



Police Officers' Preferences for Gender-Based Responding to Domestic Violence in China

Xiying Wang¹ · Yuning Wu² · Luye Li³ · Jia Xue⁴

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Abstract

This study examines Chinese police officers' preferences for different formations of responders to domestic violence. Specifically, it assessed the connections between Chinese officers' gender and gender-based attitudes and their perceptions of whether female officers, male officers, or mixed-gender officers are more suited for responding to battered women, offenders, and domestic violence overall. Survey data were collected from 1052 officers, including 278 females and 774 males from four provinces in China. Frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, and multivariate regression were used as data analysis methods. Chinese officers, in general, were more likely to believe that female officers are more suited to work with battered women, the male officer is more apt to handle offenders, and a combination of male and female officers are more adapted to deal with "domestic violence overall". Female officers preferred male officers over themselves in investigating "domestic violence overall." Officers who have more support for gender equality or more tolerance for domestic violence are more likely to believe that, compared to male officers, female officers are more suitable to work with batter women, and a combination of male and female officers is better to provide service to battered women and to respond to "domestic violence overall." Policymakers and police administrators should strive to promote the value of a more gender-balanced police force and involve more female officers to work in responding to domestic violence.

Keywords Gender · Police officers · Policing · Domestic violence · China

✉ Xiying Wang
xiyingw@bnu.edu.cn

Yuning Wu
yuningwu@wayne.edu

Luye Li
lil1@sunypoly.edu

Jia Xue
jia.xue@utoronto.ca

- ¹ Institute for Education Theories, Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University, No.19 Xijiekou Wai Street, Beijing 100875, China
- ² Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Wayne State University, 656 W. Kirby Street, Detroit, MI 48202, USA
- ³ Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, SUNY Polytechnic Institute, 100 Seymour Ave, Donovan Hall 2131, Utica, NY 13502, USA
- ⁴ Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work & Faculty of Information, University of Toronto, Toronto M5J 2Y2, Canada

Introduction

Domestic violence is a serious social problem in China. A nationwide study found that nearly a quarter of women suffered one or multiple forms of domestic violence, including physical, psychological, economic, and sexual abuse (All-China Women's Federation 2011). One recent study showed that 55% sampled women have experienced psychological aggression, and 22% experienced threatening and controlling, and 20% experience sexual violence in the past 12 months (Hu et al. 2019). The prevalence rate is even higher among vulnerable populations, such as individuals with chronic disease, pregnant women, and rural-to-urban migrant women (Tang and Lai 2008). Court records revealed that 10% of intentional homicide cases involved domestic violence (The Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China 2014). Domestic violence is undoubtedly detrimental to women's safety and health, leading to higher risks of depression, substance use, chronic disease, mental illness, sexually transmitted diseases, and other health problems (Campbell et al. 2002; Carbone-López et al. 2006).

Given the importance of curbing domestic violence, China launched the *Anti-domestic Violence Law of the People's Republic of China* (ADVL) on March 1, 2016, landmark legislation that presumptively advances women's rights and reduces gender-based violence. The ADVL defines domestic violence as "inflicting of physical, psychological or other harm by a family member on another by beating, trussing, injury, restraint and forcible limits on personal freedom, recurring verbal abuse, threats, and other means" (Article 2, ADVL, see The State Council of the People's Republic of China 2015).

Similar to their Western counterparts, the Chinese police play an irreplaceable role in responding to domestic violence. However, empirical research on front-line officers' attitudes and actions toward handling domestic violence in China is extremely limited. Recently, some scholars explored Chinese police officers' or cadets' perceptions of domestic violence (Hayes et al. 2020; Zhao et al. 2018), yet no research has examined the potential linkages between officer gender and gender-related attitudes and their preferences for gender-based responding to domestic violence. This study aims to fill the gap by assessing officers' opinions on "Who is most suited for handling domestic violence?"

Using survey data collected from 1052 police officers in four Chinese provinces, this study answers two research questions: (1) What are the general patterns of Chinese police officers' preferences for having male officers, female officers, or a combination of both groups to work with battered women, offenders and domestic violence overall? (2) Are officers' gender, attitudes toward gender equality, and tolerance of domestic violence predictive of their preferences for having male officers, female officers, or both groups to deal with battered women, offenders, and domestic violence overall? Answering these questions can improve our understanding of policing domestic violence in general and factors affecting officer attitudes toward dealing with domestic violence, particularly in the Chinese context. Results of this study are also relevant for protecting women's rights, improving the gendered culture of police departments, and maintaining good police-community relations in China.

Literature Review

Policing Domestic Violence in China

For a long time, there was no precise regulation on the police's roles in responding domestic violence in China. In July 2008, several government agencies, including The Supreme People's Procuratorate, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry Civil Affairs, jointly issued the *Opinions on the Prevention and Suppression of Domestic Violence*. This national document explicitly regulated first-

time domestic violence in the 110 police reporting system and required the police to promptly respond to such incidents. Police are expected to play a vital role as first responders to domestic violence in many other countries, typically initiating formal intervention into the incidents (McPhedran et al. 2017).

The promulgation of the ADVL in March 2016 further empowers the police with greater authorities and responsibilities to deal with domestic violence by confirming the police role as the first responders and their duties of collecting evidence, assisting in medical care, and paying follow-up visits (article 15, ADVL). According to three national laws, the ADVL, Public Security Administration Punishment Law (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China 2005), and the Criminal Law (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China 2015), the police can utilize several approaches to handle domestic violence according to the severity of the incident, ranging from the least punitive of mediation to the most punitive of criminal punishment. The police can also impose administrative sanctions such as police detention of no more than five days or written warning orders.

In real-world practices, an overwhelming majority of domestic violence cases are regarded by responding officers as family conflicts and received no or minimal criminal justice interventions. Mediation, particularly oral mediation delivered by officers, remains the most common action used by the police (Jiang 2019; Zhao et al. 2018). Furthermore, mediation is strongly encouraged by the ADVL as it serves the function of "promoting family harmony and social stability," which represents a paramount goal of the legislation (Article 18, the ADVL). China's heavy reliance on mediation to resolve domestic violence is quite different from that in the U.S., where states across the nation have passed mandatory arrest or pro-arrest statutes and implemented similar policies to guide police responses to domestic violence cases (McPhedran et al. 2017; Sun et al. 2012).

Research has consistently revealed that domestic violence victims and sexual assault victims are often reluctant to report their ordeals to legal authorities (Farris and Holman 2015; Xue et al. 2019; Xue and Lin 2020), and Chinese domestic violence victims are no exception. Evidence shows that younger generations of women survivors in China are more inclined to seek help from the public sectors than older generations who are more prone to attain help from friends and relatives (Wang et al. 2019; Hu et al. 2020). Two recent studies found that among abused women who actively sought help from public agencies, they most likely turn to the police for assistance (Wang 2019; Wang et al. 2015). However, from a women survivors' point of view, police interventions are rarely satisfactory. The most common complaints included that the police are passive mediators, lacking patience and sympathy, and tend to criticize both partners, aiming at quickly disposing of the case rather than solving the problem. The police

are also believed to respond slowly after 110 calls, and are unwilling to issue written warning orders, collect evidence for a criminal prosecution, send victims to medical examination, or help victims secure a restraining order (Wang 2019). Chinese abused women's unsatisfactory experience with police intervention is similar to women victims in other countries (Shircore et al. 2017). Some argued that abused women experienced secondary trauma when encountering insensitive, impersonal, dismissive, and minimizing treatments by the police (Gillis et al. 2006). Other studies showed that the police's supportive responses, including concern, sympathy, and understanding, contributed to victims' feelings of satisfaction (Martin 1997; Stephens and Sinden 2000). Besides inadequate training and lack of agency support (Zhao et al. 2018), the reasons that inhibit officers from providing timely and efficient assistance are often related to male-dominated police occupational culture (Leung 2014), police conservative views on gender roles and family values (Rong 2012; Liu 2017), and tolerance for gender-based violence (Li et al. 2017).

Gender Segregation in Policing

The police are one of the most gender segregated and male-dominated professions in China. According to the Ministry of Public Security statistics in 2011, among 2 million police officers in China, only 13.7% were female officers (Rong 2012; Wang 2017). This gender ratio is close to that of 12% in the U.S. (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2014), but lower than other developed countries, such as 28.6% in England and Wales (United Kingdom Home Office 2016) and 21% in Canada (Symbol of Statistics Canada 2017).

One of the reasons for policing as a segregated profession in China is that most public security universities and colleges adopt a recruitment policy that sets a quota to the number or percentage of women to be admitted. For example, the People's Public Security University of China, the most prestigious university in the discipline of public security, has explicitly stated in their enrollment guideline in the past ten years that female students could not exceed 15% of the total enrollment. This recruitment policy superficially carries a "good intention" to protect women from the hardship of "high risky, emergency responsive, and heavily burdened" profession (Rong 2012). These policies hinder women applicants' willingness and opportunity to join the force, causing unfairly fierce competition among female applicants and unequal admission requirements between the two genders as women need much higher scores to get into these schools. Gender discrimination against women breeds gender segregation in the profession.

Gender segregation can also be attributed to the police culture that emphasizes masculinity highlighted by concealing weakness, presenting strength and stamina, putting work first, and intensive competition (Rawski and Workman-Stark

2018). Studies showed that some female officers adopted these masculine qualities to better assimilate into male-dominated policing (Martin 1980; Parsons and Jeilow 2001). In China, when the police culture and traditional patriarchal culture reinforce each other to frame policing mainly as a man's job, women in the profession are marginalized and compelled to assume gendered roles in the workplace. Many police colleges have a cap on female recruits (e.g., 15%), referencing the high risks and heavy workload of police work. Female police officers are often assigned to less important positions, such as administrative positions and desk jobs, limiting their promotion opportunities due to lack of critical work experience (Kim and Gerber 2019; Wang 2017).

Gender Attitudes among Police Officers

Police officers may have gender attitudes that are more conservative than the general public (Ashlock 2019) and other professionals, such as judges (Gölge et al. 2016) and social workers (Tam and Tang 2005; McMullan et al. 2010). Ashlock (2019), for example, found that men who became police officers developed into greater acceptance of traditional gender attitudes in comparison to men not in the profession, while women who entered policing were less likely to accept traditional gender roles than other women. Another national survey of elected sheriffs revealed that many sheriffs believe in myths concerning violence against women, such as "many domestic violence victims could easily leave their relationships, but do not" (Farris and Holman 2015, p.1124). One study conducted in Turkey comparing male and female law enforcement officers found that men were more tolerant of those husbands who physically and verbally abuse their wives, and less supportive of wives leaving the abusive partners than women (Gölge et al. 2016). One study conducted in Hong Kong compared social workers and police officers and found that police officers held more conservative gender role attitudes, endorsed more myths about wife abuse, and adopted more restrictive definitions of physical and psychological wife abuse than social workers (Tam and Tang 2005). Comparing students from different college majors, including law enforcement, non-law-enforcement criminal justice, and social work, one study found that law enforcement students were less sensitive to domestic violence than social work and non-law enforcement criminal justice students (McMullan et al. 2010).

Many studies revealed that attitudes toward gender equality are a predictor of tolerance for gender-based violence (Farris and Holman 2015; Li et al. 2017; Gölge et al. 2016; Tam and Tang 2005), or vice versa (Gracia et al. 2011). One study compared Chinese and American university students and found that Chinese respondents had a greater tolerance for intimate partner violence than their American peers did (Li et al. 2017). This study also demonstrated that respondents who reported lower support for gender equality showed more

tolerance for IPV. Gracia et al. (2011) reported that police officers who expressed a general preference for unconditional law enforcement involvement (irrespective of the victim's willingness to press charges against the offender) scored higher on empathy, were less sexist, and held less tolerance for partner violence, compared to officers who expressed a preference for conditional law enforcement (based on victims' willingness to press charges). Rong (2001) surveyed police officers and cadets in China and found that many of them have strong sexism and believe in male superiority. When it comes to responding domestic violence, they are inclined to believe that domestic violence is a "private matter" (*jiawushi*) and that they should just mediate and stay out of it. Another study asked police officers to list the priority of criminal cases (e.g., robberies, stranger assaults), public disorder cases (e.g., gambling, prostitution), and domestic violence incidents, and most of the surveyed officers put domestic violence at the bottom of the priority list (Liu 2017).

Gender Sameness and Difference in Handling Domestic Violence

Past studies have yet to show consistent gender differences between male and female officers in their attitudes and actions toward citizens during the disposition of domestic violence incidents (McPhedran et al. 2017; Sun 2007). Stalans and Finn (2000) found that male and female officers did not differ in their arrest rates of domestic violence; however, women officers were more likely to recommend the victims to battered women's shelters and less likely to recommend marriage counseling. A study conducted in the U.S. suggested that female officers were more likely than male officers to initiate assistance to victims, and in a way, more effective in handling domestic violence than male officers (Sun 2007). Another study uncovered that male officers in Taiwan were more likely than female officers to support minimum police involvement and tolerate domestic violence (Chu and Sun 2014).

Two studies are most relevant to the current study (Belknap 1996; Sun and Chu 2010). Both empirically assessed police officers' views on whether policewomen, policemen or mixed genders are best suited to respond to domestic violence cases overall and handle battered women and perpetrators in specific. Analyzing survey data collected from 324 law enforcement officers in a metropolitan area in the U.S., Belknap (1996) found that officers believed that a combination of policemen and policewomen are best suited to respond to domestic violence overall, policewomen are best suited to work with battered women, and policemen are best suited to deal with batterers. Moreover, except for responding to battered victims, support for policewomen acting alone in domestic violence cases was practically non-existent. Based on survey data collected from 252 officers in Taiwan, Sun and Chu (2010) reached a similar result as Belknap (1996). A

combination of male and female officers was most preferred to handle domestic violence. Unlike Belknap's (1996) finding that the American male officers were less likely to support female officers in responding to perpetrators, the Taiwanese male officers supported policewomen or a combination of policemen and policewomen respond to offenders of domestic violence.

Aim of the Study

This study evaluates Chinese police officers' perceptions about who is most suitable for handling domestic violence. Unlike its precursors, this study relies on a larger sample size of diverse groups of officers from four Chinese provinces. It also tests a broader range of predictor variables, including such key correlates as tolerance for domestic violence and gender equality attitude that could assist in grasping a better understanding of officers' gendered choices over who is more suited in dealing with domestic violence.

Methodology

Data Source and Collection

This study used data garnered by a research project titled "Policing Domestic Violence in China (PDVC)." The project was initiated by a group of bilingual (Mandarin and English) researchers associated with several universities in Canada, China, and the U.S. The project's principal purpose is to assess Chinese police officers' attitudes, behaviors, and responses toward domestic violence after the launch of ADVL. The research team designed a survey instrument with 70 items tapping into officers' knowledge and training of the ADVL, experience, and attitudes toward organizational support for law enforcement interventions into domestic violence, and demographic characteristics. The survey was pre-tested on a small sample of Chinese officers, and minor revisions were made based on the pre-test feedback.

Between June and October 2019, the survey was distributed to police officers who work in four provinces, including Jiangsu, Henan, Hubei, and Shannxi. Jiangsu is a coastal province in East China, Henan and Hubei are located in Central China, and Shannxi is in Western China. Jiangsu has a population of 84 million and is one of the most economically and culturally developed areas with the second highest gross domestic product (GDP) among Chinese provinces. Henan, although having a large population (94 million) and one of the largest provincial economy of China, is, however, one of the less-developed areas in the country with a per capita GDP lower than the other three provinces. Hubei, meanwhile, has a population of approximately 50 million and is rich in agriculture, forestry, and hydropower resources. It ranks the

seventh regarding GDP per capita among all Chinese provinces, excluding province-level cities. Finally, Shaanxi has about 37 million people and ranks China's fifteenth largest economy, with fossil fuel and high technology sectors compose the two largest industries in the province. The four provinces were chosen as research sites mainly because they are located in different regions and have varying socioeconomic development levels. Practically, the research team has strong connections with local officials and police administrators in these provinces who were willing to assist in collecting data and serving as onsite coordinators.

In Jiangsu province, data collection was carried out in two cities. In one city, a total of 500 officers from 15 field stations (*paichusuo*) were given the survey by a local official known to local police. Among them, 423 officers returned the survey. In a second city, 300 surveys were distributed to officers in 4 police stations (*fengju*), and all 300 surveys were returned. In Henan province, a local official helped with data collection at 6 police field stations in two cities. A total of 220 questionnaires were distributed, and 177 were received. In Shannxi province, data collection was coordinated by a police administrator who distributed the survey to officers working in one police station, one detention center, and five field stations in one county. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed with 109 received. In Hubei province, the coordinator was a retired police administrator who handed out and collected the surveys from 34 field stations in two cities. Among 400 questionnaires distributed, 341 were returned.

After deleting unusable surveys and cases with missing values on key variables, the final sample for analysis comprises 1052 officers, including 575 Jiangsu officers, 145 Henan officers, 254 Hubei officers, and 78 Shannxi officers. The successful response rate was 67%, as the Chinese police sample used in previous studies commonly enjoyed a high response rate (see, Qu et al. 2018; Hayes et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2020). The respondents were predominately male officers (774, 74%) and married (811, 77%). Female officers were overrepresented at roughly 25% of our sample as we purposely recruited more female officers into this study to study gender differences. More than half of the sample officers were college graduates (613, 58%). The average length of their service as a police officer is about 11 years. Approximately 41% of the respondents worked in a field station and the remaining 59% were assigned to a higher-level police station. More than 80% of the officers have experience in handling domestic violence during the past three years.

Participation in the study was completely voluntary. Surveys were distributed and collected by onsite project coordinators trained on human subjects' protection by the project's principal investigator. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the survey's content, and all data's anonymity and confidentiality. The project coordinators told them that they could freely choose to accept or decline the

study invitation and can also withdraw from participating any time they wish to. Nonparticipation will not bring any negative consequences to the officers (Wu et al. 2020). Beijing Normal University has ethically approved this project.

Measures

Three dependent variables were constructed to represent officer gender preferences for handling domestic violence victims, offenders, and cases. Based on identical items used in previous studies (Belknap 1996; Sun and Chu 2010), respondents were asked: (1) Who do you think is best suited for handling battered women in domestic violence cases; (2) Who do you think is best suited for handling offenders in domestic violence cases; and (3) Who do you think is best suited overall for handling domestic violence cases. Response options included: (1) male officers; (2) female officers; and (3) a combination of male and female officers.

Independent variables consisted of officer gender, support for gender equality, and tolerance toward domestic violence. Gender was a dichotomized variable (0 = female, 1 = male). As this study conducted multinomial logistic regression analysis using SPSS, for all dichotomized independent variables, a higher value (i.e., 1) served as the reference group in the analysis. Support for gender equality was indicated by an additive scale of four items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$). Respondents were asked about their levels of agreement with four statements: (1) A father should have more authority than a mother when bringing up children; (2) There are many jobs in which men should be given preference over women; (3) A woman should not expect to go to the same places or have the same freedom as a man, and (4) Sons in a family should be encouraged more than daughters to go to college. Response categories ranged from 1 indicating strongly agree to 4 representing strongly disagree. A higher value on the scale thus suggests stronger support for gender equality. Additionally, respondents were asked about their attitudes toward domestic violence: (1) Violence is justified if a partner insults; (2) Battering is not grounds for divorce; (3) Violence is justified if a partner cheats/commits adultery physically or psychologically; (4) Society should expect couples occasionally have minor physical fights; (5) A husband may beat his wife if she is unreasonable and starts the argument/fight first; and (6) Abused women tend to be those who fail to fulfill a wife's responsibilities. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). An additive scale was formed and named as tolerance for DV (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$), with a higher value on the scale signaling greater domestic violence tolerance.

A range of individual, organizational, and geographic location variables were controlled in this study. Individual variables consisted of demographic characteristics, working experiences, and attitudes toward handling DV. Demographic characteristics included education (0 = college degree or

higher; 1 = below college degree) and marital status (0 = currently married; 1 = currently not married). Work characteristics were comprised of the length of service (measured in years), type of agency (0 = field station; 1 = not field station), experience responding to DV (0 = having the experience of handling DV cases during past three years; 1 = not having such experience), and knowledge on the ADVL (1 = never heard about it; 2 = heard about it, but know little; 3 = know some but not complete of it; 4 = know it very well). There were two attitudes toward handling DV variables. The first, DV is important to police work, asked the respondents if they agree: “Dealing with domestic violence is an important part of police work” (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree). The second, pro-arrest attitudes, asked the respondents if “Arresting offenders for domestic violence is a good policy” and “Police should arrest the abuser even if the victim doesn’t want them to” (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree). The two items constructed an additive scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .65$), with a higher score representing stronger pro-arrest attitudes.

Organizational variables encompassed agency support and training. Agency support was an additive scale of two items (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .73$). Respondents were asked whether “In addition to the Anti-Domestic Violence Law, my agency unit has very clear regulations in stipulating how to handle domestic violence cases” and “My agency requires all frontline officers to receive mandatory training on handling domestic violence cases” (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree). Following agency support is agency training, asking the respondents during the past three years, whether their agency has organized training on the Anti-Domestic Violence Law to the employees (0 = yes; 1 = no). Finally, four dummy variables of the geographic location were created and controlled, with 0 representing respectively the province of Jiangsu, Henan, Hubei, and Shannxi. Jiangsu served as the reference group.

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics of all variables used in the multivariate analyses. There was no concern of multicollinearity as the variance inflation factors (VIFs), except for the location variables (three dummy variables representing respectively Henan, Hubei, and Shannxi, with each having a VIF < 3), were all below 2 (Neter et al. 1996).

Analyses

Three steps of analyses were conducted. First, frequency distributions were performed on the three questions asking officers who they think are best suited to handle domestic violence victims, offenders, and overall cases – male officers, female officers, or a combination of both. Second, cross-tabulation analyses across officer genders and responses to the three questions were conducted, and chi-square tests of significant differences were reported. Third, multinomial logistic regression was employed to examine the correlates of

officer attitudes toward who is best suited to handle domestic violence victims, offenders, and cases overall.

Results

Frequency Distributions

Table 2 reports the frequency distributions of the three gender-based options for handling battered women, offenders and domestic violence incidents overall. Regarding who is most suited to handle battered women, about 47% of the respondents viewed female officers as most suitable, and a slightly smaller portion (45%) thought a combination of male and female officers is the best option. Only 8% of the respondents considered male officers alone as the most appropriate choice for dealing with abused women in domestic violence cases.

With respect to handling offenders, over half (55%) of the respondents reported that male officers are best suited for the task, followed by 38% supporting a combination of male and female officers. Only 7% of the respondents thought that women officers alone are the most suited for dealing with domestic violence perpetrators.

In terms of handling domestic violence cases overall, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (81%) supported a combination of male and female officers as the best option for handling domestic violence cases. A small portion of the respondents (12%) endorsed male officers as the most acceptable choice for tackling domestic violence incidents, and an even smaller proportion (7%) favored female officers.

Cross-Tabulation

Table 3 displays the results of cross-tabulation analyses between officer gender and the three gender-based responding options. It appears that compared to the male officers, female officers are more likely to favor a combination of male and female officers (41.0% v. 36.6%) and less likely to prefer female officers (3.6% v. 8.5%) in handling domestic violence offenders. Similarly, regarding handling domestic violence incidents overall, female officers are more inclined than male officers to choose a combination of officers of both genders (84.5% v. 79.2%) and less disposed to select female officers alone (2.9% v. 8.5%). Meanwhile, the two genders are relatively similar in female and mixed-gender officers’ preferences in responding to battered women. With this preliminary result from bivariate analysis, we now move to multivariate regression inspecting the effect of gender and gender-related attitudes on officers’ preferences for gender-based responding options.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for variables in regression analyses ($n = 1052$)

| | Total | | | | Male | | | | Female | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------|------|-----|-----|-------|------|-----|-----|--------|------|-----|-----|--------|
| | Mean | SD | Min | Max | Mean | SD | Min | Max | Mean | SD | Min | Max | T-test |
| Dependent Variables | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Battered women | 1.61 | .63 | 1 | 3 | 1.60 | .63 | 1 | 3 | 1.66 | .62 | 1 | 3 | |
| Offenders | 2.48 | .63 | 1 | 3 | 2.46 | .65 | 1 | 3 | 2.54 | .57 | 1 | 3 | * |
| Cases overall | 2.05 | .44 | 1 | 3 | 2.04 | .45 | 1 | 3 | 2.10 | .38 | 1 | 3 | ** |
| Independent Variables | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender (0=female ^a) | .73 | .44 | 0 | 1 | — | — | — | — | | | | | |
| Support for gender equality | 12.66 | 2.95 | 4 | 16 | 12.47 | 2.96 | 4 | 16 | 13.19 | 2.89 | 4 | 16 | ** |
| Tolerance for DV | 10.04 | 4.08 | 6 | 24 | 10.44 | 4.20 | 6 | 24 | 8.95 | 3.53 | 6 | 24 | ** |
| Control Variables | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Education (0 = college or above) | .42 | .49 | 0 | 1 | .40 | .49 | 0 | 1 | .45 | .50 | 0 | 1 | |
| Marital status (0 = married) | .23 | .42 | 0 | 1 | .23 | .42 | 0 | 1 | .21 | .41 | 0 | 1 | |
| Agency level (0 = field station) | .59 | .49 | 0 | 1 | .54 | .50 | 0 | 1 | .75 | .43 | 0 | 1 | *** |
| Length of service | 10.69 | 9.16 | 0 | 53 | 10.78 | 9.16 | 0 | 49 | 10.42 | 9.16 | 0 | 53 | * |
| DV handling experience (0 = yes) | .18 | .38 | 0 | 1 | .12 | .32 | 0 | 1 | .34 | .47 | 0 | 1 | *** |
| Knowledge on DV law | 2.78 | .72 | 1 | 4 | 2.82 | .74 | 1 | 4 | 2.68 | .68 | 1 | 4 | ** |
| DV is important police work | 2.99 | 1.06 | 1 | 4 | 2.93 | 1.10 | 1 | 4 | 3.16 | .95 | 1 | 4 | ** |
| Pro-arrest attitudes | 5.31 | 1.87 | 2 | 8 | 5.13 | 1.88 | 2 | 8 | 5.80 | 1.75 | 2 | 8 | *** |
| Agency support | 5.68 | 1.80 | 2 | 8 | 5.63 | 1.82 | 2 | 8 | 5.75 | 1.73 | 2 | 8 | ** |
| Agency training (0 = training) | .52 | .50 | 0 | 1 | .49 | .50 | 0 | 1 | .59 | .49 | 0 | 1 | ** |
| Jiangsu (0 = Jiangsu) | .45 | .50 | 0 | 1 | .45 | .50 | 0 | 1 | .47 | .50 | 0 | 1 | |
| Henan (0 = Henan) | .86 | .34 | 0 | 1 | .88 | .32 | 0 | 1 | .80 | .40 | 0 | 1 | *** |
| Hubei (0 = Hubei) | .76 | .43 | 0 | 1 | .71 | .45 | .0 | 1 | .92 | .30 | 0 | 1 | *** |
| Shannxi (0 = Shannxi) | .92 | .26 | 0 | 1 | .96 | .19 | .0 | 1 | .82 | .38 | 0 | 1 | *** |

SD stands for standard deviation value, Min stands for minimum value, Max stands for maximum value, and n stands for the number of cases after dropping cases with missing values. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

^a: For dummy variables, the category that has the value “1” serves as the reference group

Multinomial Logistic Regression

Table 4 presents the results of the multinomial regression analyses. Three models were performed respectively for handling battered women, offenders, and domestic violence cases overall. Recall that the response categories for all three dependent variables include male officers, female officers, and a combination of officers of both sexes, with male officers serving as the initial reference group.

Looking at the first model for battered women, four variables were significant predictors of females' preferences over male officers. Officers who had more support for gender equality and who expressed higher tolerance for domestic violence were observed to have greater odds of choosing female officers over male officers to handle battered women. In addition, officers who reported that their agency has organized training on the ADVL were less likely to favor female officers over male officers in dealing with battered women. Hubei

Table 2 Percentage distributions of officer attitudes toward who is best suited for handling domestic violence – all officers

| Police disposition of | Who is best suited for handling domestic violence | | | |
|---------------------------|---|--------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| | Male officers % (n) | Female officers % (n) | A combination % (n) | Total % (n) |
| Battered women | 8.1 (85) | 46.7 (491) | 45.2 (476) | 100 (1052) |
| Offenders | 55.0 (579) | 7.2 (76) | 37.7 (397) | 100 (1052) |
| Domestic violence overall | 12.4 (130) | 7.0 (74) | 80.6 (848) | 100 (1052) |

Table 3 Cross-tabulations of attitudes toward who is best suited for handling domestic violence – female and male officers

| Best suited for handling | Female Officers | | | Male Officers | | | χ^2 |
|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------|
| | Male Officer % (n) | Female Officer % (n) | A Combination % (n) | Male Officer % (n) | Female Officer % (n) | A Combination % (n) | |
| Battered women | 8.3 (23) | 42.1 (117) | 49.6 (138) | 8.0 (62) | 48.3 (374) | 43.7 (338) | 3.33 |
| Offenders | 55.4 (154) | 3.6 (10) | 41.0 (114) | 54.9 (425) | 8.5 (66) | 36.6 (283) | 7.96* |
| Domestic violence overall | 12.6 (278) | 2.9 (8) | 84.5 (235) | 12.3 (95) | 8.5 (66) | 79.2 (613) | 10.02** |

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

officers are more likely to prefer the female to male officers to respond to battered women than their Jiangsu counterparts.

Three variables predicted respondents' preferences for a combination of male and female officers over just male officers in managing domestic violence victims. While support for gender equality and tolerance for DV was positively related to the odds of selecting a combination of officers over just male officers only, agency training on ADVL lowered the odds of favoring a combination of officers of different sexes over male officers in responding to battered women.

We conducted additional multinomial regression analysis using female officers as the reference group in the dependent variable. Gender, perception of gender equality, and tolerance of domestic violence did not have any significant effects on a preference of mixed gender officers over female officers, but officers who have more support for gender equality and who express higher tolerance for DV are less likely to favor male officers over female officers to deal with battered women.

Moving to the offenders' model, only one variable affected officers' preference for female over male officers in handling

Table 4 Multinomial regression summary (n = 1052)

| Variables | Battered women | | Offenders | | Cases overall | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| | Female officers ^a | Combination | Female officers | Combination | Female officers | Combination |
| Independent Variables | | | | | | |
| Female | .97 (.30) | .94 (.26) | .52 (.37) | 1.11 (.16) | .40 (.45)* | .92 (.24) |
| Support for gender equality | 1.23 (.05)*** | 1.16 (.05)*** | .81 (.06) | 1.04 (.03) | 1.08 (.06) | 1.21 (.04)*** |
| Tolerance toward DV | 1.12 (.04)** | 1.15 (.04)*** | .29 (.04) | 1.08 (.02)*** | 1.23 (.05)** | 1.08 (.03)* |
| Control Variables | | | | | | |
| College | 2.45 (.27) | .94 (.26) | .91 (.28) | .84 (.15) | 1.64 (.34) | 1.18 (.21) |
| Married | 1.18 (.58) | 1.34 (.30) | 1.01 (.34) | .70 (.18)* | .71 (.34) | .99 (.26) |
| Field station | 1.04 (.90) | .86 (.30) | 1.45 (.29) | .82 (.17) | 1.79 (.36) | 1.37 (.25) |
| Length of service | .99 (.02) | 1.00 (.01) | 1.00 (.02) | 1.00 (.01) | .99 (.02) | 1.01 (.01) |
| DV handling experience | 1.36 (.33) | 1.80 (.33) | 2.09 (.47) | 1.03 (.19) | 1.68 (.47) | 1.22 (.27) |
| Knowledge of DV law | 1.41 (.19) | 1.28 (.19) | .85 (.19) | .86 (.11) | .66 (.23) | .82 (.16) |
| DV is important to police work | 1.09 (.13) | 1.14 (.13) | .82 (.13) | 1.05 (.07) | .81 (.15) | 1.11 (.10) |
| Pro-arrest attitudes | 1.13 (.07) | 1.02 (.07) | 1.03 (.07) | .88 (.04)** | 1.21 (.09)* | 1.18 (.06)** |
| Agency support | 1.10 (.08) | 1.14 (.08) | .99 (.08) | 1.13 (.04)** | 1.11 (.10) | 1.15 (.06)* |
| Agency training | .37 (.29)*** | .48 (.29)** | .59 (.30) | 1.72 (.16)*** | .83 (.36) | 1.33 (.23) |
| Henan | 1.22 (.37) | 1.23 (.37) | .52 (.48) | .80 (.22) | .87 (.58) | 1.92 (.32)* |
| Hubei | 3.59 (.39)*** | 1.87 (.40) | .37 (.38)** | .61 (.19)* | .71 (.46) | 1.56 (.30) |
| Shannxi | 2.23 (.56) | 2.06 (.56) | 1.01 (.00) | 1.69 (.28) | .32 (1.10) | 1.98 (.42) |
| -2 Log Likelihood | 1827.17 | | 1750.43 | | 1177.75 | |
| Nagelkerke R ² | .11 | | .12 | | .16 | |

Entries are odds ratios, with standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

^a. Male officers are the reference group

domestic violence offenders. Compared to their Jiangsu counterparts, Hubei officers were significantly less likely to favor females over male officers in dealing with domestic violence perpetrators.

Officers' preference for a combination of male and female officers over just male officers to deal with perpetrators was predicted by tolerance for DV, marital status, pro-arrest attitudes, agency support, agency training, and Hubei province. Specifically, officers who held greater tolerance for domestic violence reported higher agency support levels for police intervention into domestic violence and served in an agency with training on anti-domestic violence law displayed higher likelihoods of choosing a combination of male and female officers over male officers alone to handle domestic violence offenders. In contrast, officers who were currently married worked in Hubei province and held pro-arrest attitudes were less likely to opt for a combination of officers of different sexes over male officers only.

Additional analysis using female officers as the reference group in the dependent variable showed that male officers are more likely than female officers to favor mixed-gender over female officers to handle domestic violence abusers. All three independent variables did not affect officers' choice of male over female officers in responding to abusers.

In terms of who is best suited for responding to domestic violence cases overall, female officers showed lower support for female over male officers in responding to domestic violence incidents overall, net of all controls. Officers who harbored greater tolerance for DV and held stronger pro-arrest attitudes were more likely to favor female officers than male officers.

Five variables were significant correlations of choosing both sexes officers over male officers in handling domestic violence cases. Officers who had greater support for gender equality were more tolerant of DV, expressed stronger pro-arrest tendency, worked in an agency that supported police intervention into DV, and served in Henan were more inclined to support a combination of both male and female officers over just male officers than their respective counterparts.

Additional analysis using female officers as the reference group revealed that male officers are more likely than their female counterparts to choose a combination of officers of both genders or male officers only instead of female officers to handle domestic violence cases. Meanwhile, officers who have stronger support for gender equality are more likely to favor the mixed-gender response to domestic violence over female officer response. Officers who have a greater tolerance for domestic violence are less likely to value male officers over female officers responding to domestic violence cases.

Discussion

This study is one of the first attempts to investigate the patterns and correlates of Chinese police officers' preference for gender-based responding personnel to battered women, offenders, and cases overall. This study's findings can provide the necessary research base for policies and practices that aim to improve frontline officers' perception of domestic violence and, ultimately practices of policing domestic violence. Regarding officers' views on who is the most suited to handle domestic violence, it appears that most officers, regardless of their gender, considered female officers as the most suited to work with battered women, male officer as the fittest to deal with offenders, and a combination of male and female officers are the most adapted to dispose of domestic violence overall. Our findings indicate that Chinese officers' views on appropriate responders to domestic violence continue to adhere to traditional gender roles and expectations. Female officers were suitable for taking care of female victims, and male officers fitting for managing offenders who are predominately male.

When taking officer gender into account, it is worth noting that Chinese female officers prefer a male-dominated approach to deal with domestic violence by favoring the combination of women and men officers, and male officers over female officers in responding to domestic violence overall, net of all controls. In other words, Chinese female officers are less likely than their male counterparts to favor themselves to attend to domestic violence cases than male officers are, holding all other variables constant. This is not completely unexpected given that policing is a highly gendered occupation in China where female officers are given little opportunity to work as frontline responders dealing directly with crime and disorder problems. Lacking confidence among the female officers could also be due to gender socialization, making women more inclined to assume the role of "caregiver" and believe that women can only do such jobs as providing service to battered women. Recent studies on Chinese cadets provides also shed on possible explanations. One study revealed that female police cadets reported lower levels of self-efficacy in making arrests and physical strengths than their male counterparts (Chu et al. 2019), and gender segregation was supported by both male and female cadets who rated females as less competent in policing (Kim and Gerber 2019). Interestingly, research has shown that in Asian societies, some female officers prefer gendered policing in assignments and buy into the idea of "separate but equal" in policing (see Chu and Tsao 2014; Natarajan 2008). Future studies should continue to investigate the impact of officer gender on policing domestic violence in China.

We also found that although Chinese male officers displayed a greater degree of support than female officers for female officers' involvement in domestic violence cases, such

support is lower than that in Taiwan (see Sun and Chu 2010). While China and Taiwan share similar cultural roots of Confucianism, Taiwan has significantly progressed toward gender equality over the past few decades. For example, Taiwan passed the Domestic Violence Prevention & Control Act in 1999 (Sun and Chu 2010), the first domestic violence law in Asia. Taiwan promulgated the Gender Equity Education Act in 2004 (Yang and You 2017), and became the first in Asia to legalize same sex marriage in 2019 (Hollingsworth 2019). One thus may expect that differences in male officers' support for female officers may be attributed to a more integrated force in Taiwan where male and female officers are required to perform similar tasks out of field stations. Taiwan male officers are used to having female officers work side by side with them in handling domestic violence, which is less likely in China, where female officers are rarely assigned to frontline field stations and jobs.

In addition to officer gender, we also found that gender-related attitudes are predictive of officers' preferences for domestic violence responders. Specifically, officers who have more support for gender equality are more likely to believe that, compared to male officers, female officers are more suitable to handle batter women, and a combination of officers of both genders are better to handle both battered women and domestic violence incidents overall. These results align with our expectations, as individuals who perceive that men and women should be treated equally at work are naturally affirmative in their judgments of female officers possessing at least the same strong work capabilities and job performance as male officers.

Our results suggest that officers' tolerance for domestic violence is the most consistent predictor among independent and control variables. However, the positive connections between officers' tolerance for domestic violence and their preferences for responders are equivocal. Officers who hold higher levels of tolerance toward domestic violence are more likely to think that female officers are more suitable than male officers to respond to battered women and domestic violence cases. With a greater tolerance for domestic violence, these officers also preferred a combination of male and female officers over male officers to handle domestic violence victims, offenders, and cases overall. One possible explanation is that officers with a higher tolerance for domestic violence are more likely to view such incidents as less important or low priority work that does not deserve male officers' times and efforts, which should be reserved and dispatched for more serious crimes. This may explain their greater preferences to have females and officers of different genders to handle domestic violence incidents and the people involved.

Meanwhile, several other control variables mattered in shaping officers' perceptions of who is most suited for tackling domestic violence. Interestingly, officers from agencies that provide more support for police intervention to domestic

violence cases are more likely to think a combination of different genders of officers are better than male officers only to handle both domestic violence offenders and cases overall. In contrast, officers from agencies that reportedly provide organized training on the new ADVL had lower odds, rather than higher, to believe that female officers or a combination of male and female officers are more acceptable than male officers to handle domestic violence victims. Meanwhile, agency training on the ADVL appeared to promote officers' favorable attitudes toward combining both genders' officers to confront domestic violence offenders. Future studies should examine the content and teaching method of these training sessions to understand better and explain the effects of training on officer attitudes.

Lastly, while the perception of handling DV as important police work does not predict any of responding preferences, officers' pro-arrest attitudes are related to lower odds of preferring mixed gender to male officers to deal with domestic violence offenders. Pro-arrest attitudes are also connected to greater odds of favoring both female officers and mixed gender officers over male officers to handle domestic violence cases overall. It seems that officers' more punitive attitudes toward domestic violence, while curbing their support for a mixed-gender officer approach to tackle offenders, promote their favorable opinions on having female and mixed-gender officers to respond to domestic violence cases overall.

Limitations and Implications

This study has several limitations. First, data analysis relied on a convenience sample. Nationwide random sampling surveys would be ideal for producing results that are more generalizable to the population. Second, the study only assessed officers' attitudes toward their preference for handling domestic violence. Future studies should investigate officers' operational behaviors and reveal how attitudes may affect their behaviors. Third, this study did not empirically explain some interesting relationships that it revealed. For instance, it shows that higher tolerance for DV may have led to a preference for women or combo over men, possibly because for officers with a high tolerance for DV, they did not view DV as an important social problem that deserves policemen's attention and efforts. Future research should examine the underlying causal mechanism that links gender-related attitudes and officer preference. Similarly, given that gender showed some significant effect on officer attitudes in the bivariate analysis but not in multivariate analysis, future research should explore the possibility that some of the independent variables in this study (e.g., attitudes, experience) may mediate the impact of gender on officer preference. Lastly, qualitative research should be conducted to garner frontline officers' lived experience in handling domestic violence, shed light on their lessons

learned, and their frustrations, satisfaction, challenges, and gains.

The study shows that both female and male officers alike have strong preferences for gendered roles of officers in handling domestic violence cases, with female officers assigned with the role of responding to victims of the violence while male officers associated with the role of dealing with the offenders of the violence. As for gender-related attitudes, support for gender equality and tolerance for domestic violence are among the most significant predictors of officers' preferences for appropriate responders. Policymakers and police administrators should strive to promote a more gender balanced view among officers. Feminist non-government organizations need to further challenge the discriminatory recruitment policy of higher education institutions of public security, facilitating policy changes to allow more qualified female high school graduates to enter higher education in policing. In the workplace, the gendered task/position assignment pattern should be abolished, permitting female officers an equal opportunity to work in the field if they wish. Police departments should further integrate women officers into the full range of police work, particularly street-level patrol duty at neighborhood stations. Working at the front line can increase female officers' experience and skills in responding to domestic violence cases, which can benefit the police force overall in effective domestic violence intervention. The police culture should also be reformed to empower female officers and boost their confidence and ability to deal with domestic violence.

Further, raising police officers' awareness of gender discrimination is essential, as women can internalize sexism and act just like chauvinistic men. Both male and female officers need to receive training on gender equality and harm to domestic violence. During the training of police cadets in colleges and universities, courses on gender issues and domestic violence should be incorporated into their curriculum. Officers of both genders should view domestic violence as a serious social problem and thus an integral part of legitimate police work. They should be willing and ready to control and apprehend domestic violence offenders who are mostly men and be comfortable and competent in interacting with domestic violence female victims (Sun and Chu 2010). Changing officers' attitudes toward domestic violence is critically important that can be greatly improved by strong encouragement from both police leaders and supervisors. Finally, given the value of scientific research, studies like Sherman and Berk's (1984) Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment should be conducted to compare the effects of different police interventions on recidivism rates, and evaluate whether a similar pre-arrest policy is suitable for the Chinese context. Perhaps when officers are more receptive to the idea of using arrest as a proper intervention approach, they are more likely to embrace fully integrating female officers into police work, including responding to domestic violence cases.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Declarations of Interest None.

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