovcic and Hua Wen.

We are deeply grateful to Partners for Prevention, a UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV Asia-Pacific regional joint programme of masculinities and gender-based violence prevention, which provided wonderful technical support to this study. Particular thanks go to Stephanie Miedema, James Lang, and Emma Fulu.

Last but not least, we would like to thank friends and organizations that helped us to identify respondents, including Xiaoqin Xie and Shuping Zhai from the Women's Federation in Chengde County in Hebei Province, Hongyu Zheng from Qinghe Prison, Xiaopei He from Pink Space Research Center and Liu Zhang, Ting Guo, Li Ma, Bo Jiang and Donghua Liu.

Executive Summary

This qualitative report, *Hard Struggles in Times of Change: A Qualitative Study on Masculinities and Gender-Based Violence in Contemporary China*, is part of the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific, a regional study on masculinities and gender-based violence coordinated by Partners for Prevention (P4P), a UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV Asia-Pacific regional joint programme for gender-based violence prevention. The qualitative study aims to look in-depth at individual men and women's life histories to understand how they may have impacted on their gender practices and gender beliefs today in relation to gender-based violence in contemporary China. This study also aims to understand the trajectory of expression of (counter) hegemonic practices of masculinities and femininities across and throughout men and women's lives, reflecting acceptance or rejection of violence in society.

Adopting a life history approach, this study interviewed three groups of people:

- 10 'gender-equitable men', i.e. those men who display behaviours that run counter to hegemonic masculinity
- 10 male perpetrators of violence against women
- 10 women who have suffered from gender-based violence throughout their life course.

Thirty life history narratives were collected, and most participants were interviewed twice. Each interview was transcribed. The interviews were coded collectively by the project team members so as to ensure a sufficient level of inter-coder reliability.

There are five research finding chapters, which are presented according to the timeline of the life history narrative: childhood, school, work, intimate relationships and communities, in order to capture the life course trajectory of gendered construction of masculinities and femininities and experiences of gender-based violence. Each research finding chapter starts with a brief story of each group, followed by a detailed analysis of each group. Recommendations for further studies, programmes and practice and policy development are also given.

Childhood: In general, patriarchal divisions of power, whereby men and boys held higher positions of power than women and girls in the family, were prevalent across the childhoods of all respondents. Parents' preferential treatment of male children was commonly reported by both male and female respondents. This was not always framed specifically as son preference, but sometimes (and more often by the perpetrators) referred to generally in terms of expectations and rewards of being a male child. In contrast, daughters tended to be heavily involved in housework and childcare, and because of this, some were denied the opportunity to go to school and receive a formal education. This was most common among the older generation of female respondents. Witnessing domestic violence between parents was common across all three groups. In particular, the perpetrators were more inclined to justify the normality of violence, and frame it within the context of child discipline.

School: The life history narratives suggest that experiences within the education sector were varied across the sample groups. The 'gender-equitable' men group tended to have more positive memories of schooling, and also experienced more extensive engagement and support of parents, grandparents or teachers in their education. Within this context, this group tended to report higher performance and achieve higher levels of education than their counterparts in the other groups. Many 'gender-equitable' men also mentioned that they came to have a high level of gender awareness because of different school activities and educational exposure, suggested a linkage between access to higher education and enhanced opportunities to learn about gender equality. Among the perpetrators, most had only received limited education and tended to associate their school years with experiences of fighting and bullying. However, this was not always the case, as three of the perpetrator respondents reported school experiences more similar to the 'gender-equitable' group, and had achieved high levels of education (including a PhD for one). These differences and similarities across the male respondents suggest that while education and school experiences are significant spaces for socialization, they are not the only factor that determines a man's trajectory toward more equitable or non-equitable norms and practices. Among the female participants, younger women reported higher levels of education than older women, signaling generational differences in patterns of female education in China. Almost half of the female respondents reported experiences of bullying and harassment in school, although this tended to be framed as less physical than confrontations among boys. All three groups experienced – to varying degrees – poor teacher-student relationships and corporal punishment by teachers. While the perpetrators often would “drop out” from school or “fail” to cope with these experiences of abuse, the 'gender-equitable' men and the female participants seemed more able to overcome or disregard experiences of violence and continue to do well at school.

Work: There were significantly different patterns of how work was discussed and framed within the respondents lives across the three samples. Generally, the 'gender-equitable' men spoke of their passion, motivation, devotion and satisfaction derived from their work, although there were also some reported tensions around living up to standards of masculinity that emphasize financial success, given the low pay rates in the respondents' chosen sectors. The perpetrators tended to frame work as a means to an end: a way to make a living and a way to support lifestyle preferences, such as gambling, drinking with friends or visiting sex workers. In their working lives, there was a substantially higher level of reported conflict and frustration, and tensions often spilled over into the domestic sphere. Among the female respondents, the main trend across respondents was the extent to which women were expected to fulfill a 'double-burden': to be responsible for contributing financially to the household through outside work, and also to maintain the image of “virtuous mothers and good wives” at home. At the same time, many of the female respondents credited their engagement and success in outside work as enabling them to leave abusive relationships.

Intimate Partnerships and Violence: The analysis of how respondents perceived and dealt with incidents of violence, and the connections with gender norms, revealed multiple forms of violence perpetration – even among the 'gender-equitable' sample. However, perceptions of violence varied across the two male sample groups: the 'gender-equitable' men sample tended to reject, in theory, violence as a conflict solving mechanism, although they sometimes did use violence against their partner. In these cases, violence was reported as an unfortunate, last resort. Nevertheless, it does suggest the traction of patriarchal

values and forms of conduct in shaping (perhaps subconsciously) the 'gender-equitable' men's behaviours. The perpetrators were more likely to perceive violence as a normal occurrence within the intimate partnership space, and often linked their use of violence to disagreements over activities they saw as 'natural' for a man, such as drinking or gambling. They also tended to deny or justify acts of violence by attributing them to outside provocation or to their own "excusable" temper. The study also demonstrates a broad spectrum of violence reported throughout the interviews, from low-level verbal sparring to extremely serious psychological and physical abuse, as well as sexual violence. A significant difference between perpetrator's and women survivors' narratives was the frequent references to sexual violence among the female sample, and the lack of reporting on this topic by men.

Community Discourses of Gender Norms and Response to Violence: Overall, most of the respondents agreed in principle to gender equality and the need for equal rights between women and men, although the perpetrators were slightly less likely to report these beliefs. In practice, however, practices varied particularly in relation to acceptability and use of violence. Both 'gender-equitable' men and men in the perpetrator sample tended to describe similar types of ideal men and ideal types of relationships. However, among the perpetrators (and some of the 'gender-equitable' men) these described norms did not always preclude the use of violence to enforce the norm. Female respondents tended to hold ideal images of masculinity and femininity that underscore women's role as wife and mother, and men's role as wage-earner and head of the family. Some of the female respondents also held contradictory beliefs about the acceptability of men's violence against their partners, noting that violence against women was a crime but at the same time, it was sometimes deserved or needed. Differences between urban and rural living arrangements and community life also played a notable role in our participants' accounts of domestic violence, influencing their perceptions of violence and their experiences of dealing with violence within their communities. In discussions around community response to violence, most respondents strongly emphasized that gender-based violence prevention and intervention need effective community support, accessible support agencies, and multi-sectoral collaboration.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Hard Struggles in Times of Change: A Qualitative Study on Masculinities and Gender-Based Violence in Contemporary China, is part of the *UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific*, a regional study on masculinities and gender-based violence coordinated by Partners for Prevention (P4P), a UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV Asia-Pacific regional joint programme for gender-based violence prevention. This overall *UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence* has three components: a quantitative household survey, qualitative life history research and policy analysis of gendered policy-making¹. This report describes the findings from the qualitative life history study conducted in China, and complements the findings from the quantitative household survey which was conducted in one urban and rural site in central China (Wang, Fang and Li 2013). The qualitative study aims to provide a deeper understanding and interpretation of the social structures, norms, attitudes and behaviours related to gender-based violence and its prevention. It will complement the set of data and findings generated by the quantitative study for comprehensive evidence-based programming and advocacy to engage men in eliminating gender-based violence in China. UNFPA China and Partners for Prevention financially and technically support this project.

1.2 Conceptual framework

Gender-based violence is an expansive concept that encompasses a wide variety of attitudes, values, and practices. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC 2006) define gender-based violence as:

Any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially associated differences between males

and females. As such violence is based on socially ascribed differences, gender-based violence includes, but it is not limited to sexual violence. While women and girls of all ages make up the majority of the victims, men and boys are also both direct and indirect victims. It is clear that the effects of such violence are both physical and psychological, and have long-term detrimental consequences for both the survivors and their communities. (ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment 2006)

From this perspective, gender-based violence covers a wide range of behaviours that are based in systematic and pervasive inequalities of power between individuals and social groups within the gender order of a particular society (O'Toole, Schiffman et al. 2007). It is often perpetrated by men against women and children, but violence against men and against transgender individuals must be equally considered. Relevant forms of violence are equally wide-ranging. They include, but are not limited to, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence/rape, child sexual abuse, homophobic hate crimes, sexual harassment in the workplace and public life, and sex trafficking. Moreover, it is important to consider physical violence as well as verbal violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and systematic gender-based discrimination.

In China, research on gender-based violence has been conducted for nearly 30 years. Most studies can be categorized into four types. First, there are surveys that explore the prevalence and risk factors of violence. Second, there are legal discussions on how to protect abused women through the law, with a view to enacting a special law against domestic violence. Third, there are case studies that explore why women have been abused and remain in abusive relationships. Fourth, there are discussions of how to establish multi-sectoral collaboration to prevent and intervene in gender-based violence.

However, there is a lack of qualitative research about gender-based violence through the lenses

¹ To learn more about the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific, and to read findings from other countries, visit www.partners4prevention.org

of masculinity and femininity. Recognizing that in any setting there are multiple masculinities, it is important to conduct qualitative research to understand the specific social, cultural and political conditions in which some men in society reproduce hegemonic masculinity while others produce a “caring”, “collaborative”, “sharing” and “responsible” masculinity. Equally, it is important in this context to understand the political, cultural and social conditions in which women suffer abusive relationships rather than ask for help.

1.3 Masculinities

While gender-based violence encompasses a very diverse array of practices, it remains important to acknowledge the frequency with which it involves men as perpetrators and women as victims (O'Toole, Schiffman et al. 2007). Therefore, masculinity emerged as a major concern among social researchers in the wake of 1970s feminism, whose achievements destabilized taken-for-granted assumptions about gender relations and the nature of both masculinity and femininity (Oakley 1974, Rubin 1975, Connell 1987). Masculinity, in this sense, is a social construct:

The patterns of conduct our society defines as masculine may be seen in the lives of individuals, but they also have an existence beyond the individual. Masculinities are defined collectively in culture, and are sustained in institutions. (Connell 2000: 11)

Raewyn Connell (1995/2005) argues that societies encompass multiple masculinities, which are shaped by cultural differences, as well as by the interplay of race, class, gender and other institutional arrangements. Connell (1998, 2000, 2005) argues that diverse and hierarchically ordered masculinities may exist within any one society, as well as at the international level. Therefore, she introduces the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a means of analyzing power relations between men and their consequences for gender relations in society at large. Connell writes:

At any given time, one form of masculinity

rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell 1995/2005: 77)

While the characteristics of hegemonic masculinities vary widely, they are often associated with behavioural traits such as aggressiveness, strength, confidence, and the ability to control oneself and others (Mirandé 1997; Louie and Low 2003). At the same time, such traits may often be more a matter of prevalent public images and stereotypes about what makes a good man, which obscure and suppress considerable variations in men's everyday experiences and practices (Gutmann 1996). Therefore, it is crucial to account for the interplay between prevalent public images and beliefs and the on-the-ground realities of men's lives in order to research masculinities and gender-based violence.

1.4 Ecological framework

This study is based on the theoretical framework of the ecological model (Heise 2011), which is generally used to assess risk factors and protective factors associated with the occurrence of violence² at various levels: individual, households and families, communities and society at large. While these factors are generally determined through population-based surveys, this qualitative study can explore in much greater depth the biographical pathways that lead men to become violent and equal, and help to nuance and unpack factors which are statistically associated with men's perpetration of violence and practices of gender equality.

1.5 Gender-based violence in contemporary China

Current research on gender-based violence in China points to a problem of considerable

² For an analysis of risk and protective factors associated with men's perpetration of gender-based violence, see the quantitative China report from the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence, entitled Gender-based violence and masculinities study in China: Preliminary findings (Wang, Fang and Li, 2013).

magnitude (Tang et al. 2002, Xu et al. 2001, Xu et al. 2005). At the same time, it is apparent that the study of gender-based violence in contemporary China has remained limited and largely confined to men's violence against women in the domestic sphere (Chan 2009: 79). This limitation notwithstanding, the studies reviewed do allow important insights into the relationship between gender-based violence and prevalent forms of masculinity in Chinese society.

Most recently, as part of the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific, Wang, Fang and Li (2013) conducted a quantitative study on men's perpetration and women's experiences of gender-based violence in China with 1,103 women and 1,017 men aged 18 to 49. Among female respondents who were ever partnered, 39 percent reported experiencing physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence. Men's reporting was higher, with 52 percent of ever-partnered men reporting perpetration of physical and/or intimate partner violence. Different types of intimate partner violence overlapped, as 27 percent of men who reported perpetrating physical intimate partner violence also reported perpetrating sexual violence against a partner (Wang, Fang and Li 2013). In a nationally representative sample from the 1999-2000 Chinese Health and Family Life Survey, Parish et al. (2004) found that 34 percent of women and 18 percent of men between 20 and 64 years of age had been hit during their current relationship.

The reported figures suggest that gender-based domestic violence continues to be a serious and widespread issue in China. Extant research offers a snapshot of different factors associated with gender-based domestic violence in China, and gender norms associated with hegemonic patriarchal masculinities were found to lie at the root of the problem (Chan et al. 2009, Tang et al. 2002, Xu et al. 2001). The patriarchal organization of Chinese families and society, which affirms men's dominance over women, is a key issue cited by various authors (Xu, Campbell et al. 2001; Tang, Wong et al. 2002; Tang, Cheung et al. 2002; Zhao 2003; Xu, Zhu et al. 2005; Chan 2009). Based on focus group discussions conducted in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, Tang, Wong and Cheung (2002) point to the existence

of certain cultural scripts in Chinese societies that legitimize violence against women. They argue that "Chinese tend to adopt victimological shared responsibility explanations that blame women for provoking men to violence" (Tang, Wong et al. 2002: 992). Within prevalent cultural narratives, men are represented as subject to violent impulses, while women are liable to provoke men through nagging and disobedient conduct, or even simply by being too beautiful. However, Tang and colleagues also present a nuanced argument about the potential for change in cultural understandings of violence against women. In particular, they point out to the importance of both generational shifts and education in challenging cultural myths that legitimize violence against women. In their focus group discussions, they found that younger, more educated participants more frequently challenged such myths than their older, less educated counterparts.

1.6 Historical and social context

Chinese society has witnessed momentous transformations of major social institutions, identities, and social relationships (Kleinman et al. 2011, Liu 2002) after the establishment of P.R. China. These transformations have had major consequences for the organization of contemporary gender relations in China. Writing about women's changing social roles, Harriet Evans (1997; 2008) argues that the transition to a consumerist market society has entailed equally new possibilities for women's sexual exploitation while at the same time providing unprecedented ways for young women to express themselves emotionally and sexually. Still, deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs in men's power and authority over women contribute to a larger environment of gender inequalities, making it possible to both justify and hide violence against women in Chinese society.

The systematic academic study of masculinities in China is still relatively young. To date, the work of Kam Louie (2002) has been particularly influential. In particular, Louie's discussion of the duality of *wen*, defined as cultural

attainment, and wu, understood as martial valor, has received much attention. Louie points to specific cultural images, such as the haohan (a brave, outstanding man), the caizi (a talented scholar), or the junzi (an exemplary man), around which ideals of the good man have frequently crystallized throughout China's history. These ideals stipulate forms of conduct that ostensibly leave little room for violent and abusive conduct. For instance, Louie (2002: 44f.) explains, as an important masculine ideal, the junzi is characterized by a balance of cultural refinement (wen) and gentility (zhi) and thus understands the importance of morality (yi). Likewise, images of ideal men who are predominantly defined by martial valor (wu) leave no room for excessive expressions of violence, as they incorporate important values of honor and restraint. In this sense, it might be argued that there is, to some extent, a noteworthy tension between 'traditional' cultural ideals of masculinity that stress non-violence and restraint and the realities of everyday life, in which gender-based violence is a common problem.

Louie (2002) acknowledges that the wen-wu duality cannot fully explain the consumerist forms of masculinity that manifest, especially in China's urban settings. He argues that, as a result of capitalism's emphasis on production and profit, ideas about ideal masculinity are increasingly concentrated around the issue of financial prowess. Consequently, cultural ideals of masculinity are undergoing profound transformations, and it might be possible to speak of a weakening of 'traditional' forms of patriarchal domination in contemporary Chinese society, alongside a rise of alternative forms of masculinity.

1.7 Legislation and women's social participation

Ever since the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) in Beijing, various NGOs in China, such as the Anti-Domestic Violence Network and Maple Women's Hotline have been instrumental in raising public awareness of domestic violence as a significant issue and placing it on political agendas, advocating the passing of an anti-

domestic violence law as a way forward (Tang, Wong et al. 2002; Tang, Cheung et al. 2002; Milwertz 2003; Xu, Campbell et al. 2001; Zhao 2003).

According to a recent report, the criminalization of domestic violence represents a major step forward in curbing gender-based violence (Lü and Zhu 2011: 6). Stipulations against domestic violence remain spread across various laws, while an anti-domestic violence law has so far not been passed (Lü and Zhu 2011: 20). Moreover, the specific legal responsibilities of the police, the judiciary and other bodies remain ill defined (Lü and Zhu 2011: 15).

On the whole, a significant gender gap persists in Chinese society, although progress towards greater equality is being made. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2011 ranks countries' achievements in attaining gender equality and empowering women in economic life, education, health, and politics. Among 135 countries, China occupies the 61st rank, its scores for women's health and economic and political participation lagging notably behind those of the most highly ranked countries (Hausman, Tyson et al. 2011: 18). However, the report awards China the highest possible scores regarding equality of maternal and paternal authority, inheritance practices, and women's access to bank loans, land ownership, and other forms of property. This suggests that women in China are achieving some rights and forms of social empowerment through legislation, although actual practice and norms are slower to change.

1.8 Research objectives

The qualitative study aims to look in-depth at individual men and women's life histories to understand how they may have impacted on their gender practice today and their experience of gender-based violence, whether as a victim or perpetrator. This study aims to understand the trajectory of (counter) hegemonic practices and expression of masculinity across and throughout men's lives. To do this, the research will contrast the practices and lives of two groups of men: those who display behaviours that run counter to the mould of 'traditional' or hegemonic

masculinity (named as 'gender-equitable' men) and men who are identified as men who use violence against women (named as perpetrators) The study builds up on the following key research questions:

1. Are there particular differences in the life histories, trajectories and influences of these two different groups of men? What does this tell us about how to encourage men to be 'gender-equitable' and non-violent? How do men and women accommodate and resist the existing gender hegemony in pursuit of gender equality?
2. For 'gender-equitable' men: through what processes and influences that occur during the life course did these men come to engage in more 'gender-equitable' forms of behaviours? What are the relationships between 'non-traditional' practices and practices of gender equity in these men's daily life?
3. For perpetrators: what processes and influences occur during the life course that shape the violent behaviours of men? How, when, and why do they use violence against their intimate partners? What are the consequences and how do they cope with it?
4. For female survivors: what influences occur during the life course that shape women's experience of gender-based violence? How do their experiences relate to their gender construction and gender practices?

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Life history approach

The qualitative component of the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence uses life history methodologies to explore patterns and trajectories across women and men's lives regarding gender norms and gender-based violence. This China study adapts this regional methodology and uses life history interviews to examine masculinities and gender-based violence in the lives of Chinese men and women. Paul Atkinson defines life histories as follows:

“A life history is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible. It is what is remembered of about life experiences and what the teller wants to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another.” (Atkinson 1998: 8; italics omitted)

Life stories are ‘human documents’ that allow a degree of insight into lived experiences in the past and present and an individual's actions along the life course (Connell 1995/2005). Life stories also allow for the longitudinal analysis of biographical patterns and developments (Bertaux 1981; Roberts 2002). Life histories thus enable a rich and detailed exploration of the ways in which dynamics of class, race, gender, sexuality and generational difference, etc. intersect to shape everyday lived experiences and the development of biographical trajectories over long periods of time.

2.2 Sampling

The research team consisted of four professors and eight research assistants. The interviewees were identified through all kinds of channels, including friends, Internet BBS, NGOs, the local Women's Federation, legal aid services, local residence committees, police stations and prisons. A localized life history interview guide was developed, based on the original life history regional questionnaire developed by Partners for Prevention. The adapted China version included

the following components: childhood, school, work, intimate relationships, marriage, violence, gender beliefs, and gender practices.

Three groups of men and women were included in this study. The first group comprises of ‘gender-equitable’ men, i.e. those who display behaviours that run counter to hegemonic masculinity. The second group consists of perpetrators, as in men who have used violence against their female partners. The third group includes women who have experienced gender-based violence throughout their life course. Purposive sampling was used to select ‘gender-equitable’ men who are known to be involved in gender-related activist work (paid or unpaid) or engaged in professional care work (nursing, social work, early primary school teaching). In all three groups, purposive sampling was used to include participants from a range of socio-economic levels and life situations, differentiating in particular, between occupations, educational levels, generations, and urban and rural backgrounds. Also, in groups two and three, men and women were included who had been involved in different types of gender-based violence, including physical, sexual, psychological and emotional violence, differentiating between long-term and short-term episodes of violence. Finally, in these two groups the extent to which the legal system was involved in the aftermath of violent episodes was also taken into account.

2.3 Data Collection

Data was collected from November 2012 to April 2013. There were 13 ‘gender-equitable’ men, 11 male perpetrators and 16 female survivors of violence interviewed. The research assistants, supervised by the research professors, conducted most interviews. Professors conducted five interviews. While this study was conducted mostly in Beijing, about one quarter of the cases refer to Jiangsu, Hebei, and Jiangxi Provinces. Although most of the interviewees lived in Beijing at the time of interviews, they are originally from eight provinces in China as well as Beijing.

Most of interviews were conducted twice, with a few exceptions due to limited time and difficult arrangements. The first interview was mostly about participants' experiences of childhood, school and work, while the second interview mainly focused on their intimate relationships, marriage, and experiences related to gender-based violence. In the case of one-off interview sessions, the researchers combined different components within one interview. Based on the research purpose, interviewee's characteristics, and the quality of interviews, 10 from each group were selected for data analysis and report writing.

2.4 Ethics and safety

This study followed the ethics and safety guidelines of the *UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence*, which were developed by Partners for Prevention and technical advisors at the regional level and adapted for national contexts³. This included, first, an information leaflet that presents the study to participants and their community, gives contact details of the research team, and outlines sources of support for a range of relevant problems. Second, an information sheet was distributed to all participants. The information sheet detailed the subject matter of the study, including information about the fact that interview sessions would involve questions about violence. Third, written consent forms were collected before every interview, confirming participants' willingness to participate in the study on the basis of the information they had been given about it. The participants were also informed as fully as possible about the nature of the research and their participation in it, and it was made clear to them that they were free to withdraw at any time during the interview.

All interviews were conducted in locations that were deemed safe and sufficiently private by the research team and convenient and accessible by participants. To the fullest extent possible, the participants' wishes as to the time and venue of the interview sessions were accommodated. Throughout all stages of the research process,

the research team sought to ensure that no harm would come to participants or members of the research team through their involvement in the present study. The interviews have followed the basic principles of "men interviewing men, and women interviewing women", which helps to minimize distress of the interviewees to discuss the sensitive topic. Participants' identities are anonymized in all publicly available research reports, so that no harm can be done to them because of their involvement in this study.

2.5 Sample characteristics

The ten 'gender-equitable' men were all born 1970s to 1980s. Their age therefore ranges from 23 to 39, with an average age of 27.8. Most of them were well educated; 2 of them obtained PhDs, 7 of them had bachelor degree, and one had a college certificate. Two of them were married, while the other 8 remained single. Two of them worked in NGOs and three was a university teacher, a lawyer, and an editor of a women's newspaper respectively. The other five are nurses, kindergarten teachers, and social workers.

Most of the ten men with experiences of being abusive (referred to as perpetrators in this study⁵) were born in the 1970s; and their age ranged from 27 to 50, with an average age of 40.7. Most of them lived in Beijing and Hebei Province at the time of interviews, with a rural household registration. Also, most of them are not well educated, and only three of them received college degrees. Six of them are married, while two were divorced. Two had murdered their wife or girlfriend and were imprisoned at the time of the interviews. Five of them work as physical labourers or ran small businesses, while three are a public servant, a researcher, and journalist respectively.

The ten female survivors had the largest age range: the youngest was 28, and the eldest was 75 years old. The average age of the female sample was 46.5. Their education likewise varied considerably, including being illiterate (1), primary school (2), middle school (2), high school (2), college (1), bachelor (1) and a master's

⁴ For more on the ethics and safety guidelines, visit <http://www.partners4prevention.org/about-prevention/research/men-and-violence-study>.

⁵ The authors note that the label 'perpetrator', while it is used to describe the category or sample of men used in this study, does not encompass the entirety of the individual's identity or life experiences. Rather, this term is used for ease of communication and clarity throughout the report.

degree (1). Five of them were divorced because of domestic violence, while one was in the middle of her divorce at the time of interview. The other 4 remain married. One was retired, and two were housewives. The others work as, office ladies, domestic helpers, farmers, and small business owners.

From the above description, the age difference between three groups was noticeable. The notable age range of women survivors demonstrated that gender-based violence has existed for a long time and affects women of all ages. The 'gender-equitable' group of men is much younger than the other two groups. This may be related to the fact that gender equality work in China is in relatively nascent stages and it is through these networks and organizations that the men were sampled. The interviewees' origins in 8 different provinces and Beijing show that the issue of gender-based violence is widespread across the Chinese society, both in urban and rural settings.

2.6 Data analysis

Each interview was transcribed. Based on the transcripts, detailed case summaries were compiled, consisting of a timeline detailing major events and turning points in participants' lives, summaries of the major thematic elements of their narratives, and memos with reflections on the narratives' significance in the context of our research. The project team members coded the interviews collectively in group sessions. The analysis began with line-by-line open coding and then proceeded to explore and link the various narratives further through focused, theoretical and axial coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Charmaz 2006). Codes were compiled in a common codebook, shared by all team members, so as to ensure a sufficient level of inter-coder reliability. In our analysis, the focus was on particular on our participants' accounts of their personal development over time, paying close attention to issues of plot, narrative sequence, and biographical changes over time.

Chapter 3: Childhood

Chapter three discusses the childhood experiences of the study respondents within the home. Key thematic differences and similarities across the respondents emerged from the research analysis, including: the nature of parental power-sharing arrangements in the childhood home, son preference and corporal punishment and witnessing and perceptions of domestic violence between parents.

Case Studies

'Gender-equitable' man

Zhong Quan was born in 1983 as the elder son of a family in rural Henan Province. He obtained a PhD and now works as an editor at a newspaper. During a period of 7 years, from 5th grade in the primary school to high school graduation, Zhong Quan's family went through many challenges, including his father's business failure, his mother's serious health problems and extended hospital stay. His uncle was struck down by lightning, and his paternal grandfather passed away. The death of relatives, in conjunction with the predicament of his immediate family, made this period in his life very difficult. However, his perceptions around his parents' persistence was particularly influential and he credits their tenacity with instilling in him a proactive determination to excel in his studies.

Perpetrator

Zhang Qiang, was born into a family of five children and spent his childhood in a remote village of Henan Province. Now he is a producer at a TV station. He just divorced. As the oldest son, he was expected to be obedient to his parents and behave well; however, he recalls that he often annoyed his parents and misbehaved. His parents would beat him with tree branches or bamboo poles until, as he recalls, he was sprawled on the floor. Unlike other peers, Zhang Qiang says that he never ran away from his furious parents. At night, he often cried in the bed hiding in the quilt after being abused because of the feeling of injustice. His story is all about the pain from his early childhood memories.

Woman Survivor

Guihua was born in 1952 in a rural area of Hebei Province. She grew up with six brothers and a sister. Her father was a powerful autocrat, and her mother was generally perceived to be timid and weak. Frequently, Guihua's father would become violent towards his wife and children. Guihua witnessed violence towards her mother by her father and grandfather, and she also was frequently the victim. On one occasion, she knelt in front of her father and begged him for forgiveness to avoid his violence. From a very young age on, she acted as a mother for her siblings. For as long as she remembers, she participated in childcare, chopped firewood, cooked, mended shoes, and did other household work.

The three case studies show that severe hardship and the experience of abuse in early life may affect personal development in adulthood in the long run. Among the men, early-life abuse shows its effects in variable ways across the study respondents: victims of hardship and abuse in some cases were resilient and non-violent in their adult lives, whereas others continued the cycle of violence along their life course and became perpetrators themselves. This chapter will examine the experiences that may have contributed to resilience and led men and women to adopt

alternative, non-patriarchal, non-violent masculinities and femininities. It will also explore the trajectories which led men to become perpetrators of violence or pathways in which women may become trapped in abusive relationships that they cannot leave.

3.1 'Gender-equitable' men

The 'gender-equitable' men sample was overall more likely to report harmonious family environments growing up, although a few describe their experiences of witnessing domestic violence between their parents. All of the 'gender-equitable' men reported experiences of corporal punishment and some also described pervasive son preference within their homes.

3.1.1 'Traditional' families with some new qualities

Amongst 10 interviewees in the 'gender-equitable' group, 7 grew up in a nuclear family, and the other 3 lived in an extended family. The original families of the 'gender-equitable' men have some unusual characteristics. For example, Zhang Hao used to live with his grandparents because his parents preferred an independent couple life rather to a child-centered family life. For Zhu Yu's family, his father stayed at home while his mother was working to support the family. These unusual traits of the family may contribute to their understanding of gender roles, gender divisions, and equality, as they grew up with different concepts of family and division of power within intimate partner relationships.

Yet, at the same time, seven of the ten 'gender-equitable' men's families conform to the 'traditional' Chinese division of labour whereby men work outside and women work inside. However, within this 'traditional' division of labour, some fathers shared the household work alongside mothers. Cao Hong told us:

In my family, my father did most of cooking, and my mother did most of the laundry. Sometimes, my mother makes some dumplings and pancakes; sometimes, when it comes to washing bed sheet etc, my father will help. My mother took care of us more often, and when we were little, she had to make winter clothes for us. (Cao Hong)

However, the other three families reversed the 'traditional' gender division of work – with mothers gaining more power by becoming the main providers for the whole family. Zhu Yu's mother was working hard to support her family, while his father was a failed businessman and stayed at home all the time:

My mom was aggressive, sometime even attacked me – you should not end up like your father. – My dad assumed all the 'traditional' female roles at home, doing all kinds of family work. I was close to my father when I was little, because my mom was always out working – sometimes however, I also hate my father because he did not assume those so called men's responsibilities. (Zhu Yu)

In this case, the reversal of the 'traditional' gender roles and household division of labour caused tensions between the parents, as well as tensions between the father and the son. It also illustrates that notions of masculinities and what it means to be a man were ingrained in Zhu Yu by his mother, with his father as a model of a non-ideal form of masculinity. The 'traditional' gender roles appeared to have a deep impact on the family, with the mother in this case internalizing 'traditional' norms, blaming her husband for his inability to provide for the family. Across his life course, Zhu Yu's feelings for his father evolved from emotional closeness to certain resentment, and subsequently to construction of altogether new perspective on gender roles and equality.

3.1.2 Domestic violence within the home

Six out of the ten 'gender-equitable' men reported that their families were non-violent and peaceful, with the parents enjoying good relationships with each other. Sometimes, the men reported that their parents did argue or quarrel, but generally the parents managed to resolve the issues through non-violent conflict resolution mechanisms. Four 'gender-equitable' men, however, reported that their parents constantly had conflicts, up to the point of violent incidents.

Social worker Luo Wen recalled incidents of violence that occurred between his parents:

There were huge conflicts at home when I was little, and my parents fought a lot for money – sometimes my father was abusive and all of us are so afraid; sometimes my father did not respond, and then my mom transferred the temper to me and my sister. (Luo Wen)

Overall, the gender equitable men tended to recognize this violence as ‘wrong’ or ‘incorrect’ behaviour, and actively reflect on how witnessing abuse as a child influenced their perceptions around violence. Some of them noted that they were determined to not make similar mistakes in their intimate partnerships, although in some cases (such as Luo Wen) violence did occur within intimate partnerships during adulthood. This tended to be framed as something they deeply regretted.

3.1.3 Son preference and corporal punishment

Among the ‘gender-equitable’ interviewees, some had a clear awareness of son preference existing within their own families. As Zhong Quan said,

My father is the eldest son of four children in the family, and I am the first grandson, so I got a lot of attention when I was little. Therefore, my mom had no stress at all on giving birth to another baby. (Zhong Quan)

Though Zhong Quan’s sister is six year younger than him, he still felt that he was treated better by the whole family, even by his mom. Zhong Quan attempted to explain why his mother acted in this way:

My mom maybe thinks that my younger sister will marry out to the other family in the end, and meanwhile I am the one bringing honor to the family. (Zhong Quan)

These notions of preference of male children appeared to influence many of the respondents. However, the participants’ personal development was not only shaped by the gender -biased preferential treatment they experienced within their families, but also by experiences of punishment and discipline.

All ten interviewees experienced some sort of physical punishment during childhood, and three of them suffered serious battering. For example, Wei Ming also shared a story that he was beaten up by the father to correct his misbehaviour.

I remember that was my grandmother’s birthday, my auntie came – maybe because I was willful, I talked back to my auntie – she hit me. I felt wronged and told my father, unexpected, my father hit me again. (Wei Ming)

Wei Ming believed that his experience of physical punishment by both his auntie and his father was related to Chinese culture that one should respect the older generation, and talking back is an unacceptable behaviour for a child. Overall, many of the men minimized their experiences, and framed them within existing Chinese cultural norms of child rearing and discipline. Still, some of the others stated clearly that it was wrong to use physical abuse to punish children, and reported that they preferred a more relaxed and democratic way of raising their own children

3.2 Perpetrators

The perpetrator sample discussed their childhood homes where dominant gender divisions of labour were prevalent and when challenged, tended to result in violence. Childhood experiences of abuse and witnessing domestic violence between parents were particularly prominent within this sample. In addition, while they did report widespread son preference (as the ‘gender-equitable’ sample tended to do) they did allude to certain practices and patterns of parental affection toward sons, suggesting that son preference was present, but not seen by the respondents as a problem or issue.

3.2.1 “Men work outside, and women do everything at home”

Six interviewees explained that their fathers were the breadwinners and their mothers were caregivers, with the fathers acting as decision-makers. Some of the respondents framed this within the Confucian cultural model of the gendered labour division: as Liu Qi argues, “men work outside, and women do everything at

home”. However, this was not always the case. Zhang Qiang recalls that “my parents argued because my father was lazy and didn’t want to do housework”, and this type of arguments sometimes led to violence. In addition, because of women’s ‘traditional’ role in childcare, many interviewees were closer to their mothers during childhood and subsequently, not as close to their fathers who were less engaged in child rearing. Chen Bai describes his father as a devoted communist cadre, who was busy at work and seldom returned home:

I was closer to my mother than father– because I always stayed with my mother, while my father worked outside. He only came back for 15-20 days (every year), although his work place was within the same county. It was my mother who took care of the family. My father has been a family provider, but he contributed nothing except for money. (Chen Bai)

The lack of strong father-son relationships in this sample was particularly prominent.

3.2.2 “Domestic violence is no big deal”

The links between men’s childhood experiences of parental violence and their own abuse of their wives and children as adults was particularly prominent within this group of respondents. Five out of ten interviewees grew up in families where they witnessed their parents’ arguments and physical fights. The men reported that both mothers and fathers were the perpetrators of violence at home. Gao Fei complained, “My father has a bad temper; he often made trouble after being drunk. He abused my mother, nobody could stop him.” Sometimes the participants also took the side of the abusive father and blamed the mother for stirring up the trouble, as Chen Bai explained, “my mother often struggled with tiny things and she loved nagging.”

Many of the interviewees believed that older generations did not recognize domestic violence as a serious problem and therefore did not regard it as grounds for divorce. For example, Yang Zi quoted a very popular Chinese phrase and explained:

‘A couple fighting at the front of the bed will

be reconciled soon at the end of the bed’, domestic violence rarely led to divorce in old days. Even when a couple argued and fought each other all through their lives, it has limited impact on their relationship. On the contrary, it is prevalent and considered as an essential part of everyday life. It becomes a complicated issue nowadays. (Yang Zi)

Yang Zi’s reasoning suggests that there was a very limited understanding of domestic violence when he was young in the 1980s. It confirms that domestic violence was not a public issue until recently and the individuals were not able to express their experiences, confront violent behaviour, and even use cultural phrases to minimize the violence, and that this environment impacted how these men perceive the use of violence within their own intimate partnerships.

3.2.3 “Sparing the rod spoils the child”

Compared to the ‘gender-equitable’ men, this group of respondents did not identify son preference as a major issue in their own lives. However, they did allude to certain practices where boys were ‘spoiled’, suggesting that while son preference did occur, they did not identify this practice as inequitable, unfair or out of the ordinary. All ten perpetrators interviewed had grown up in small families. Seven of them were the youngest sons, while three were the eldest. Often, the men reported that the youngest children grew up spoiled in comparison with their brothers and sisters. For example, Sun Ming explained, “I never did housework because I was the most spoiled kid by my mother, and my oldest brother also loved me a lot.” Three participants were eldest sons, and they usually took on extra family duties and they also had to partially share the responsibilities of raising their younger brothers and sisters. Wang Xi told us:

When I started working, I spent all my salary on my younger brothers and sisters’ schooling. At that time, they were in primary school. (Wang Xi)

Some cannot identify any gender discrimination against women in their childhood memories, and they often simply argued, as Wang Xi did, along the official lines of “[men and women] are all the same, there is no clear difference between

men and women, and we are all equal". A few interviewees acknowledge the preference for male children in rural areas, but they generally believe that gender inequality does not exist in their own families.

However, similar to the 'gender-equitable' men, they did note widespread use of violence against children. They tended to receive different types of punishment from mothers versus fathers. As Chen Bai explained:

My parents rarely beat me, but they scolded me a lot. Compared to my mother, my father was more kind to me, he seems to know how to communicate with children. Sometimes my mother shouted at me, she even beat me, but not seriously. (Chen Bai)

Wang Hu spoke of his abusive father and described the need to remain passive and appease him to avoid maltreatment:

My dad is really ill tempered. I dared not to talk to him, especially when he was drunk. He always blamed us after being drunk. In the beginning, I tried to run away from him, then I found out he became even more furious if he could not find me. So my strategy was to stay around, prepare a cup of water for him, flatter him and try to cheer him up. (Wang Hu)

The interviewees felt that they suffered from great injustice at the time they were abused. However, they generally regarded their parents' abuse as a way of education in their adulthood. Like the 'gender-equitable' sample, physical punishment occurred in almost all interviewees' families and was often rationalized as a necessary form of discipline. In Zhang Qiang's case, he believes he was abused because: "I was not an obedient boy, didn't know how to delight parents, so I was beaten up a lot by them." Looking back at the experience of being abused in childhood, Zhang Qiang even commented positively:

I think it was a strict, critical, and even cruel mode of education, through which we learned that we must study and fight to get out of here, because of poverty. And (child abuse) can instill energy into us. (Zhang Qiang)

3.3 Women Survivors

Like the male respondents, there was a diverse range of family arrangements among the female sample. One woman grew up in a single-parent family, three of them lived in a small family, and six lived in an extended family. Seven participants' households were located in rural areas, while three grew up in an urban environment. The number of their siblings varied between one and eight, apart from two who were only daughters. Female participants in the study – like the men – witnessed a broad range of violent behaviours between their parents, including verbal violence, emotional abuse, and physical attacks. The female respondents reported that this violence was caused by a range of factors, including fathers' extramarital affairs, poverty, drinking and other behavioural problems, as well as struggles over performing household duties.

3.3.1 Nature of childhood families

Three of the ten participants thought that their parents were gender-equal and harmonious. One respondent described a household comprised of an 'anti-traditional' mother and "a weak father", and in the other six households, the fathers were reported to be patriarchal and violently authoritarian and enjoyed greater power than the mothers, who were reported as being gentle and obedient.

The existence of social support networks for parents also tended to influence family dynamics among the respondents, particularly around the perpetration of domestic violence within their childhood homes. When Yingzi was 15 years old, she moved with her family to their hometown in Hebei Province, where her mother's family lived. Her uncle intervened with her father's violent behaviour and managed to reduce it. She reports that as her father became financially dependent on her mother, he started to consider her views, at least to some extent.

3.3.2 Unequal treatment of girl

In 'traditional' Chinese rural society, respondents'

narratives confirmed the density of patriarchal values built around the notion of continuing the family line, which is consistent with the reports from the male respondents in this study. Xiang'er found that majority of the family's resources were spent on her brother. Likewise, girls found their freedom of marriage limited by parents in the name of patriarchal values and family welfare.

In order to continue the family line, my father would rather sacrifice his daughter, regardless of the sacrifices we have to make and the price we have to pay. My elder sister was forced by my father to marry somebody she did not like just to trade-off a wife for my elder brother (Xiuli).

Many respondents, especially those who were elder daughters, had to assume responsibility for substantial amounts of domestic work during their childhood, and some even assumed mothering roles when the mothers were not available. Ying Zi remembered that her mother had to work outside the home and at the same time assumed a lot of responsibility for domestic work:

She had to work every day. After coming home, she had to dress us and cook. I have three siblings, my younger brother was ill all the time, and she had to take care of all of us. She had no free time at all. (Yingzi)

In contrast of busy mothers, few fathers did housework. One interviewee, Xiuli explained:

My father definitely did not wash dishes or do the laundry, and he rarely cooked. He always felt that these things were for women to do. I think that, while my dad is a well-educated person, he is still a patriarch. (Xiuli)

Many women participants remembered that their childhood domestic life was extremely harsh; they had to struggle to do household tasks and started to look after their families when they were very young. For example, Guihua, the eldest daughter, looked after her brother from his very young age onwards in order to support her mother who worked outside the home.

For a variety of reasons, most of the women we interviewed suffered inequitable treatment in their families due to the fact that they were girls

or because of their position within the family. For example, Guihua was prevented from attending school by her father. Jinxing explained that her parents gave preference to her brother and her sister, because she was the middle daughter. Yingzi likewise felt that, in rural households, parents would tend to educate their children according to 'traditional' gender stereotypes and presume that girls, while they should not remain wholly uneducated, should mainly be taught manual labour skills.

Yet, these patterns were not consistent across the female sample. In contrast, respondents who grew up in urban households, and particularly those comprising "modern" one-child families, tended to report that their families that moved beyond restrictive values around girls' education. They would not fully insist on 'traditional' gender roles for their daughters and be more open about their education. Momo, for example, grew up in a large city in the north of the country. She described her parents as well educated and the everyday dynamics of life in her parents' household as democratic and 'gender-equitable'. Momo came to be fairly successful in school and at university, and she went on to complete a postgraduate degree.

3.3.3 Experiences of violence in the home

Violence against children was particularly prevalent in households where the women reported very strict patriarchal divisions of labour and rights. The respondents were often powerless to resist or bound by the constraints of filial piety, enduring violence from a position of fear and weakness. Yingzi revealed that her father had a bad temper and would beat her frequently. It was practically impossible for her to please him, and any attempt to resist him would be met with a beating. In some of the respondents' families, they reported that their mothers would attempt to protect children, and therefore the mothers themselves would be abused. Guihua remembers:

My father was a very violent person. Since I remember, he always had to have the final say. [...] Even if you knew he was wrong, nobody would dare to tell him. My mother

was too timid [...] She did not dare to quarrel. (Guihua)

Other mothers were abused by the husband and respondents' tended to use these experiences to explain a mother's abuse toward her children. Xiang'er, for instance, told us that her mother would frequently beat her when she was angry or responding to her misbehaviour.

3.4 Discussion

We found important commonalities in our participants' life stories across all three groups. In general, patriarchal divisions of power were prevalent among the families of origin of all three groups of men and women interviewed. Steep imbalances of power were notable in many families, particularly in the perpetrator's families. Even when both parents were employed, the fathers still acted as household heads, and mothers usually were the major caregivers at home. However, among the 'gender-equitable' men and younger urban women, alternative family patterns emerged, providing different role models and non-patriarchal domestic living arrangements.

On the whole, and as will be seen later through the report, early experiences of family life seem strongly connected to the ways in which our participants dealt with gendered power relationships in their later lives. Notably, experiences of growing up in 'gender-equitable' families were particularly common among those men who adopted 'gender-equitable' and non-violent forms of behaviour in their intimate relationships later on. Equally, those of our female participants who had grown up in relatively egalitarian families seemed more able to resist violence in their later lives.

Those male participants who had frequently become violent towards their intimate partners had mostly also experienced strong gendered divisions of labour and power in their families of origin in early life. The patriarchal pattern in the participants' families of origin is highlighted, for instance, by parents' preferential treatment of their male children. Older sons would frequently be given substantial responsibilities,

while younger sons would be able to spend their childhood fairly unburdened by work. Such formative experiences appeared to have a substantial influence on our participants' understandings of gender relations in later life. Among the female sample, those women who became victims of particularly severe violence in adult life tended to be heavily involved in housework and childcare during their childhoods, at the expense of schooling or formal education. This, in turn, hampered their ability to participate autonomously in paid labour and public life throughout their life course and may have rendered them more vulnerable to attacks by their intimate partners.

Almost all the participants mentioned their experience of physical punishment by parents, and many of them witnessed serious domestic violence between their parents. Some of them were able to intervene in quarrels between their parents. Others were confronted with pervasive and excessive brutality of their fathers, to which they could only respond passively, by acquiescing to maltreatment or trying to escape. Their interpretations of domestic violence might have influenced their later strategies in solving family conflicts. The "gender equitable" men tended to emphasize the wrongfulness of their father's use of violence, and claimed that they would never repeat the fathers' wrongdoing. The perpetrators tended to acknowledge its normality, and the women survivors were inclined to emphasize the fear, powerlessness and emotional detachment that they experienced.

Chapter 4: School

Chapter four focuses on the respondent's experiences within academic institutions during their childhood. In the China context, this subject matter is especially important as Chinese culture greatly values scholastic achievements (Chao, et al. 1996; Taylor et al. 1995; Seginer 1983), with a lasting impact on everyone's long-term life chances, social mobility, and social status (Duncan and Hodge 1963; Meara et al. 2008; Mirowsky and Ross 2003). The following chapter looks in depth at the respondents' reflections on their educational experiences, their reported relationships with teachers and peers, and how this time period in their life shaped their notions of gender and violence. Key thematic differences and similarities across the respondents emerged from the research analysis including: the extent of influence on personal development that respondents accorded to their educational experiences, the different patterns of teacher-student relationships, and experiences of bullying, punishment and other forms of violence within school settings.

Case Studies

'Gender-equitable' man

Jiang Hang's father and mother had different views regarding his education. His mother had not received a higher education and therefore was eager that her son achieves high levels of academic success. In contrast, his father felt that educational attainment was a personal endeavor and could not be forced onto a child by his or her parents. Instead, it was to be left to the child's own wishes. Jiang Hang was particularly gifted in the arts; in high school, he enrolled in an arts programme without consulting his parents. Upon graduation, he chose to major in the field of Preschool Education, which was a female-dominated major. Eighty-five per cent of his male classmates transferred to other disciplines. He persisted and became one of the few remaining male preschool teachers.

Perpetrator

Wang Hu reported that he was often perceived as naughty within his community, as he tended to not study hard and often skipped school to play outside. In grade two of junior high school, he had a very responsible teacher who became seriously concerned when Wang Hu missed his classes. The teacher also encouraged him to study hard and take responsibility upon himself. With this teacher's guidance, he paid more attention to his studies and received much better marks than before. When he was in grade three of junior high school, however, the teacher was replaced by a new one, who was very strict and abusive toward the students. Wang Hu reports that he started to dislike school again and his performance declined. He went to work directly after graduating from junior high.

Woman Survivor

Yingzi grew up with one elder sister, a younger brother and a younger sister. From an early age, Yingzi looked after her brother and her sister, cooked, and did housework. When she was nine years old, her mother allowed her to attend the school. From her first day at school onwards, she excelled academically, became a class cadre, and was liked by her teacher. However, other students, most of them girls, were jealous and bullied her. In the second and third grade, the bullying became serious, and so she started to rebel, quarrelling with her attackers and even slapping them in the face. When her father found out about these incidents, he would always beat and scold her. Her mother merely told her to put up with the bullying, rather than fighting back. During her second year in middle school, Yingzi worried a lot about her father's violence and the escalating conflicts between her parents. She was frequently distracted, her grades declined, and she dropped out of school.



Jiang Hang showed the personal autonomy to choose to do something he likes, although this was likely fostered by his father. Wang Hu and Yingzi both experienced severe obstacles affected their school performance. Conflicts at home between and with their parents constituted a major distraction, leading to worries and failure in the school. Both of them also struggled to form positive relationships with teachers and peers, and their performance was affected to the point that they dropped out of school.

4.1 'Gender-equitable' men

Overall, the 'gender-equitable' sample tended to report more positive experiences during their school years, particularly regarding academic performance and teacher relationships. However, they did also have some poor relationships with teachers and experience abuse in the school setting. In many cases, they were better able to overcome these challenges because of strong support from the home, or from internal confidence and strength.

4.1.1 Doing well at school

In the early lives of the 'gender-equitable' men, academic performance played a significant role in how they described their childhood. They vividly remembered their time in school, and they stressed the importance of doing very well in schools. Most of them reported being "high performers" at primary and middle school and also went to attain higher academic degrees in their later lives. For many of these men, these experiences tended to shape their individual notions of masculinities, conforming to the high value which has 'traditionally' been given to scholastic performance in Chinese culture, in line with Louie's (2002) observations about the ways in which Chinese masculinities have been built around the prestigious figure of the scholar. Much of this achievement was credited to parents or grandparents who emphasized the need for the men to achieve high academic performance. For example, Zhang Hao, a 34-year-old social worker, told us that his grandparents had placed all their hope in their grandchildren getting good marks in school and then attending a good university. Academic achievement was highly emphasized by the adult role models in his life. It was also used as a marker for discipline. If he got a bad

test mark, he would not be allowed to play, watch TV or read comics, and so he reported that he worked hard to live up to expectations to succeed academically.

4.1.2 Complicated relationships with teachers and corporal punishment

Overall, among the 'gender-equitable' men, those who did well in school tended to have good relationships with their teachers, and some of them listed teachers as important figures in their lives. For example, Zhu Yu mentioned that his class teacher in grades 2 and 3 had a huge influence on him:

She was good at teaching and also very considerate, taking care of all the students. If she noticed that you are not happy, she would talk to you in private. She gave me a lot of attention, and at that time, my score was flying up. (Zhu Yu)

Some of the participants in the 'gender-equitable' group did speak of poor relationships with their teachers and reported that the teachers would frequently punish them. However, this does not seem to have affected their academic performance in major ways, as they generally went on to be high achievers and did not credit poor teacher-student relations or corporal punishment in schools with any long-lasting impact on their personal success. This is likely due to the external influences that supported their academic achievements. For example, descriptions of academic achievement among these respondents were influenced by numerous factors, including family support, personal motivation, peer support and the teacher-student relationship. Wei Ming, a nurse, told us that growing up in a rural area meant that corporal punishment and arbitrary treatment played a big

part his education at school and led him to have bad relationships with his teachers. This had a very negative effect on him, provoking feelings of injustice and negatively affecting his academic performance at that time. However, he continued his schooling and obtained a vocational degree in nursing, likely due to other factors, such as family support, personal motivation, peer support and expectations for his future.

4.2 Perpetrators

Overall, the perpetrators tended to have more complicated relationships with teachers and peer students, and were more reticent about their experiences during school years. In contrast to the 'gender-equitable' group of men, they tended to define their strength and success in school-settings in the context of peer relationships and performance of dominance and strength among groups of boys, rather than scholastic achievement.

4.2.1 Teacher, students, and academic achievement

Seven out of the ten men in the abusive group completed only secondary education, while the other three went to college. One respondent, Zhang Qiang, completed a PhD. Among seven of these men, narratives of school life provided were brief and shallow in comparison with those of the 'gender-equitable' men. Formal education generally seems to have played a much-reduced role in their lives and, as will be demonstrated later on, came to be associated with substantial conflicts and disappointments. However, Chen Bai, He Shun, and Zhang Qiang, three well-educated men within this group of men, had different experiences and remembered their "glory" and "hard-working" days in school:

I have been a good student in primary school, junior high school as well as senior high school. In addition, I was elected as the class president in primary school. (Chen Bai)

When Zhang Qiang experienced a serious accident as a child, he was hospitalized in Beijing, and this turned out to be a significant turning point in his life. This was partly related to changes in

his perceptions of education and social mobility within urban settings. He realized that, as a rural boy, studying hard was his only way to achieve upward social mobility, to bypass social hierarchies, and to avoid being looked down upon. This proved to be a substantial struggle for him:

I stayed in Beijing for medical treatment for two years, which opened my mind and enabled me to see a different world. I love the outside world. After I came back, because of health reasons, because of the malfunctioning of my leg, I know I should try my best to study. Ever since then I studied hard, extremely hard. (Zhang Qiang)

Those who performed well in the schools mentioned that they had a good relationship with teachers. For example, He Shun said, "Good students like us, received less critiques and lots of praise." However, the others did not talk much about their school lives during the interviews. They explained that they had "indifferent relationships with their teachers," and they did not even have clear memories of their school lives. In some cases, such as Wang Hu's experience described at the beginning of the chapter, the men had brief times when they had strong relationships with teachers or academic mentors, but these often faded or were curtailed due to transfers or moves. These patterns suggest that teachers play an important role in the participants' childhood and adolescence. Engaged and supportive teachers can be inspiring and influential, while poor teacher-student relationships may have a substantial negative effect on students' academic development.

4.2.2 School fighting and bullying

The experience of school fighting and bullying with others was much more prominent in this group than among the 'gender-equitable' men. Some even played a leadership role in fighting among peers. For example, Sun Ming confessed:

I always fought with others; it was a method of establishing status. All guys followed me and were obedient. (Sun Ming)

Wang Hu justified violence and fights as a way to garner respect from others, improve his

status, and through these methods, he was able to construct an outward veneer of tough masculinity.

At that time I was naughty, always engaged in group fights. The others all respected me (because I was always the winner). (Wang Hu)

Some interviewees were victims of fighting events. For example, Niu Jun confessed, “my first fight was triggered by being bullied by a few older boys.” In general, many interviewees from the abusive group believed that fighting was an unremarkable and normal part of their everyday lives, as it frequently happened in school. They described the process as strengthening relationships within a group, and these experiences appeared to be early spaces where they formed notions of hyper masculine versions of masculinities, reinforced by their peers.

4.3 Women survivors

The ten women participants mostly reported doing well at school, but they frequently found their achievement limited by familial pressure to concentrate on domestic work or to perform manual labour outside the home to support the family. These duties would often interfere in the women’s ability to concentrate on their education, and sometimes it became a reason for them to quit school altogether. This was particularly characteristic of the women older than 40. The female respondents tended to frame their educational backgrounds in the context of situations in which girls were deprived of their right to formal education. For instance, Guihua’s father had very ‘traditional’ values, and he thought that schooling was useless for girls. As a result, Guihua did not receive any formal education. Younger participants, who at the time of the interviews were in their twenties and thirties, generally did manage to go to school and receive a substantial formal education. Two participants with the highest educational attainments, Xiyi and Momo, were among the youngest participants and both grew up in one-child families.

4.3.1 Teacher-Student relationships and school bullying

Our female participants generally reported that their relationships with teachers were shaped by their academic performance, and not the other way around (as had been described among the male respondents). Xiang’er, Jinxing and Huixia all commented that their average achievements lead to equally unremarkable relationships with their teachers. The other six participants who attended school were favored by their teachers because they performed well and were obedient. In order to become a true teacher’s favourite, the respondents agreed, as a good student and a good girl, high grades were essential.

In the context of their educational background, the female respondents also reported experiencing and perpetrating school-based bullying and harassment. Four women participants reported that they experienced bullying, either as victims or perpetrators. Xiang’er explained that she was bullied because of her unusual family name in the small village where she grew up. Yingzi was bullied due to her good marks:

In second and third grade, I was bullied. I learned well, and the teacher treated me in a special way. My classmates were envious, and they would stand around me in a circle and mock me as a nerd. (Yingzi)

However, as compared to the male sample, the female respondents’ recollections of bullying during childhood rarely involved severe physical violence. Momo told us that “she made plans to bully other kids without ever becoming violent.” The women perceived that conflicts between boys were more violent than the ones they had engaged in and that conflicts between girls tended to amount to verbal violence and minor physical violence. However, this may be related to how the respondents frame their experiences – as women – and the gendered expectations around women as peaceful and non-violent. Often violence occurred within the context of interpersonal relationships. Momo, for example, remembered one violent confrontation:

In junior high school, I had a boyfriend. The girl

in the next class liked him too, and she really hated me because of this. One day I came across her and she called me names. This made me so angry that, after class, I went with my girlfriends straight away to get hold of her and taught her a lesson. (Momo)

4.4 Discussion

There were significant differences among the three groups in terms of academic achievement and the role that formal education played in their lives. The 'gender-equitable' men generally did well in school, and most of them were highly educated. Among the perpetrators group, only three out of 10 were highly educated, while the others had received limited education. While this does not mean to suggest that violence perpetration only occurs among men with lower levels of education (and indeed, our sample demographics suggest otherwise), there does seem to be a relationship between a man's scholastic achievements and their confidence and social power accorded to their level of education, that perhaps minimizes the need to use violence to establish power or display a normative masculinity, particularly in a country like China which emphasizes the ideal scholar man. Among the female sample, the differences were particularly prominent along generational lines. Older women's opportunities to gain an education were often negated by family conflict, poverty, domestic work, taking care younger siblings, and the favorite treatment of sons. However, the younger women had a much better chance of gaining education, especially those who grew up as the only child in urban settings. This suggests that women's systematic inclusion into formal education in educational settings may reduce the risks of experiencing and perpetrating violence and foster their ability to build egalitarian relationships in later life and resist violence by their intimate partners.

Schooling experiences and academic achievements are also deeply related to the interviewees' social mobility and career development in their later lives. The 'gender-equitable' men significantly surpass perpetrators in their professional achievements. Many of the older women's achievements are limited; while

the younger women performed well at school and went on to develop white-collar careers and a middle-class life. Many 'gender-equitable' men mentioned that they came to have a high level of gender awareness because of school activities, participation in supervisors' research projects, and the influence of important others within the school. Thus, the linkage between access to higher education and enhanced opportunities to learn about gender equality is demonstrated by the gender equitable men. It also suggests that men who achieved a certain public type of masculinity through academic practices may feel empowered and therefore less likely to resort to use violence to "prove" their masculinity. Among the perpetrators, however, masculinity within school settings was defined by peer perceptions of strength and toughness and violence became their way of demonstrating masculinity.

School bullying was another issue that affected our participants' academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and personal development and this is consistent with other literature on school-based violence in China (Glew, et al. 2005; Olweus 1997; Smith et al. 1999). School bullying particularly appeared to influence the life trajectories of the perpetrators group and the younger women suffering violence. Among the group of perpetrators, peer relationships were characterized by conflicts and disappointments, as well as by difficulties in building positive relationships with the others. Among our female participants, it is interesting to note substantial generational differences. While the older women generally experienced caring and harmonious peer relationships, the younger women witnessed and experienced school bullying just like boys, even though the level of violence they engaged in was much reduced. These findings highlight the substantial negative long-term impact that bullying may have on children's personal development. This further highlights the need for effective strategies against school violence and support for children who have become victims of sustained aggression.

In all three groups, academic performance often coincided with the nature of participants' relationships with their teachers. Those who did well in school tended to have good relationships with their teachers, while those who did poorly

reported indifferent relationships or spoke of unfair and abusive treatment by teachers. The male participants tended to credit their teachers and the strong support they received as the reason behind their academic success. On the other hand, the female respondents tended to believe that teacher support would only be attained if the woman was academically successful. These different frames may suggest gendered perceptions on how approval and validation of success is obtained.

All three groups of respondents reported corporal punishment by teachers; however, the perpetrators appeared to experience the most corporal punishment, or at least recall those experiences most vividly within the context of their school years. While the perpetrators would often “drop out” of school or “fail” to cope with the challenge, ‘gender-equitable’ men and abused women with similar experience seemed more able to overcome or disregard experiences of violence and continue to do well at school. This tended to also be related to the larger childhood environment. Strong family support, personal motivation, peer support or other teacher-student relationships tended to help the men overcome certain challenges around abuse and violence. In this sense, experiences of failure and exclusion in academic settings appeared to contribute to individuals’ gender identity and perceptions of self-worth and success. For boys, the school setting appeared to be instrumental in shaping an individual’s perception of masculinity and dominant traits around being a man. For the female respondents, descriptions of education were characterized by noticeable generational differences. For the older participants, education was perceived as a luxury that was more often given to boy children. For the younger participants, education was more often perceived as a right – regardless of gender – and these larger social changes around girls’ education appears to have impacted their later abilities to navigate abusive relationships. Subsequently, encouraging academic performance for both boys and girls and reducing the prevalence of corporal punishment might thus contribute substantially to women and men’s abilities to build non-violent personal relationships as adults.

Chapter 5: Work

Chapter five explores how work experiences and the workplace intersected with the participants' experience of gender, masculinity, and power, across the generations and geographical locations. Key thematic differences and similarities across the respondents emerged from the research analysis including: levels of commitment and fulfillment from work life; work as a marker of a successful man and the challenges men face when they are unable to fulfill this role; and the double expectations that women face around external work and domestic duties.

Case Studies

'Gender-equitable' man

Nan Long started to take an interest in gender issues and to promote gender equality during his college years due to his volunteer involvement for an NGO that focused on promoting gender equality. He later joined the organization as a full-time staff member. His major task is to provide gender-based sexuality education to teenagers. He attempts to incorporate gender and rights perspectives into sexuality education, and also to add awareness raising around gender-based violence and school bullying into the current curriculum. He is passionate about this work, and he believes that this work influenced his perceptions of what it means to be a man. His friends and immediate family members support his job, although some of his relatives do not, and even mock him for working in activism.

Perpetrator

After graduating from a teachers' training school, He Shun became a teacher in the township high school. Subsequently, he was promoted to the deputy schoolmaster. He Shun and his wife attended the civil service examination together in 2003. His wife passed and moved up to the county government, while he failed and remained in the township. After a separation of one year, He Shun tried to find a way to move to the county level but failed. Worse yet, he lost his position as deputy schoolmaster and was demoted as an ordinary teacher. He Shun was upset and developed a rocky relationship with his boss. He felt that at home he also lost his position. Relationships with his family members became worse, and his wife became distant. He had frequent arguments with his wife, which sometimes involved violence. Finally, they divorced.

Woman survivor

Following her father's advice, Dongmei decided to become a teacher. The school recognized her abilities and she reported that the seven years she spent working as a teacher were the happiest period in her life. However, since her husband worked in Beijing, she eventually quit the teaching job in Heilongjiang Province and took a position at her husband's work unit in order to better look after the children. Her new colleagues were indifferent, the work conditions were restrictive, and her salary did not increase for a long time. Dongmei invested a lot of effort into her work and demonstrated her abilities. At the same time, she bore all the burden of housework. Her husband had an affair, and Dongmei was abused. Later, she participated in anti-domestic violence women's support groups and became an advisor for women with similar experiences.

In all three groups, there were notable differences in the way in which work was structured by gendered power relationships. Nan Long is in his 20s and works in a NGO in Beijing that advocates gender equality.

He Shun is in his 40s and works in the rural central China, a more conventional environment. His unremarkable work achievements in comparison with his wife placed a strain on his marriage, which led to violent incidents and ultimately ended in divorce. He Shun's story illustrates how, within mainstream society, women's achievement is possible, but may still lead to conflicts and upset cultural expectations about gender hierarchies within the family (Wang and Nehring, in press). Dongmei is in her 70s and was a committed worker across a variety of working environments. Her story illustrates the tensions between 'traditional' values and gender relations in a rapidly changing socio-economic environment in which women faced both new opportunities and old constraints, and subsequently shouldered a "double burden" (Li, 2010) at work and at home.

5.1 'Gender-equitable' men

There were two sub-groups of 'gender-equitable' men in terms of where they work and how they were sampled. Six men work for NGOs and other institutions, where they engage in advocacy for gender equality or provide services to marginalized groups. The other four work in areas 'traditionally' regarded as women's jobs, such as nurse, kindergarten teacher, etc.

5.1.1 Mission, satisfaction, and advantages

For the six men who worked in NGOs and other activism organizations, their everyday work tended to strengthen their gender-equitable values. Advocating gender equality and the non-discrimination of certain marginalized groups was a major mission for them. For example, Nan Long makes a conscious effort to combine gender perspective into sexuality education, and Zhu Yu has been working in the field of sex workers' rights and HIV/AIDS prevention. Zhang Hao was the director of an NGO and has devoted himself to HIV/AIDS issues for more than 10 years, conducting a series of projects to help people living with HIV/AIDS. Consequently, for these men, their work on behalf of human rights and equality – particularly for marginalized populations – appeared to influence their beliefs and practices towards 'non-traditional', equal relationships with women and other men. While the respondents did recognize that they were unlikely to make as much money as their peers who work in different industries, they also appeared to derive great satisfaction from their rich experiences of social participation and the

provision of public services. In some cases, the respondents report that the nature of their work to improve public welfare brings its own kind of fame, social status, and respect from peers. For example, when Zhang Hao established a school for AIDS orphans and some of his friends donated money and books.

A lot of my friends are very supportive. When I organized an activity, they came to support. They introduced me to their friends who may have some connections. Some of my friends work in the publishing houses, and they donated a lot of books therefore saving some money from our limited resources. (Zhang Hao)

Across this group, many of the interviewees have a strong sense of work satisfaction. In spite of work conflicts, the men in NGO groups generally reported high levels of work satisfaction, and they use terms such as "happy" and "self-fulfillment" to describe their working situations. Many perceived that this work satisfaction had a positive impact on their fulfillment, confidence, and personal characteristics as a whole. Jiang Lei said:

[Work] has gradually made me open – in the past, I was inclined to protect myself, not willing to express my opinion – opening myself brings me self confidence, and I felt comfortable about myself. (Jiang Lei)

For the other four interviewees who worked in professions 'traditionally' regarded as 'female', unbalanced gender ratios in their workplace sometimes became an advantage when seeking attention and promotion. This is also an important reason for them to continue their work. Jiang Hang works in a kindergarten as a teacher, and he said:

Right now, there is a lack of male teachers in the kindergarten, and the director takes us more seriously. There are more than 100 female teachers, and only three male teachers. We have certain advantages. (Jiang Hang)

While it is not possible to quantify levels of job satisfaction, it did appear that compared to their counterparts who work in NGOs or other activist causes, the four men who worked in 'traditionally' female industries tended to feel stigmatized or judged due to existing gender stereotypes around their profession, and were less driven or passionate about their work life.

5.1.2 Stress, challenges, and difficulties

Even though the gender equitable men's work entails great satisfaction, the interviewees also stated that they have to cope with stress and difficulties. One difficulty was the relatively low reported levels of income. Many complained that their salary was not adequate to give them a decent life. In particular, they believed that the rewards were not proportional to the effort they invested in their work. For example, Cao Hong said:

I spend more than I earn. Life is very stressful. It is unfair that we spend most of our time out of town for business while our salary is less than those who stay in an office all the time. (Cao Hong)

The other stress they tended to face came from family, relatives, and friends. Those interviewees working in NGOs sometimes faced a lack of support from their family, relatives and friends because their job was not perceived to lead to a successful career that would make the family wealthy. Some interviewees shared confusion and frustrations about their work, and were uncertain whether or not they could continue on their chosen career path. For example, Nan Long noted:

I do not know how long I can hang on, and how low I can go. Sometimes I don't even know whether I have chosen the right direction to continue. (Nan Long)

For those working in 'traditionally' female

professions, the work-related stress and pressure was mostly related to the discrimination they face around doing work that is stereotypically seen as a woman's job. Social worker Jiang Lei once was challenged by a relative who said, "Girls can do this job, so why are you doing this?" As a male nurse, Wei Ming feels that he is looked down upon, not only because of his work – one of his friends told him: "A man at least should be a doctor in the hospital" – but also because of gender stereotypes within his profession. At times, patients have rejected him because "they think that a female nurse is more considerate and careful than a male nurse."

Overall, it is worthwhile to note that the tensions did not appear to spill over into domestic conflicts with spouses and girlfriends. Even though the "gender equitable" men reported feeling stressed, frustrated, or under pressure, they generally separated work problems from their domestic lives and sought to maintain positive relationships with the others in their personal lives. This may be due to the underlying commitments and satisfaction that they derive from their work, and also their exposure to alternative forms of gender norms and practices.

5.2 Perpetrators

The men in this group, generally speaking, identified themselves with their work to a far lesser extent than those in the 'gender-equitable' group. For them, work was perceived as a way of making a living rather than pursuing mission and/or personal satisfaction. In their working lives, there was a substantially higher level of reported conflict and frustration, and tensions often spilled over into the domestic sphere.

5.2.1 Frustration and the last straw of violence

Three of the more educated men - Chen Bai, He Shun and Zhang Qiang - had stable jobs and shared similar experiences with one another. They all studied in teachers' college and subsequently worked as teachers, but changed jobs because of unsatisfying salaries. The other seven men in the perpetrator sample were

manual labourers or ran small businesses as brick layers, porters, miners, etc. Some of them worked seasonally, and did not hold fulltime jobs or salaries. Some of the men reported that they did not want to work. For example, Sun Ming and Gao Fei did not do anything for several years after graduating from high school due to low motivation to get a paying job. Overall, in this sample, the instability of their work and their low salaries tended to result in frustrations and low opinions of their own self-worth:

I don't have a fixed job...not stable, (I) always think of doing this and that, but nothing has been done well. Maybe my wife cannot bear that." (Niu Jun)

Their dissatisfaction with their positions also appeared to be related to a limited ability to advance professionally, and the lack of power that they held within their current positions. For example, He Shun recalls:

I was so frustrated to be demoted from deputy schoolmaster to an ordinary teacher. As deputy schoolmaster, I was in good relations with the schoolmaster as well as all my colleagues. My suggestions and decisions (on school affairs) were always accepted by the leader. But it was very hard for me to enjoy work as an ordinary teacher. (He Shun)

In the context of these work experiences, tensions and frustrations tended to result in attempts to gain power in the domestic space. A few interviewees strongly believed that they should hold the role of male breadwinner within the family setting, in order to hold power and provide for one's family.

[My wife] didn't have a job at that time, I was the only provider and we had to support parents in the village, and we have children to raise. (Zhang Qiang)

They tended to hold negative attitudes toward women's role in paid employment. Zhang Qiang particularly illustrated this in his attempts to minimize women's contributions to the work force by reducing them to sexual objects that rely on attraction for upward mobility:

Men have fewer opportunities to get promoted than women if they have libidinous men for the leader. For beautiful women, or for those who are willing to trade

authority for sex, they have much more opportunities than others. There are so many examples around us. (Zhang Qiang)

The powerlessness and frustration that these men felt in relation to their work tended to also spill over into their intimate partner relationships. Some men vented their frustrations on their wives when they felt that they were unable to achieve expectations:

It is increasingly hard to earn money, and life pressure is also increasing...Sometimes it feels like my wife isn't satisfied with my income. Sometimes she complains, we quarrel with each other, and then I lose my temper and beat her up. (Zhang Qiang)

5.2.2 Work, entertainment, and family conflicts

The intersection between work – and work-related stress – and conflict within the intimate partnership space was particularly prominent within this sample of men: notably gambling and recreational activities, and shifts in employment that change power dynamics within the relationship. Within the context of work, the perpetrator respondents were more likely to discuss their recreational activities, which they tended to explain as the benefits of work and earning money. Most of them reported drinking alcohol and playing cards, gambling, or seeking out sex workers for entertainment. They tended to preempt negative feedback on these activities by normalizing their behaviour. Sun Ming explains that he should not be criticized because “it is very common” for men to engage in these range of entertainment activities. Seeing a prostitute, for example, should not be regarded as cheating or betraying their wives, because “in particular circumstances, it happens” (Zhang Qiang). Work, recreational activities and tensions within intimate partnerships tended to become linked together in their reasoning: the money they earn becomes an excuse for seeking out costly entertainment, and they seem inclined to blame their wives for not understanding them:

I have lots of contacts with others for work. Sometimes female colleagues call me. She is jealous and suspicious. My wife is always like that. She always interrogates me a lot, like how we know each other, what she calls for, etc. (Chen Bai)

In line with these attitudes, the interviewees generally also believed that men are the families' breadwinners and therefore have the right to spend money. In China, gambling, especially playing mahjong, is very popular. Using the example of playing mahjong, Wang Xi explained the relationship between income, gambling, and violence:

If you earn more, you can play bigger in casino. But for a man who cannot make money, if he loses that much in casino, his wife will get angry with him, which is a major cause for violence and divorce. (Wang Xi)

Another source of interpersonal conflict related to work was when husbands or wives changed employment and subsequently shifted the nature of income and power within the relationship. The intimate partnerships of the perpetrator sample appeared to be more susceptible to these shifts, suggesting that when power-sharing arrangements are not equitable, economic or work-related change can precipitate violence more readily. At the beginning of the chapter, He Shun's case was documented, which illustrates how professional problems can manifest itself in the individual's personal life and family conflicts. In particular, within this sample of perpetrators, when men lost work opportunities, they often saw this as a failure in terms of fulfilling the masculine role of provider within the family, and this contributed to their frustration and stress inside and outside the home.

5.3 Women survivors

At the time of interviews, six interviewees worked as manual labourers or farmers, ran small business or were employed in service work, and they changed their jobs frequently. Three had white-collar jobs, and Dongmei, the oldest interviewee, had already retired when she was interviewed. The working lives of the female participants were significantly different than the men, and provide a strong picture of the gendered differences between women and men's work and how these are valued and perceived differently in society.

5.3.1 Trajectories into the Work Force

Among the female participants, family obligation was a key driver of their trajectories into the work force. For some, they moved into the workforce in order to support their families, and often at the expense of their education (particularly for the older generation). Three older women interviewees began work, both within the family and out of the family, while they were still minors because of family poverty. When she was twelve, Xiuli lied about her age to be able to get a job in a food factory. Two others, Xiang'er and Hailan dropped out of school to work as farm labourers in order to support their families. For others, family influence was a major determinant of women participants' first job, and families would select the career path of their daughters. As Xiyi recalls, "for my first job, my family arranged for me to work as an English editor for the new channel."

However, at the same time, for many of the women the pursuit of economic independence further motivated their choice of work. Xiang'er stated that she did not wish to be financially dependent on others. Therefore she decided to run her own small business, which afterwards allowed her to buy high-quality food for herself when she was pregnant. Women who had experienced divorce also valued economic independence. Yingzi began to work after her first divorce, opening a small business to provide for her children and pay for their school.

5.3.2 Hard work in the face of gender discrimination

Almost all the women participants reported that they were willing to work very hard in order to prove that they are just as competent as men at work. They provided extensive narrative to prove this point, suggesting that they have often felt that their work was undermined due to their gender. For example, Dongmei reports that she gained a highly respected position in a factory with more than 1,200 employees. Guihua lifted rocks while participating in the construction of a dam, and Xiuli helped to build roads, dig ditches and construct buildings. Likewise, they did not shy away from asserting themselves in the hostile

workplaces. Hailan described herself as “feisty” to explain that she did not allow any bullying happen to her in a male-dominated working environment.

Some women showed self-confidence by telling us that their work achievements had been acknowledged. For example, Hailan liked to work because she was confident of her ability to earn a good salary in comparison with the others. Likewise, many of them emphasized that their work has left them with happy memories and empowered them in certain ways. Dongmei was empowered by her achievements while being a teacher and later, as a factory worker. The ability to have their own income enhanced the women’s power within their domestic relationships. Guihua told us that her income improved her ability to make choices within her marriage, since it enabled her to provide for herself.

At the same time, discrimination and unfair treatment in the workplace was reported by some of the female respondents. Four participants reported that they had encountered sexual harassment at work. Xiuli recalled one boss:

He would ask you to go to his office and tell you how beautiful you were...it’s not like flirting. He put his hand on my shoulder and touched me. (Xiuli)

In coping with sexual harassment, Xiuli believed that “quitting the job is the most direct way to deal with it,” but on many occasions, they adopted the strategies of avoidance to deal with sexual harassment and preferred not to have direct conflict with the harasser, and sometimes, they even choose to put up with the sexual harassment, for example, as Jinhai put, “you have to endure it for keeping the job and make a living.” The women recognized that in most working places there was no official channel or protocol to report an incident of sexual harassment. These challenges added to existing stigma around reporting sexual harassment in the first place.

5.3.3 “Iron ladies shoulder a double burden”

Among our female respondents, the duties for

both work and family were closely interlinked through women’s obligation to work both inside and outside the home. Most of the female respondents, particularly those of older generations, struggled with what they termed a “double burden,” as they often worked inside and outside the home, and their domestic obligations frequently affected their work performance.

Women were so worthless. The country liberated us to join in the work. But could we just leave the domestic affairs alone? We still have to be responsible for cooking and child-care. Actually we haven’t liberated from family at all. In contrast, our burden [is now] doubled. We not only have to earn money outside, but also shoulder the domestic affairs (Dongmei).

Dongmei pointed out that her commitment to housework and paid labour had placed a heavy strain on her and made her question the accomplishment of women’s liberation in China.

Liberate our women to join in the work places? Actually, we could not do nothing less than before. Can we not cook? Can we not raise the kid? – it was not women’s liberation. It added to women’s burden. I had to work both outside and inside. (Dongmei)

Related to these norms around women’s role in the household, half of the women participants reported that their work was related to significant domestic conflicts at home. Some respondents reported that when they performed well at work, their husbands would belittle them, and some husbands even openly resented the fact that their wives were working. Xiuli stated that her husband did not recognize her work as valid at all and that she fought with him about this matter. Likewise, Xiyi’s plans to do business in Xi’an were met with fierce resistance by her husband, which ultimately meant she had to cancel her plans.

5.4 Discussion

The meaning which work acquired in our participants’ life stories varied considerably across the three groups. The ‘gender-equitable’ men talk about their passion, motivation, devotion and satisfaction with their work, envisioning changing the world into a better

place to live in. However, sometimes these men faced unsupportive families, low incomes, gender stereotypes, and institutional limits, which often led to stress and frustration. Nonetheless, work meant much more than a source of income in their lives, and they strongly identified with their work and work activities. It is worthwhile to note that this understanding of work is supported by the Chinese ideal of the cultured man, who, as Louie (2002) suggests, derives knowledge and personal sophistication from his work to achieve “success” and establish his masculinity.

On the other hand, many of the perpetrators did not report satisfaction with their work, and instead regarded work as a way to make a living rather than as a cause or passion. Still, the men in this group also held beliefs around masculinity in which a man's success is defined through achievements in the workplace, as well as his monetary earnings. It is worthwhile to note that within this group, there were often connections between a man's work and his perpetration of violence within the domestic sphere. When the men failed to live up to dominant notions of masculinity through their career success, their perceived failure in this regard led to considerable frustration for many of them, which often spilled over into violence against their intimate partners. Moreover, throughout our interviews, these men seemed to attribute little value to their partner's achievements in paid labour, seemingly taking for granted a patriarchal gendered division of labour in which men act as main income earners through their work, while their female partners' duties chiefly lie with housework. Their aforementioned frustration might be understood as an outcome of their perceived inability to live up to ‘traditional’ patriarchal expectations of men as strong and powerful providers for their homes. At the same time, when they reported their successes in the workplace, they often used this success to legitimize recreational activities such as drinking, gambling and seeking sex workers. Yet often, these activities would also lead to tension and conflict within the intimate partnership space, creating a paradox whereby men's work and domestic lives became connected through violence.

In opposition to the stereotypical notion of victimized Chinese woman (Bachman 1994; Gelles and Straus 1987; Johnson 1995), female respondents in this study demonstrated that they were able to negotiate their independence and power, particularly through economic independence and work experiences. At the same time, the respondents noted the difficulties that women in China often face in trying to balance expectations around women's career/external work and duties in the domestic sphere. This balance could sometimes upset existing power dynamics within the relationship, for example when husbands became jealous of their wives' achievements at work. Women's involvement in the workforce was also reported to have challenged their husband's notions of masculinities, which as noted above were often linked to being the main provider and breadwinner of the family.

Most importantly, however, many of our female participants were strengthened by their professional achievements, which they credited as having empowered them to deal with their experiences of partner violence. Older participants, such as Dongmei, gained strength and resilience from their work in dealing with domestic violence. Many of the younger participants managed to combine their professional achievements with intimate relationships that, while still involving a substantial degree of conflict, were notably more egalitarian than those of older generations. Conversely, those participants who were prevented by their parents and husbands from acquiring a formal education and participating in extra domestic labour were particularly prone to becoming victims of severe domestic violence throughout their adult lives. These findings highlight the contradictory ways in which women's engagement in paid labour shaped their home lives and partnerships. Ultimately, however, the findings point toward the ways in which financial independence contributed to women's abilities to negotiate and leave harmful domestic relationships.

Chapter 6: Intimate Partnerships and Gender-Based Violence

Chapter six explores the nature of intimate partnerships and the perceptions and experiences of gender-based violence across the three samples. Key thematic differences and similarities across the respondents emerged from the research analysis, including: the prevalence of violence and acceptability of violence across all groups of respondents, the different ways in which violence is perceived and the multiple coping strategies that women and men use to deal with violent incidents.

Case Studies

'Gender-Equitable' man

Luo Cheng married a classmate from graduate school and they have a fairly equitable division of responsibilities and power within the relationships that promotes a healthy relationship environment. Within the family division of labour, he reports that he takes responsibility for housework, as well as for some big decisions, while his wife deals with the day-to-day affairs. Financially, he and his wife are largely independent and spend their own money, but they also have a "public fund." As he has more free time than his wife, he looks after their child during the day and is deeply involved in childcare, while his wife reads the child stories after returning home from work. Major disagreements in their relationship are based around their child, particularly as Luo Cheng feels that his wife is too strict with their child. Once, he slapped his wife in the face, which almost led to divorce.

Perpetrator

Due to their poverty, Wang Xi's parents made him marry a girl from a wealthy family. Wang does not have a deep relationship with his wife. He stays with her only because "she is a nice person and is good to his parents". Wang reports that he enjoys gambling, but he frames his enjoyment as an addiction. He compares it to alcohol addiction and states that neither can be overcome. He usually plays cards everyday and loses some money, especially when his financial situation is strong. He does not like the way his wife handles his gambling problem. Whenever they talk about this, they end up arguing and sometimes Wang Xi resorts to violence. Once during an argument, he started to beat her. The injury was so bad that his wife had to be hospitalized for several days.

Woman survivor

In 2004, at the age of 41, Xiang'er married a man from the Beijing suburbs. She lived with him, his mother-in-law, and an 18-year-old stepson from her husband's previous marriage. In 2006, when she was three months pregnant, her husband physically abused her for the first time. When their baby was three months old, her husband started to physically abuse the child. The abuse got increasingly frequent and serious. Her mother-in-law was also involved as an abuser. Xiang'er initially tried to endure the violence of her mother-in-law and husband. When the violence got really bad, she decided to escape temporarily and sought shelter with her neighbors. In 2008, she filed for a divorce.

This chapter focuses on the three interviewed groups' experience of intimate relationships, gender-based violence, and their coping strategies. It is notable that all participants from the perpetrator sample were currently or previously married, while only two of the ten interviewees from the "gender equitable" men

group were married at the time when our interviews were conducted. The other eight men in this group had only dated women, and were unmarried. This is likely due to the fact that this group of men was, on average, younger than the perpetrator sample. Narratives from the perpetrators and women survivors of violence illustrate a wide range of violence and coping strategies, while the stories of the ‘gender-equitable’ men show different patterns within the relationship space.

6.1 ‘Gender-equitable’ men

6.1.1 Equal and cooperative with partners

All the gender equitable men stated that they had chosen their partners, wives or girlfriends based on love and affection. Sometimes, parents still interfered with these romantic relationships, but overall, the men felt agency over their intimate partner relationships. For example, Zhong Quan, originally from a rural area in Henan Province, was dating a girlfriend whose parents opposed the relationship because he was not tall enough.

Her family did not approve our dating because of my height. Men in her family are all very tall, and I am quite short. (Zhong Quan)

Many of them state that they have a harmonious relationship with their partners and that they were considerate in their daily lives and took care of their partner. They often collaborate with their partner in assuming family duties when they live together. For example, Jiang Hang said:

Our arrangement is who has time, who does more. If both of us have time, we choose to work together. I like doing the chores. (Jiang Hang)

Financially, many of them share the daily expenses with their partners. However, they also tend to support the notion that as a man they should financially contribute more than their partners, suggesting that beliefs of men as breadwinners also have traction within this group of men. Zhong Quan said:

We do not split the bill, most of the time, men pay more, which means I pay more, sometimes my girlfriend also pays – I earn more, we did not clarify that clearly, without doubt, I pay more – I should do this, I am a man. (Zhong Quan)

Both of the married men, Zhang Hao and Luo Cheng, fathered children at an early age. They preferred to spend more time with their children, and they believe in a warmer, gentler approach towards child rearing. Zhang Hao spent most of his childhood with his grandparents who were very strict to him and had high expectations around his academic performance. When he became a father, he reflected often about his own experience as a child, and believes that it is the parents’ responsibility to provide a peaceful and supportive environment for children.

I think that I should provide some opportunities during his growth. When he starts his own social relationships, we need provide him good friends, good teachers and other role models, and better environment. If he did not perform well in school, do not be worried or anxious, we need give them space to grow. (Zhang Hao)

6.1.2 Conflicts in married couples

Although the two married “gender equitable” men advocate for gender equality through their work, at home and within their relationships with their wives do not appear to be equal. Zhang Hao works out of town, seldom returns home, and does not contribute financially to the home. Zhang Hao’s wife supports the home financially, and she shoulders the double burden of work and taking care of their baby. In comparison, Luo Cheng reports that he equally shares family duties with his spouse, and contributes to their “public fund.”

Despite these differences, there were some commonalities between the two men who were in married relationships. For example, both men report that they have had extra-marital affairs. Zhang Hao justified his behaviour by criticizing the monogamous marriage system. He argued:

Marriage system is nonsense, and I think that feelings for each other are most

important. If we like each other, we can be together without the certificate, even you have the certificate, you cannot bind two people together and change the nature of the marriage. (Zhang Hao)

Luo Cheng justified and explained his behaviour as follows:

Though I cheated on her, I did not feel guilty. Maybe I am a little bit selfish, but I think that extra-marital affair is not a bad thing. She did not know, so it did not influence our feeling, also did not influence her body. (Luo Cheng)

The 'gender-equitable' men also reported that sometimes they had conflicts with their wives over trivial things. For example, Zhang Hao said:

Sometimes we quarrel with each other, erupt once every half a year, mostly on trivial things, such as a dirty house, doing laundry etc, mostly she wants me to do something but I did not fulfill – then she criticizes me. (Zhang Hao)

Luo Cheng once slapped his wife in front of his mother-in-law, almost leading to divorce. He justified his violent behaviour by saying, "I was misunderstood, and good intentions were taken as malicious intent." He also notes that "everyone has emotional moments." He attributed his temper to his father's violent upbringing, suggesting the strong influence of family during childhood on conflict resolution solutions.

Maybe because I was bad-tempered – I think my personality roots in my father's personality. My sister and I are all bad-tempered though we do not approve of my father's violent behaviour. I think it is wrong to beat others. Maybe she just misunderstood what I said and I misunderstood what she said. (Luo Cheng)

Luo Cheng admitted that he regretted his violent behaviour, and his regret may be related to his work in gender equality and his exposure to non-violent norms around what it means to be a man.

6.2 Perpetrators

6.2.1 Power sharing arrangements

Family power relations within this group of men mainly revolved around distribution of housework, control of family income and decision making about family expenditures, including children's education. In terms of housework distribution, some interviewees believed that it was the woman's responsibility to do all the housework. Gao Fei said, "my wife does not have a job, she should do all the housework." Wang Hu said, "If my wife is on holiday, she should do all the housework. If she comes back home early after work, she should cook." Other interviewees feel that they should share the housework. Wang Xi told us:

If a woman does most of the washing, the man should do things that require heavy labour. They should do more for each other if the relationship is good. (Wang Xi)

The majority of interviewees report that they earn more than their wives, but that they let their wives take charge of financial affairs. They explained this as follows: "I earn a lot and give it all to her." (Sun Ming), "She controls money and spends my money." (Chen Bai). The reason for giving money to their wives is that they believe that women are better at saving. Although women hold the money for the family, this does not appear to result in more decision-making power, as the men report that their wives usually do not make independent decisions about family expenditures without them.

6.2.2 Reasons for violence and types of violence

All men in the perpetrator were sampled due to their past perpetration of violence against an intimate partner or girlfriend. According to the respondents, there were various reasons for different violent incidents. The most commonly reported explanation was that a couple may not share the same views or opinions and in such cases, a man's opinion holds more weight. Second, different educational backgrounds were cited as an important dividing issue for our participants. Yang Zi, who holds a bachelor's degree, explained that his wife "does not understand what I am saying because she has primary school education." Third, financial pressure was reported to be a precursor to serious

conflicts. Fourth, extra-marital affairs were commonly believed to have led to domestic violence, as in cases of Chen Bai and He Shun. Both respondents recalled that their sexual affairs led to violence and conflict within the partnership, and then divorce. Finally, men noted that personal characteristics and habits, such as having a short temper, drinking, playing mahjong, gambling, and seeking out sex workers, were all associated with violence. Gao Fei said:

Once I lost a lot of money playing mahjong, and I went back home to take more to play the game. She was angry and said 'fuck you' taking all the money. I was so angry that I slapped her. I told her I did not play frequently and I beat her up. (Gao Fei)

Across the perpetrators, most of them reported that their wives provoked them and the violence was always mutual and not only perpetrated by the men.

Once I went out with friends in Karaoke. She phoned but I did not take it. In the end, I took it. She asked if I was with some prostitutes. I said yes. Then we had a huge fight when I got back home. She always hit me first. (Zhang Qiang)

Emphasizing mutual violence usually meant that the respondents blamed their wives and simultaneously justified their own violent behaviour as defense. However, they tended to ignore the physical consequences and serious injuries experienced by their wives. Wang Xi described a violent event that ended with his wife's hospitalization:

Most of time our fight is about – I did not finish the housework she asked and went out playing cards. Once when we were eating with my card player, she was criticizing me again. It was so embarrassing that I threw a bowl at her head. She bled immediately and in the end we called a car and sent her to the hospital. (Wang Xi)

In terms of the type of violence, the men reported that they engaged in verbal violence more frequently than physical violence. Zhang Qiang noted that "I only beat up her a couple of times but we frequently argue." Gao Fei also said, "We do not fight [physically] frequently, just argue with each other." Chen Bai, however, illustrates how verbal violence can often escalate into physical violence.

We quarrelled with each other. At a certain point, she punched me, and then I pushed her or threw something towards her. (Chen Bai).

Though Zhang Qiang admitted that sexual coercion also existed in his relationship with his wife, many other interviewees certainly avoid to talk about their sexual life, especially their coercive sexual experience, so strong data on this topic was not able to be collected. Two respondents – Li Jun and Sun Ming – were introduced to the research team through the local prison. They were convicted for killing their partners and sentenced to life in prison. In each of their narratives, there is a limited sense of guilt or remorse in terms of their deceased partners. Li Jun, who killed his much younger wife in a drunken fight, thought he was just unlucky and he "could not believe that she would be dead after just one huge punch." Sun Ming, who killed his cohabitating girlfriend while drunk drinking and buried her to hide his crime felt that life in prison was too much for his crime.

6.2.3 Coping strategies for violence

In terms of solving problems within the relationship, some participants reported that they would usually admit their fault and apologize to their wives by using complementary words to get forgiveness. As Wang Xi said,

The way I apologized is that I would say nice things to her and say I was sorry, I did not intend to hit you with the bowl. I would cook for her and soon after she would forgive me. (Wang Xi)

Some interviewees indicated that they were not sincerely apologizing. It was just a strategy to solve the problem of violence.

Women are usually quite weak and she would not admit her fault to you. You have to say that you were wrong and you wished she'd forgive you and so on. (Yang Zi)

Sometimes the other people will mediate the violent act, including parents, in-laws, siblings, neighbors, friends, colleagues etc, especially when "there was severe violence."

The most serious time – we were in a cold war, we did not talk to each other for months. Our friends and colleagues helped us solve the issue. (Yang Zi)

Some interviewees did not want their parents to know about domestic violence. Also they do not wish to “publicize their family issues” (Niu Jun), and they show little sympathy for their wives’ seeking-help behaviour. For example, Zhang Qiang said, “my wife called her brother for help and I found it funny. How could he help from such a long distance?”

6.3 Women survivors

6.3.1 Type of violence

All female respondents were selected to participate in this study due to their past experiences of domestic violence, including physical, verbal, psychological and sexual violence. In most cases, the violence occurred in a cyclical pattern, with a harmonious period leading to a gradual increase of conflicts and ultimately culminating in violence, followed by apologies by the perpetrators. Physical violence sometimes involved “weapons” – often kitchen tools – and this would in some cases lead to serious injuries.

He beat me with a rolling pin. It snapped all of a sudden and cut a hole in my face. It directly went through my lip, which lead me to the hospital. (Xiuli)

He beat me for two hours at least. In the end I can't even move...my ears were perforated and my head rang and buzzed after this particularly bad incident. ...I have to go to the hospital to receive treatment. (Yingzi)

Furthermore, three women participants mentioned that they had suffered physical abuse from their husbands while they were pregnant. Xiang'er recalls that “when I was three months pregnant, he hit me until I had a bloody nose, my eyes are all black, and my face is swollen.”

Psychological and emotional abuse was also common among the female respondents and involved a broad variety of behaviours. Xiang'er experienced verbal harassment, starvation and

controlling behaviour once she was married to her partner.

Just 3 days later after we got married. He shouted at me, “go away! Go away to your own home!”...My mother-in-law had hidden the food everyday in order to prevent me from eating ...They didn't give me the key for a long time after I got married ...They even deprived my right to give birth...They controlled everything. I was an absolute invisible woman who never existed. As if I was the tenant. (Xiang'er)

Jinxing also experienced emotional abuse, describing her experience in Chinese as “cold violence”: she and her husband stopped talking to each other for months, pretending the other did not exist, and feeling apathetic towards each other.

Neither of us would give up. We didn't even want to talk with each other firstly. Though we lived together, we regarded each other as air. It bothered me a lot. (Jinxing)

Seven women respondents reported that they suffered sexual coercion and marital rape. Dongmei narrated:

I called him (her ex-husband) a marital rapist, he never asked for my consent for sex – he never gave me a break, even during my period, just after giving birth to our daughters, and after three abortions - he was just a beast. He never cared about my feelings. (Dongmei)

Some of them reported that physical violence would often ensue if they refused sex. As Dongmei put, “sometimes he wanted [sex], and I did not. Then we quarreled, he beat me up and did it anyway.” Yingzi said, “I did not like him. For me, having sex is not pleasure but suffering.” Seven of the female respondents claimed that they never took the initiative to have sex with their partners, but rather their husbands would decide when they wanted to have sex, and assume that they held control over their wives’ bodies and sexuality. Whenever Xiuli attempted to avoid sex with her husband, he would say, “you are my wife. What do I marry you for? It's legal. You have nowhere to sue me.”

6.3.2 Power struggles and daily conflicts

The female respondent's descriptions of factors that led to partner violence were similar to those reported by the male perpetrators. This included husband's drinking, gambling, and visiting sex workers, as well as financial stress. Only two female respondents were financially dependent on their husbands, while the other eight reported that they were economically independent. Xiang'er and Huixia husbands did not work and had no income of their own, expecting to be supported by their wives. Xiuli's husband had a substantially higher salary than her, but he withheld his income and did not contribute to everyday household and childcare expenses, leaving the respective financial burdens to her. Xiuli told us that she put up with this situation due to her strong family values to look after her in-law parents and her children.

The female respondents also noted that relationship dynamics and personal characteristics could often lead to serious tensions and disagreements. Women emphasized in particular short tempers, jealousy, differences in values, a lack of affection and the accumulation of disagreements over time.

Power struggles and women "resistant to their husbands" demands tended to also escalate domestic conflicts and violence. Xiyi and her husband struggled over his attempts to control her, by imposing himself as more powerful while Xiyi was resisting fiercely:

He needs me to need him, rely on him, love him wholeheartedly, obey him – I just cannot do all this. (Xiyi)

Xiuli's frustrations would spill over into mutual violence when he was drunk, and her husband would become more violent when she contradicted him.

6.3.3 Coping with violence

Three of the abused women stayed in violent intimate relationships for a long period of time: Guihua, Huixia, and Xiuli had been in a violent relationship for 36, 14 and 11 years respectively

before separation and divorce. They gave a series of explanations for why they remained in these abusive relationships. Guihua felt that she ought to "show patience and tolerance with the hope that her husband someday would be touched and change." Huixia felt that her material living conditions were not good enough to support herself. Xiuli stated that she was willing to sacrifice her own happiness and try to mitigate family conflicts in order to give her child a chance to grow up in a complete family environment.

At the same time, all of the female respondents eventually left their abusive relationships. Running away from home and seeking a divorce were the two most common ways for respondents to leave a violent relationship. Some of the women left home, usually to their parents' house, in order to gain temporary relief from violence. In response to incessant violence, Huixia, for instance, would first seek help at the local police station and then run away from her hometown to Beijing. Other respondents reported that divorce was necessary to end violence and free themselves from violent relationships. For the older women, divorce tended to carry more stigma, and it took more time for these women to decide to go through the divorce process. For the younger respondents, the decision to divorce seemed less difficult and they were not as concerned with the stigma around divorce, particular those in urban settings, signaling the changing norms around divorce and women's rights to non-violence in China.

The reason for me to divorce my husband was simple. I did not really feel happy. Even my child wasn't an obstacle because I should have the right to find my own happiness. (Xiyi)

However, despite these statements, respondents did report that the presence of children and the possibility of relatives' disapproval of divorce sometimes hindered their decision to divorce. Psychological pressure from their husbands or attempts to reconcile likewise made them question their own decision. Some of the respondents considered extreme ways to end abuse, from thinking about committing suicide to murdering their husband:

Sometimes I want to kill him, but I constrain myself from doing it, because I am thinking, if I kill him, then I will be in the prison, what will happen to my son and daughter? (Guihua)

Abused women were quite active and innovative in seeking formal and informal help. For example, Xiyi asked for and received help from a law school student to deal with her divorce papers. Guihua attributed her survival to the support of older female relatives. Formal sources of support include husbands' work unit, the Women's Federation, the police, and the courts. Younger participants, such as Xiyi, also sought help from a psychotherapist. Sometimes, these measures worked and the respondents said that they significantly reduced their husbands' brutality. On other occasions, women's seeking-help behaviours were ignored, and public institutions in some cases even took the side of the abusers, failing to provide effective help. Guihua narrated her experience of filing for divorce in the court as follows:

The court treated me unequally. One staff frightened me that my husband would beat me more seriously if I didn't go back home immediately. (Guihua)

6.4 Discussion

Across the participants' narratives, a broad spectrum of violence was discovered, including verbal, emotional, sexual and physical violence. A significant difference between perpetrators' and women survivors' narratives about sexual violence emerged in this context: Most perpetrators avoided talking about their sex lives, therefore ignoring the question whether they had forced their wives into sex, while seven out of ten interviewed women told us that they had had experience of sexual coercion and marital rape.

Moreover, it is clear that the husband's family may play an important part in violent relationships. Relationships with parents-in-law may deteriorate, and especially the mother-in-laws (husbands' mother) may become the initiators of family violence. A culturally deeply rooted preference for male children, disagreements over children's education, three generations live under the same roof, were all

sources of the conflicts with in-laws reported by our participants.

Many perpetrators denied or justified their violence towards their partners by attributing it to outside provocation or to their own excusable temper. These denial strategies might be connected to broader patriarchal values that legitimize violence against women. They were much less present among the men from the 'gender-equitable' group. Also women incline to self-reflect on the violence they suffered, sometimes forgiving their husbands, although stating that what they have done is wrong but accepting it as their own fate or bad luck. The reasons from the two sides explain why the abused women take a long time before they leave the abusive relationships.

Informal and formal external intervention might in some cases mitigate or stop men's violence. However, more often than not it proved to be ineffective, especially when abused women had to deal with professionals like judges and doctors without gender awareness and an understanding of gender-based violence. Divorce sometimes became the only escape from domestic violence.

In summary, three factors serve to differentiate our participants' experiences of domestic violence. First, in so far as domestic violence was ignored or accepted by our participants' families, it acquired a legitimate presence in their everyday domestic lives. Thus, for most of the perpetrators interviewed, violence against their intimate partners had become a routine event rather than a traumatic exception. Likewise, among particularly the older women interviewed, domestic violence had become a taken-for-granted aspect of their everyday lives that elicited few significant responses from others in their domestic environment. Conversely, the 'gender-equitable' men were clear about the low tolerance for violence that characterized their homes. Relatively rare incidents of violence thus became exceptional incidents with severe consequences, such as the threat of divorce.

Second, the unresponsiveness of external support systems further contributed to the creation of the perpetrators' violent behaviour as routine or institutionally accepted, as they faced little

resistance or threats of punishment. This is consistent with findings from Wang, Fang and Li (2013) in the complementing quantitative study, which found that only seven per cent of women who had experienced intimate partner violence reported it to the police, and among them, only one case had been opened by the police. Confirming these patterns, the female respondents faced difficult choices when it came to confronting or leaving their abusers, as they typically received little external support. This may explain the prolonged periods that many of them spent in highly abusive relationships.

Third, the narrative strategies our male participants employed when discussing violence seem to offer the most significant explanations of their behaviour. Throughout the interviews, the 'gender-equitable' men continually explained domestic violence as unacceptable and inadmissible in their everyday lives. They constructed their presentations of self to a significant degree around their claims to non-violent and 'gender-equitable' behaviour. Contradicting these claims through frequent abusive actions towards their partners would have entailed particularly high personal costs for them, as it would have called into question the self-identities around which they had built their lives. Conversely, the narratives of the men in the second group combined perfunctory denunciations of domestic violence with the denial or justification of their own violent behaviour towards their partners. Domestic violence for these men was a part of their everyday lives that could be accepted, tolerated or ignored because it did not threaten their self-identities in significant ways.

Chapter 7: Community discourses of gender norms and responses to violence

Chapter seven explores the nature of community discourse on gendered norms and expectations in the communities where respondents lived, as well as Chinese society more broadly. Key thematic differences and similarities across the respondents emerged from the research analysis, including: their perception of gender equality, gender-based violence, and ideal men, women and marriage. This chapter will also examine how social norms and institutions at different levels shaped our participants' perceptions and experience of gender-based violence. The impact of community discourse on gender perceptions will be specifically discussed.

Case Studies

'Gender-equitable' man

Zhong Quan was born in a rural area of Henan Province, which he reports was a highly patriarchal community in which gender discrimination and son preference were normal. When he became a postgraduate student, he followed his advisor's suggestion to conduct a gender equality project in a rural area close to his hometown, which had similar sets of gender ideologies around male superiority over women. Using changing village regulations as an entry point, he and his collaborators worked hard to promote gender equality in this community, and he believes they have made some good progress. He is proud of what he has achieved and believes that the gender perspective in development is a powerful tool to enhance and protect women's legal rights.

Perpetrator

Zhang Qiang holds 'traditional' views on gender relations, and he believes that equality between men and women can never be achieved. His childhood was characterized by rigid gendered labour division whereby the men worked in the public sphere and women in the domestic sphere, as well as by the use of violence to maintain these gendered hierarchies. Much of this has carried over into the present day: for example, he believes that drinking and smoking are very normal for men, but not for women, and that men should be dominant in sexual activities. Zhang Qiang also believes that women with more modern dressing habits and attitudes are immoral, noting that, "when rape happens to those women, I can only say she deserves it." Zhang Qiang has hit his wife; he believes "when language does not help, I have to use physical violence."

Woman Survivor

Throughout 25 years of her marriage, Xiuli suffered serious partner abuse from her husband. However, she reports that she stayed with her husband for the sake of her children, and in order to maintain the integrity of her family. She believes that a good man should be ambitious, show a sense of responsibility, and be a gentleman. A good woman should be a good wife and mother, considerate and tolerant, and protective of her husband's reputation. Husband and wife should have mutual respect for each other and share mutual values. She holds contradictory beliefs when talking about domestic violence; on one hand, she thinks that there may be legitimate reasons for a husband's violence against his wife, while on the other hand, she argues that men's violence against women is a crime, which should be stopped through community intervention and severe legal punishment.



As the above stories suggest, there are differences among the three groups with regard to views on gender relations and gender roles in the community and Chinese society in general, as well as perceptions on the use of violence vis-à-vis gender norms in those communities. Overall, the “gender equitable” male sample reported that they worked hard to challenge existing gender inequality and promote equal relationships between men and women. In contrast, among the perpetrators, even though Zhang Qiang candidly pointed out that gender equality will never be realized, most of the other participants stated that they fully support gender equality. Nonetheless, they acted aggressively and violently towards their intimate partners, suggesting that they accepted gender equality in theory but not in practice. Women participants tended to hold ‘traditional’ beliefs around gender roles in society, and held ambivalent views on violence.

7.1 ‘Gender-equitable’ men

7.1.1 Gender equality is for everyone

The “gender equitable” participants were sampled due to their engagement in some type of ‘gender-equitable’ work or practice, and many were engaged in activism and were familiar with concepts of gender equality and rights. They tended to believe that some changes had been made in China to ensure gender equality, but also believed that existing policies needed to be strengthened, particularly in a normative sense. As Zhong Quan noted “gender equality means providing same opportunities and rights to men and women, [and] there is a long way to go to achieve the final goal.” Luo Cheng thinks that gender equality does not mean “sameness,” as in the Maoist Era, during which time women were expected to behave exactly like men (in dress, work, etc.) and ignore any gender differences between women and men. The ‘gender-equitable’ men openly recognized that women’s social and economic status was still lower than men’s, and they expressed their willingness to work toward changing social norms. Nan Long said:

I think that women are still in a weak position, though men in today’s society are very stressed – they need shoulder the responsibility to buy a car and apartment, but in general, women are still in a very vulnerable position. (Nan Long)

Overall, this sample also generally opposed hyper-masculinity and machismo. For example, Wei Ming said, “my understanding of machismo is self-centered, do not respect others, and do not care to understand others, always doing whatever they

want.” Zhu Yu’s understanding is related to power and control, and he said, “so called machismo is emphasizing their power, to show their privilege by controlling you, when the others are out of control, he will get angry.” These participants generally looked down on these types of masculinities.

7.1.2 Good men should be respectful of women

The majority of interviewees in this group were opposed to physical violence against women, but they rationalized verbal violence. For example, Cao Hong believed:

It may be acceptable to sometimes use bad language, but it is absolutely unacceptable to use violence. (Cao Hong)

Zhu Yu and Zhang Hao think that domestic violence reflects abusers’ low level of social competence. They likewise emphasize the need for better legislation and institutional measures to prevent domestic violence. Nan Long, for example, told us that “legislation against domestic violence should be enhanced and support services improved, in order to enable victims to come forward and seek help.” They also tended to report that sex should result from the wishes of both partners and that coercive sex was not allowed. Zhu Yu told us:

I think that two people having sex is about the choices of the two. After marriage it should likewise be voluntary. It is not that, after I have married, I can play around with you as I please. A woman is not a toy. (Zhu Yu)

Respect towards women was frequently cited by our participants as an important quality of a good

man, as were ambition and the ability to protect one's family. Cao Hong emphasizes the need for tolerance, stating that it was a good thing that his wife had a better career than him. Luo Cheng told us that a good man should be respectful towards his wife and take care of his family. He likewise highlighted the need for mutual understanding and care, as well as men's role in protecting their families.

7.1.3 Sources of gender awareness

Most of the men saw domestic violence as a serious social problem, which was related to violent imagery and practices in society at large. So how did they become aware of gender equality? This research suggests that there are three major sources through which 'gender-equitable' men raised their gender awareness.

1. Experience in students' organizations and activism. Many 'gender-equitable' men were actively involved in students' organizations at universities. For example, Zhang Hao was the head of Communication Department of Red Cross in his university. They were inspired by their experiences in students' organizations and became interested in social work. Zhu Yu said:

I was involved in NGO activities as a volunteer since I was an undergraduate student. I feel good doing these and I am very interested in these kinds of things, which empowered me a lot. (Zhu Yu)

2. Social movements. The majority of the 'gender-equitable' men also have some type of experience in social movements, which sometimes instilled a gender perspective within their work. For example, Zhang Hao explained:

(I was involved in) disclosure of HIV village, establishment of HIV orphans' school and village activity centre, anti-poverty of HIV families, projects in legal rights of HIV infected patients, human rights education, cultural protection of ethnic minorities, website building for human rights development, and social enterprise, etc. (Zhang Hao)

3. Influence of important figures. Some 'gender-equitable' men's gender awareness was shaped by important figures across their life course. For example, Jiang Lei explains:

My mentor provided me with great help, including social knowledge and gender awareness, but more importantly, inspired by him, it was the first time that I told my stories to others completely. (Jiang Lei)

These sources of gender equitable beliefs suggest that these beliefs are fostered across the life course through interaction and engagement with peers or role models who exhibit these characteristics, and also due to exposure to messages around non-violence and peace.

7.2 Perpetrators

7.2.1 Gender equality: reality or fantasy?

More than half of the abusive interviewees state that they support gender equality. For example, Wang Xi said:

I believe that men and women are equal. There are many people who believe that men are more important to women. In my opinion, men and women are basically equal. (Wang Xi)

Those participants claim that they support gender equality argue that the most important indicator for gender equality is that both men and women should have their own job, which is likely linked to the density of discourse around women and men both working outside the home, a social norm that was propagated during the Maoist era in China (Jin 2006; Zuo 2005). Wang Hu said:

Housewives are wasting their lives. When you close your eyes, you want to think about whether you have wasted your life. All men and women should consider that. (Wang Hu)

The second indicator for gender equality, according to the perpetrator sample, is that men and women should equally share rights and responsibilities. Yang Zi explained:

There are rights that are given by the society and ones that are given by the family. When the two are together, they should have a mutual right. It's not necessarily up to the man. This is equality. (Yang Zi)

In describing an ideal marriage, they tended

to report that couples “should trust each other and share things in common” (Chen Bai), “have similar personalities”(Yang Zi), and “tolerate each other” (Gao Fei). To describe an ideal man, this group listed qualities such as the following: taking responsibilities by “taking on the burden of the family” (He Shun); “work hard, and do not participate in drinking and gambling” (Niu Jun); and “taking care of a wife and family” (Zhang Qiang). Many of these reported characteristics were similar to those stated by the ‘gender-equitable’ male sample. Still, these characteristics did not always preclude the use of violence. As Wang Hu notes:

In fact, I don't think a guy who does not hit his wife is necessarily a good guy. You have to understand her and know when to tolerate her, when to make her happy, what to do when you go shopping, how much time to spend with the kids, how to deal with relationships with relatives and parents. When you can do that, you are a good man.(Wang Hu)

When the interviewees were asked to describe a good woman, they emphasized qualities including: “soft and benign, submissive and obeying” (Yang Zi); skills around “cleaning up the house and taking good care of the family” (Sun Ming) and “cooking for men” (Wang Xi). While the perpetrator sample tended to claim that they support gender equality, many of them still believed that an ideal woman should conform to the ‘traditional’ division of labour and gender roles in Chinese society.

7.2.2 Contradictory beliefs and practices

Just as they have somewhat contradictory views of gender equality, a key theme from the male perpetrator sample was their conflicting views on violence. They all reported or indicated that they were aware that violence was socially unacceptable and thus best avoided. They also tended to know about the consequences of broken relationships, divorce, and material damages, etc. For example, Niu Jun’s description is quite vivid:

Since we are together, if we fight and she gets injured I have to spend money on her hospital treatment, or when she breaks things and I have to pay for them. It's really not worth it. If we chose to stay together, then it's better not to fight and treat our lives better. (Niu Jun)

He reflects on the consequences for him – financial loss, rather than the damage to her – physical injury and emotional hurt. However, some interviewees thought that violence was the last resort. For example, Yang Zi said, “We only use violence when there’s nothing else we can do to control anger.” And Zhang Qiang added, “You feel that language has lost its power, the only thing you can do is to use violence.” From these narratives, it can be argued that, on the one hand, they lack problem solving mechanisms and anger management skills, and on the other hand, the underlying assumptions of their behaviours are that women should subordinate to men and obey them.

The sexual double standard remains quite strong in the group of perpetrators, particularly in relation to their conversations around coerced sex – which tended to remain abstract, rather than reporting actual behaviours or practices. For example, a few interviewees stated, “Chinese women are more prone to be passive in sex” (Zhang Qiang), and “After all, you are the man and you should take the control (Niu Jun)”. Unlike women who were willing to disclose their experiences of coerced sex, the men in the perpetrator sample were more inclined to minimize sexual coercion by emphasizing women’s passivity. The perception of a double standard about sex also is reflected in their views on sexual harassment. They criticized sexual harassment as “immoral” (He Shun), and “disrespectful of women” (Chen Bai), thinking that the harasser is a “loser” (Niu Jun) while in the same time they believe that women bear the responsibility for sexual harassment.

Women should be more self-respecting. They should not wear revealing clothing, which leads to harassment. (Yang Zi)

7.3 Women survivors of violence

7.3.1 Ideal images reinforce hegemonic masculinity and femininity

When describing men’s ideal characteristics, women participants often used keywords such as: pillars, responsible, caring, reasonable, gentlemen, bold, conservative, stable, mature, not violent and

respectful towards his wife, not visiting prostitutes and not gambling. The ideal hyper-masculine man, they reported, was “a tiger in public and a cat at home,” does not use violence, and is respectful towards his wife or partner, allowing her to speak freely. Humour was also a frequently mentioned trait that our participants expected of a good man with good social skills. As for men’s machismo, the female respondents held a range of opinions. Some depicted hyper-masculine men as overbearing, violent, and authoritarian, some described them as weak men hiding a childish temperament, while others think that gives them a sense of security. The majority believed that hyper-masculine attitudes and behaviour were very common, particularly among those men with successful career.

In terms of ideal femininity, the participants generally framed the ideal woman as wife and mother, whose best traits were fulfilling family responsibilities, being gentle, introverted, thoughtful, tolerant, diligent, hardworking, and generous. Most of them agreed that women should not only to be a good domestic worker, but also a good income earner outside home, suggesting that they also reinforce beliefs around women shouldering a ‘double burden’.

Good women should to be the No.1 both in family and outside. Not only good at cooking, but also competent to earn money which is a mark of successful career. (Xiang'er)

Many of them felt that doing well with housework and childcare was the most basic standard by which women could be judged. At the same time, they stress the need for women to be independent, particularly economically, which is viewed as fundamental to enhance women’s status in the domestic sphere. They also emphasize the need for women to take charge of financial matters to prevent men from wasting money. In China, economic growth and enhanced labour market opportunities have enabled women to overcome economic dependency by engaging in paid work. This also allows them to make autonomous choices in response to violence.

In previous decades divorce was not an option for women because work would be hard to find. We had to put up with violence because there was no way out. But now, young women are able to leave their homes and can be strong and self-reliant, so that there is no need to tolerate violence. (Xiuli)

When talking about sex, most of the women reported strong beliefs that men do not have the right to control sexual relationships. Women have the right to refuse sex with their husbands, for physical reasons, for example during menstruation or pregnancy, and also for emotional reasons, for instance, in times of conflict. Jinxing, stated clearly that women “are not a tool,” and Yingzi pointed out that “this is a thing between two people,” not just the man. However, they also think that men have natural sexual urges that need to be met. In contrast, women were framed as sexually more passive, with fewer needs.

I would have sex with my husband because his needs had to be satisfied. Men always have this kind of requirement...men would become unfaithful if they were unable to satisfy their sexual urges at home. (Huixia)

7.3.2 “Violence against women is a crime”

Women participants believe that domestic violence is widespread and a serious issue. They agree that domestic violence is mainly men’s problem and violence against women is a crime. They wish for harmonious domestic relationships and opposed violence in marital life and in their families of origin:

Fights and conflicts would destroy the mood of the entire home and lead to an undesirable way of life. The harder you beat your wife, the more distant your wife will feel about you. Violence will estrange the couple’s relationship. (Xiang'er)

Dongmei, Guihua and Yingzi told us that it is important for women to understand whether violent husbands were truly repentant, so that violence would not be repeated. Guihua thought that there was no point staying with incorrigible husbands to maintain a relationship. Regarding men’s role in domestic violence, women participants argued for enhanced punishments and community-based solutions.

Perpetrators should be deprived of all their rights, including their right to property, so that they would pay a high price for violent conduct. (Xiuli)

However, some of the women also simultaneously recognized domestic conflicts and violence as a

normal part of everyday life, and they emphasized that both women and men play a part in conflicts. Therefore, they adopt a cautious approach when dealing with violence and handling relationships with their husbands.

For women participants, social support against domestic violence is important, including public campaigns to increase gender equality, the direct provision of information and service to abused women, the strengthening of legislation, legal advice and psychological help from the Women's Federation, as well as community mediation services.

7.4 Discussion

The need for effective community support and accessible support agencies is strongly emphasized by the interviewees. The majority of the men in the 'gender-equitable' group argue that women's welfare organizations in communities, such as the Women's Federation, are insufficiently effective when handling issues of violence. Likewise, the women victims of violence spoke of problems in obtaining reliable help that could be effective in the long term. Informal support from community and family members does work sometimes, and public institutions are accessible sometimes, but such support still remains inconsistent. This highlights their understanding of domestic violence as a collective problem that needs to be addressed through collective interventions from a range of sources.

For the 'gender - equitable' men, their formative experiences as activists in social movements, student organizations and so forth seem to have contributed to this understanding. It departs notably from customary patriarchal understandings of gender relations, which in their explanations of family life emphasize natural rather than social differences between women and men (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002). Conversely, such explanations of gender relations in terms of natural difference were common among the perpetrators, and their accounts contained numerous general statements about Chinese men and women or just women and men in general. Even though some of the perpetrators paid lip service to basic principles of gender equality,

they ultimately justified their violent behaviour towards their intimate partner by explaining it in terms of differences between women and men that are natural, general and therefore to a large extent unavoidable.

The female participants were highly conscious of the abusive nature of their relationships, and they tended to be vocal about the extent of their suffering and their rejection of domestic violence. Nonetheless, their responses to abuse by their intimate partners were complicated by a tendency to endorse patriarchal understandings of women's roles as tendentially submissive housewives and mothers. Their self-definition in these terms seems to have made it more difficult for them to challenge violent intimate partners and abandon abusive relationships.

Differences between urban and rural living arrangements and community life played a significant role in our participants' accounts of domestic violence. Rural communities emphasize patriarchal family relationships and the idea of raising children as the caretakers in old age, with sons strongly preferred over daughters. The cultural practices of patrilineal kinship structures and female exogamy also reinforce gender inequality in rural China. In urban communities, patriarchy and local living arrangements are less pronounced, as are son preference and the notion of raising children for old age care.

Finally, certain public policies and cultural practices are also associated with gender inequality. For example, in certain rural areas, if the first-born baby is a boy, families might not be allowed to have another baby. In contrast, if the first child is a girl, having another child will be acceptable. Such policies accommodate the 'traditional' preference for male children in rural areas and imply that girls are less valuable than boys. The fact is that women's retirement age precedes men's by five years and discrimination against female college graduates in the labour market exists. These are further examples of persistent gender discrimination in public life, which may work towards reinforcing the patriarchy in domestic life.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Conclusions

Gender-based violence cuts across the life stories of most of the men and women who took part in this study. It has expressed itself in a variety of forms, from witnessing violence between parents, physical punishment by parents and teachers, school bullying in early life, to numerous accounts of intimate partner violence.

Male participants were sampled in two groups, 'gender-equitable' men and perpetrators of intimate partner violence or violence against women. In the group of 'gender-equitable' men, when violence did occur, it mostly occurred in isolated instances. Among the perpetrators, violence was more routinized as a part of everyday life. It included physical abuse of varying severity, as well as emotional and sexual abuse. In some cases, violence caused serious injury and hospitalization of their partners. All women participants are survivors of gender-based violence, mostly at the hands of their husbands and boyfriends.

The participants' experiences were further differentiated by age, educational levels, and distinctions between rural and urban patterns of social life. For example, discrimination against girls was most significant for the older female participants, while their younger counterparts faced greater opportunities to develop personally and professionally. Also, younger women participants suffered abuse to a lesser extent than those who belong to older generations, and they were more proactive in seeking help or filing for divorce. 'Gender-equitable' men on average were younger than the perpetrator sample, with the majority of the former being in their twenties. Likewise, their educational levels and professional achievements were notably greater. Generational differences seem to reflect changing attitudes towards gender relations in Chinese society, in particular a trend towards more equitable intimate relationships. We argue that domestic violence is more visible in rural than in urban areas; however, it is certainly a serious problem in China's cities, as the anonymity

afforded by urban life makes it easier for violence to remain hidden inside homes.

As for the trajectories of violence in our participants' lives, male interviewees' psychological responses to early-life violence seem significant. Some, particularly those in the perpetrators group, used denial to cope with painful experiences of abuse. These men argued, for instance, that abuse was just a normal part of family life or that it demonstrated parents' love and concern. By denying or legitimizing violence, these men were perhaps more prone to becoming perpetrators themselves in adult life, as they were unable or unwilling to confront their own aggressive attitudes or notions of conflict resolution within the relationship space. Conversely, among a number of the gender equitable men, a conscious engagement with and rejection of early-life parental abuse is notable, as it is their explicit will to do better with their own families and speak out publicly against gender-based violence. Thus, men's psychological capacity for coping with and responding to their own victimization is tied to the ways in which they handle domestic gender relations in later life. However, other factors were also at work. The existence of significant others, such as members of the extended families, teachers, relatives, or cultural idols in some cases helped to mitigate domestic violence, and played profound positive roles in formulating interviewees' awareness of gender equality, and also their sense of self. This was particularly prominent in the stories of "gender equitable" men; in contrast, the lives of the perpetrators and the rural women interviewed appeared to involve a higher level of social isolation.

While life experiences at a young age, at school and during early career development all played an important role in shaping their personalities, and their perceptions and approaches to domestic violence, men and women did appear to have the ability and agency to reflexively engage with their experiences and to shape their future behaviour and experiences. This was particularly pronounced among the equitable men and younger women survivors. For the "gender equitable" men, they

actively chose to depart from the gender norms and values of the mainstream culture, constructing alternative masculinities, and establishing greater gender equality in their private and public life. For younger women survivors, they had better understanding of domestic violence and their rights, chose not to tolerate violence, and were more likely to take active initiative to cope with experiences of violence. Conversely, the perpetrators tended to hold tacit assumptions that confirmed men's greater power and rights in dealing with women. They tended to rationalize violence as normal, justifying it as an expression of parental love, and denying that there was an underlying pattern of gender preference in their homes. They therefore seemed less able to confront and revise their own violent conduct.

8.2 Recommendations

The findings from this qualitative study support the recommendations produced in the quantitative report on gender-based violence and masculinities produced by UNFPA China, Partners for Prevention, Beijing Forestry University and the Anti-Domestic Violence Network (Wang, Fang and Li 2013). The in-depth nature of the qualitative life history data provides further nuance for recommendations on programmes and policies to prevent violence against women, and also further areas of research needed. Adopting the timeline of the life history, the recommendations discuss programme intervention and policy sites for preventing violence against women during childhood, in schools, in working environments, within the intimate partnership space and across communities.

Recommendation: Support healthy childhood environments

This life history research confirms that family environments and relationships with parents are formative to the development of gender socialization for both boys and girls. The study found widespread son preference across most of the respondents, even when it was not explicitly recognized as such. The study also found that many participants witnessed domestic abuse between parents or suffered from child abuse and these experiences contributed to their perceptions and practices of violence in adulthood.

Specific Programme Interventions and Approaches

- Set up a positive parenting skills training programmes in China, which engages both fathers and mothers as primary caregivers and provides training in communication skills, conflict and problem solving resolution, respect for children's rights, and equal investment in boys and girls, etc.
- Develop awareness and advocacy campaigns around the negative impacts of physical punishment on child development
- Strengthen the availability of psycho-social support and counselling for at-risk children who witness parental violence or suffer from child abuse, particularly in rural areas

Key Target Policy Sites

- Advocate for paternity leave policies to encourage fathers to engage more fully in child-rearing
- Strengthen implementation of policies to reduce son preference
- Promote a more comprehensive health sector response to child abuse and maltreatment, engaging a wide-range of health-care professionals in identifying and addressing evidence of abuse

Further Research

- Enhance research on child abuse, especially child sexual abuse in urban and rural China

Recommendation: Promote school-based gender equality programmes

This study finds that school bullying, drop-outs, and physical punishment by teachers were quite common across the participant's narratives of school life. The study found that teachers played important roles in students' personal development, particularly around academic achievement, which is highly prized in China. Further, the findings show that engagement in college or university activist organizations helped to promote empathy and support for equality and peace, particularly among the 'gender-equitable' man sample.

Specific Programme Interventions and Approaches

- Integrate school-based gender equality and rights curricula within existing sexual education

curricula throughout national school systems, and throughout grade levels, to foster early exposure and open communication around topics such as gender norms, sex, sexual relationships, human rights and gender-based violence.

- Implement early-age reading and activity groups within preschool and early primary school classrooms to discuss school bullying and promote non-violence at an age-appropriate level
- Provide comprehensive training for teachers on non-violent classroom discipline methods and students' rights
- Implement school-based programmes on dating violence and bullying prevention
- In colleges and universities, provide stronger financial and logistical support to students' organizations involved in gender equality and anti-gender-based violence campaigns

Key Target Policy Sites

- Engage the Ministry of Education in efforts to support equal education opportunities and violence prevention within school settings

Further Research

- Promote further studies on school bullying and dating violence.

Recommendation: Promote healthy and respectful intimate partner relationships free from violence

The life history study found that the nature of intimate partner relationships contributed to creating spaces in which violence was either condoned and normalized, or rejected and avoided. Further, respondents were also influenced by the nature of intimate partnerships that they were exposed to during childhood, such as parents, grandparents, etc. Therefore, it is important to develop and promote healthy intimate relationship for dating couples and married couples.

Specific Programme Interventions and Approaches

- Promote interventions that work with young people to challenge harmful or disrespectful relationship patterns and build communication and relationship skills based on mutual respect,

strong communication, and non-violence problem solving approaches

- Strengthen formal and informal support systems for women experiencing violence, particularly legal aid, support groups, hotlines, shelters and health care support
- Build programmes to work within communities – particularly among mothers and daughters- in-law – to promote supportive intergenerational relationships

Key Target Policy Sites

- Sensitize and build the capacity of law enforcement and judiciary to more effectively respond to cases of domestic violence or violence against women
- Establish and promote clear legislation to address domestic violence and gender discrimination at the national level
- Promote anti-sexual harassment campaigns and policies in public space and workplaces.

Further Research

- Conduct research on the effectiveness of violence prevention initiatives in China
- Conduct research on the nature and scope of violence within same-sex intimate partnerships

Recommendation: Promote notions of masculinities that are built on equality, peace and respect for women

This study finds that notions of masculinity and roles of men and women are shaped by working environments and broader communities. Changing social norms and gender stereotypes remain a long-term goal to promote peaceful and equitable societies for everyone.

Specific Programme Interventions and Approaches

- Adopt multi-media campaigns to promote non-violent masculinities, particularly among youth and within rural communities
- Promote neighborhood watch systems within communities to prevent and respond to incidents of gender-based violence
- Design contextual sensitive community projects to challenge sexist cultural beliefs, routines, and conventions

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