Original Research

Bidirectional Intimate Partner Violence Among Chinese Women: Patterns and Risk Factors

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Abstract

Bidirectional intimate partner violence (BIPV) refers to the co-occurrence of violence perpetration by both partners. BIPV has been analyzed using samples from different sociodemographic contexts but has yet to be fully explored in China. The present study employed a latent class approach to identify BIPV patterns, rates of prevalence, and associated risk factors among a sample of 1,301 heterosexual adult women in mainland China. Five distinct patterns of BIPV were identified, including (a) *bidirectional psychological aggression*, (b) *bidirectional violence of all types*, (c) *multi-type victimization with psychological aggression*, (d) *minimal violence*, and (e) *bidirectional multi-types without physical violence*. Marital status, education, employment status, acceptance of male dominance, and justification of intimate partner violence (IPV) were found to be predictive of different types of BIPV. Our findings suggest a need for a conceptual recognition of the heterogeneity and bidirectionality of IPV among Chinese women. Future research should extend to other diverse populations and sociocultural or clinical contexts in China. IPV assessments,

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research, and social programs ought to recognize the complexity of IPV and consider various IPV patterns specific to heterosexual women.

Introduction

Bidirectional intimate partner violence (BIPV), also known as mutual partner violence, refers to the co-occurrence of violence perpetration by both partners in an intimate relationship (Straus, 2011, 2015). In other words, in a BIPV incident, a person may act as both a victim and a perpetrator. In recent decades, an increasing number of studies have empirically supported the prevalent occurrence of BIPV across varied geo-cultural contexts and among different populations (see Straus, 2011, for a review). For instance, compared with unidirectional types of intimate partner violence (e.g., male-to-female IPV), BIPV was found to be the most prevalent and a common phenomenon in different samples, such as the general population and participants recruited in the criminal justice system (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012).

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate BIPV in mainland China, specifically among Chinese heterosexual women. Although BIPV, as an increasingly common type of IPV, has been studied in other populations around the world (e.g., Kahya, 2018; Weiss et al., 2017), it has yet to be fully explored in the Chinese population. Previous studies focusing on IPV in China have often conceptualized partner violence as unidirectional and mostly male-to-female violence (see a review by Breckenridge et al., 2019), a conceptualization that has predominantly focused on Chinese women's experience of victimization. Studies on women's perpetration of IPV and experience of BIPV remain limited. In March 2016, China passed its first National Anti-domestic Violence Law to address IPV (The National People's Congress of China, 2016). According to the new legal tool, domestic violence is defined as controlling behavior, physical abuse, psychological violence, and other forms of harm that occur between family members, such as married or cohabiting couples, parents, and children; however, intimate partners that do not live together are not protected by the law, such as dating intimate partners. Nevertheless, the passage of the Anti-domestic Violence Law is a significant first step toward securing the legal protection of IPV victims as well as facilitating the development of social services in China.

These development efforts will benefit from continued research that examines the complexity of IPV in Chinese society. Whereas a growing body of research has focused on either victimization or perpetration of IPV independently, studies on BIPV in China have been sporadic (e.g., Chen & Chan, 2019; Hou et al., 2010; Parish et al., 2004). Guided by a theoretical premise that IPV is heterogeneous and dyadic in nature (Straus, 2011, 2015), the present study sought to extend the literature by examining BIPV patterns, pattern-specific rates, and risk factors among Chinese heterosexual women.

Bidirectional IPV in Existing Typological Models

Several typological models of heterosexual IPV have been developed to reveal the bidirectionality of IPV (Johnson, 2006; Swan & Snow, 2002). This vein of inquiry has contributed to the understanding of BIPV and in particular the ways in which different types of IPV interact to form unique patterns.

Drawing upon a sample of 108 heterosexual women involved in the criminal justice system, Swan and Snow (2002) proposed a three-type model, including *victims, aggressors*, and *mixed relationships*. The last group is further divided into two subtypes: *mixed-female coercive* and *mixed-male coercive*, both of which feature a relatively equal use of physical violence by both partners but high controlling behavior by either the female partner or the male partner, respectively. The bidirectional and dyadic nature of violence is reflected not only in the three types but also in the status of victims and aggressors. In their study, a victim or aggressor status was determined by the difference in the total counts of being a perpetrator of varied forms of violence and the total counts of being a victim of corresponding types of violence, using a cutoff benchmark set at one fourth of the standard deviation (Swan & Snow, 2002). Therefore, even in the victim and aggressor groups, violence might still be bidirectional but more prominently subjected to asymmetric power and control. For instance, a woman might be in a powerless position in a heterosexual relationship and used violence to merely resist her partner's violent domination and control. While the typology by Swan and Snow (2002) was developed based on the IPV experience of women (e.g., victims or aggressors), alternatively, Johnson (2006) proposed a four-type IPV typology based on the patterns of violence, including *mutual violent control, couple violence, intimate terrorism*, and *violent resistance. Mutual violent control* refers to violent and controlling behaviors imposed by both partners; *couple violence* alludes to a more situational type of BIPV that does not involve coercive controlling behaviors; *intimate terrorism*, also known as "patriarchal terrorism" (Johnson, 1995), signals that the violence is solely

perpetrated by male partners; and *violent resistanc*e represents violent acts initiated by female partners as a defensive response to intimate terrorism.

Although the above models have made important contributions to our understanding of multiple ways in which different forms of partner violence co-occur and may be perpetrated by both partners, limitations exist regarding the theoretical premise of both models. Specifically, as Swan and Snow (2002) argued, severe partner violence is predominantly perpetrated by male partners, whereas IPV perpetration by women should be understood as a defensive response in the context of male violence. These propositions have been criticized for excluding women-initiated violence (Capaldi & Kim, 2007; Straus & Gozjolko, 2014; Winstok & Straus, 2016). Although BIPV is not equivalent to symmetric perpetration and equal power dynamics in a heterosexual relationship (Capaldi et al., 2018), it is possible that both men and women possess equal power or that women actually hold more power. Recently, another heterosexual IPV typological model, *Dyadic Concordance Types* (DCTs; see Straus, 2015), classifies IPV into three groups by directionality, including *male-only, female-only*, and *both*. The first two groups refer to situations where violence is predominantly directed by partners who are male or female, respectively; the last group refers to bidirectional partner violence. The strength of DCTs (Straus, 2015) lies in its conceptual inclusiveness of both gender symmetry and asymmetry. While these typological models jointly offer a promising theoretical foundation for understanding heterosexual women's IPV experience, the extent to which the IPV types identified in the models are applicable to women in China remains largely unknown.

Prevalence and Risk Factors of IPV Among Chinese Women

The existing literature reveals that Chinese women experience IPV victimization, and they also perpetrate different types of IPV against their male partners. Data from 2010 China's National Survey on Women's Social Status showed that approximately 25% of Chinese women experienced psychological aggression, physical violence, and sexual violence in their lives (Xiao & Feng, 2014). The rates of IPV victimization were higher among women with specific sociodemographic characteristics, such as rural-to-urban migrant women (Chen et al., 2016; Li & Jin, 2012), women in rural areas (Gao,Yan & Lin, 2011), college students (Kamimura et al., 2016), women postpartum (Chan et al., 2011), and women who recently experienced natural disasters such as earthquake (Chan & Zhang, 2011). The rates of IPV also vary by type

of violence. A recent review of empirical studies between 1997 and 2016 in both English and Chinese found that the victimization rates of physical violence and psychological violence for women ranged between 5.4% and 27% and between 24.5% and 30%, respectively (Yang et al., 2019). In addition, 1.7% of women experienced sexual violence in a lifetime and 0.7% in the past 12 months (Yang et al., 2019).

With respect to IPV perpetration against men, studies reported a higher rate of psychological aggression than physical and sexual assault among Chinese heterosexual couples (see review by Breckenridge et al., 2019). Cui and colleagues' study showed that 26% of female participants reported physical violence perpetration against their male partners, and 49% of them perpetrated psychological violence in the past year (Cui et al., 2012). In the study by Xiao and Feng (2014), nearly 23% of Chinese male participants reported having been exposed to at least one type of IPV. Specifically, psychological assault (22.7%) was the most common type of IPV perpetrated by their female partners, followed by physical violence (2.5%) and sexual violence (0.3%; Xiao & Feng, 2014). In addition, IPV perpetration by women was also found to be higher compared with that of their male partners among city-based college students (Xue, Cui & Gelles, 2019).

BIPV in China

A limited number of studies have assessed BIPV in Chinese society. Hou and colleagues (2010) sampled 192 heterosexual couples and found that 31.8% of them used psychological violence against each other (or bidirectional psychological violence), with 16.1% bidirectional physical violence and 10.5% bidirectional sexual violence, respectively. A recent study by Chen and Chan (2019) also found a bidirectional pattern in all four forms of partner violence. Specifically, mutual psychological violence was the most prevalent (25.44%), followed by mutual physical assault (3.68%), mutual sexual violence (2.62%), and mutual injury (1.08%; Chen & Chan, 2019). However, these studies analyzed different forms of IPV (e.g., physical, psychological, or sexual violence) independently without investigating how these basic IPV types may meaningfully cluster with one another in their actual occurrence, forming unique bidirectional IPV patterns. In other words, BIPV remains understudied in China.

Limited research investigated factors associated with BIPV among Chinese women. The present study reviewed existing studies that assessed factors associated with either IPV victimization or IPV perpetration. The existing literature has examined sociodemographic factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, age, and rural/urban residency; Chan et al., 2008; Chen & Xia,

2016; Gao et al., 2011; Parish et al., 2004; Tu & Lou, 2017; Xu et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2014), marriage-related factors (e.g., length of marriage, marital status, marital stability, and marital commitment; Chen & Xia, 2016; Lin et al., 2018; Xu, 1997), social or intra-family support (Chan et al., 2008; Emery et al., 2017), IPV-related attitudes and beliefs (e.g., justification of IPV, endorsement of IPV as family private issues; Xu et al., 2005), and women's behaviors (e.g., substance abuse and use of specific media; Kamimura et al., 2016; Parish et al., 2004; Xue et al., 2018). The following review focused on factors used in the present study, including age, marital status, socioeconomic status, residence status, acceptance of male dominance, and justification of IPV.

Demographic Background

Findings have been mixed as to whether age is a significant factor to predict IPV. Some studies reported that younger age significantly increased the risks of all types of IPV victimization (Chan et al., 2008) or physical violence particularly (Gao et al., 2011) among women. Younger age was also reported as a risk factor for psychological violence among rural-to-urban migrant women in China (Li & Jin, 2012). In contrast, several studies found that age was not related to women's victimization of any types of IPV (Chen & Xia, 2016; Lin et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2005).

Married women were less likely than divorced women to report IPV perpetrated by their male partners, including psychological violence, physical violence, sexual abuse, and controlling behavior (Lin et al., 2018). Chen and Xia (2016) found that shorter length of marriage was associated with an increased risk of victimization among rural women. However, in an earlier study by Xu (1997) among urban Chinese women, longer length of marriage increased the risk of victimization, and other marriage-related risk factors identified in the study were marital instability, poor partner communication, and more marital conflicts. In a sample recruited among Chinese women who visited an urban health clinic, partners having extramarital affairs were also found to increase the likelihood of victimization, whereas marital status had no effect on victimization (Xu et al., 2005).

Women's socioeconomic status and financial factors were also found to predict IPV victimization and perpetration among Chinese women. Women whose education levels were higher than those of their male partners were found to increase the risk of psychological violence victimization among women, and women's greater financial contribution to the household was associated with an increased risk of physical violence victimization (Xiao & Feng, 2014). Contradictorily, a national representative study showed that

women's higher contribution to family income decreased women's IPV victimization (Parish et al., 2004). Higher levels of education were linked to a greater risk of physical violence victimization among women in rural regions (Gao et al., 2011). Women's financial challenges (e.g., low financial autonomy, having debt, and no income) were associated with an increased risk of various types of IPV (Chan et al., 2008; Tu & Lou, 2017; Xu et al., 2005). Being employed was reported as a protective factor of IPV in some studies (Xu et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2014). Finally, residing in rural regions raised the likelihood of women's IPV victimization but was not a significant factor for IPV among men in heterosexual relationships (Parish et al., 2004; Xiao & Feng, 2014).

Relevant Attitudes

In intimate heterosexual relationships, the acceptance of male dominance refers to a series of attitudes that endorses the authority and power of men in the relationship. Justification of IPV refers to the extent to which one believes that the use of violence is appropriate in certain circumstances. Both attitudes were associated with IPV victimization and perpetration in different population groups in China. For instance, higher justification of IPV was associated with increased risk of women's IPV victimization and male perpetration of IPV in heterosexual relationships (Lin et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2005). Acceptance of male dominance was found to predict IPV among college students (Kamimura et al., 2016) and health clinic–based women (Xu et al., 2005) but was not a significant factor for IPV among urban Chinese women (Lin et al., 2018).

The Present Study

The present study sought to extend the current literature on IPV in China by examining BIPV patterns, rates, and associated risk factors among Chinese adult women who self-identify as heterosexual. To identify BIPV patterns, we conducted a latent class analysis (LCA) by including indicators of both victimization and perpetration of IPV. LCA is a "person-centered" statistical technique that is commonly used to group participants based on homogeneous characteristics according to their responses to a set of selected categorical variables (Porcu & Giambona, 2016). Therefore, this approach allows us to identify distinct patterns of BIPV in the sample and the prevalence of each pattern. Based on the identified BIPV patterns, we then identify associated risk factors by multinomial logistic regression analysis.

Method

Procedure and Participants

Data used in this study were collected from mainland China between September 10 and 25, 2015, which was 6 months before the promulgation of the Anti-domestic Violence Law in China. The research team conducted a research project to examine the experience of IPV among both heterosexual and sexual minority groups, aiming to advocate for a more inclusive legal framework that protects individuals of different sexual orientations. The research team developed a survey on Wenjuanxing (wjx.cn), a Chinese online questionnaire platform, and created a link directed to the survey. The team employed three strategies to recruit participants from the general public: (a) sharing the project on two Chinese mainstream social media platforms (i.e., Weibo and Wechat), which are commonly used among the general Chinese population; (b) collaborating with women's rights or anti-IPV organizations (e.g., Tongyu, Women's Voice, Anti-domestic Violence Civil Advocacy Group) that helped the research team in distributing the survey to potential participants; and (c) distributing the research information to members of all kinds of email groups related to IPV or domestic violence advocacy.

The original sample consisted of a total of 3,334 participants, including 2,875 women, 434 men, and 25 who identified as another gender. Of all women, 1,941 self-identified as heterosexual, and 934 self-identified as homosexual ($n = 319$, 9.57%), bisexual ($n = 415$, 12.45%), other sexual orientation ($n = 33$, 0.99%), or unknown ($n = 167$, 5%). Given that the primary goal of the study was to advocate for a sexual orientation–inclusive law, the original sample has a relatively high percentage of participants from sexual minority groups.

For the present study, we included all participants who self-identified as women, heterosexual, and were in an intimate relationship in the past 12 months at the time of the survey, resulting in a final sample of 1,301 individuals. Their ages ranged from 18 to 70 years ($M = 27.2$, $SD = 7.3$). Approximately one third of the women were married ($n = 402$, 30.9%), and about two thirds were employed ($n = 801$, 61.57%). The majority (60.95%) completed college. More than one third had a monthly income below 2,000 Chinese Yuan,[1] with 49.42% between 2,000 and 8,000 Chinese Yuan and 12.84% above 8,000 Chinese Yuan. About two thirds (63.34%) resided in either a provincial capital or a municipal city in

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants and Other Variables Used in the LCA.

Characteristics	n (%)	M (SD)	Range	α
Age	1,301	27.23 (7.30)	18–70	—
Education				
Completed middle school or below	12 (0.92)	—		—
Completed high school	52 (4.00)			
Completed an associate diploma	125 (9.61)			
Completed college	793 (60.95)	—		—
Completed graduate school or above	319 (24.52)	—		—
Income				
Below 2,000 Chinese Yuan	491 (37.74)	—		—
2,000–8,000 Chinese Yuan	643 (49.42)	—		—
Above 8,000 Chinese Yuan	167 (12.84)	—		—
Employment				
Employed	801 (61.57)	—		—
Unemployed students[a]	411 (31.59)	—		—
Unemployed nonstudents	89 (6.84)	—		—
Marital status				
Married	402 (30.90)	—		—
Cohabiting	134 (10.30)	—		—
In a dating relationship	502 (38.59)			
Recent relationship ended[b]	250 (19.22)			
Other[b]	13 (1.00)			
Status of residence				
Rural regions/village towns	79 (6.07)	—		—
County-/prefecture-level regions	398 (30.59)	—		—
Provincial capital/municipal regions	824 (63.34)	—		—
IPV justification	1,301	5.57 (1.96)	4–20	.83
Endorsement of heterosexual norms	1,301	9.19 (2.74)	4–20	.72
IPV victimization (yes)				
Psychological aggression	715 (55.0)	—		.75
Threatening and controlling	285 (21.9)	—		.87
Physical violence	159 (12.2)	—		.83
Sexual violence	255 (19.6)	—		.83
IPV perpetration (yes)				
Psychological aggression	883 (67.9)	—		.76
Threatening and controlling	297 (22.8)	—		.88
Physical violence	132 (10.1)	—		.86
Sexual violence	76 (5.8)	—		.90

Note. IPV = intimate partner violence; LCA = latent class analysis; α = ordinal alpha based on polychoric correlations.
[a]Unemployed students = Students who were either attending college or graduate school. [b]Recent relationship ended/Other = Divorced or formerly in a relationship but relationship ended/Other situations.

China. Table 1 provides detailed sociodemographic characteristics of the study sample.

Measures

Except adapting the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales to the Chinese context (CTS2), all other measures used in the present study were originally developed in Chinese. All participants also completed the survey in Chinese.

IPV. Participants were asked to report the occurrence of IPV victimization and perpetration in the past 12 months. In all, 15 items were developed by adapting the CTS2 to the Chinese context (Straus et al., 1996). The 15 items were used to assess four types of IPV, including *psychological aggression* (e.g., "neglecting," "verbally humiliating or cursing," and "talking ill or laughing at"), *threatening and controlling behavior* (e.g., "threatening with self-harming or suicide attempts," "restricting social interaction with family or friends," and "restricting physical freedom"), *physical violence* (e.g., "slapping, pushing," or "shoving, kicking, biting, punching," or "choking," "throwing sharp objects or using those to attack"), and *sexual violence* (e.g., forcing to have sexual activities). Three-point Likert-type scales were used for each question item (1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, and 3 = *often*). We conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to assess whether the four types of IPV emerged from the data as distinct factor dimensions (see Table 2). Through the EFA, four factors were identified, representing four types of IPV, including *psychological violence, threatening and controlling behavior, physical violence*, and *sexual violence*. Ordinal alpha was used to assess the internal consistency for each of the four types of IPV including both victimization and perpetration. The values ranged from .76 to .90 (Zumbo et al., 2007). In the present study, the response was coded as *did not occur in the past 12 months* when the participant answered *never* to all the items on a measure (e.g., the answers of all three items in the psychological aggression measure were *never*); a response of *sometimes* or *often* reported on any of the items on a measure was coded as *occurred in the past 12 months*.

Justification of IPV. Four items were summed up to measure IPV justification, including "harsh words or deeds are ways to show love," "there is no reason to decline unreasonable requests, if one loves the partner deeply," "when under stress, it is understandable to be physically or sexually aggressive toward one's partner," and "beating or being verbally aggressive is appropriate if the partner does something wrong." A 5-point Likert-type scale was used for each item (1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *disagree*, and 5 = *strongly disagree*). All items were reverse-coded. A higher number

Table 2. Factor Analysis Differentiating Four Types of IPV (*N* = 1,301).

Variables and items	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
Psychological violence				
Neglecting	**0.75**			
Verbally humiliating or cursing	**0.76**			
Talking ill or laughing at	**0.76**			
Threatening and controlling behavior				
Verbally threatening	0.43	**0.62**		
Stalking or digital monitoring		**0.76**		
Threatening with self-harming or suicide attempts		**0.52**		
Restricting social interaction with family or friends		**0.82**		
Restricting physical freedom		**0.79**		
Controlling financially[a]		**0.45**[a]	0.44[a]	
Physical violence				
Slapping, pushing, or shoving			**0.63**	
Kicking, biting, punching, or choking			**0.75**	
Throwing sharp objects or using those to attack			**0.83**	
Burning with boiling water or cigarettes			**0.72**	
Sexual violence				
Forcing sexually touching or kissing				**0.90**
Forcing sexual activities				**0.87**
Eigenvalues	6.37	1.54	1.36	1.16
Percent of variance explained	42.5	10.3	9.1	7.7
Total percent of variance explained		69.5		

Note. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using polychoric correlation matrix and varimax rotation. Response categories include (1) *never*; (2) *sometimes*; and (3) *often*. Only factor loadings >.40 are displayed in the table. IPV = intimate partner violence.
[a]The item *Controlling financially* loaded onto both Factor 2 (*threatening and controlling behavior*) and Factor 3 (*physical violence*); because this item represented a unique aspect of controlling behavior (Factor 2), we retained the item in Factor 2.

indicated a higher level of acceptance of IPV justification. The ordinal alpha was .83, indicating good internal consistency.

Acceptance of male dominance. The additive scale included four items: (a) *having premarital sex put women in a more disadvantaged position (compared with men)*; (b) *on a date, men should pay*; (c) *men are the breadwinner*

and women should take care of domestic duties, and this is the best arrangement for a family; and (d) *in a relationship, if men express sexual desire, women should do their best to meet his need*. Response categories ranged from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. All items were reverse-coded so that a higher number indicated a higher level of endorsement of the heterosexual norms described above. The scale has an ordinal alpha of .72, suggesting good internal consistency.

Sociodemographic factors. Six sociodemographic variables were age, marital status, education, income, employment status, and residence status. Age was measured in years. Marital status was categorized into *married, cohabiting, in a dating relationship, recent relationship ended (inclusive of all relationships such as divorce and dating)*, and *other*. Education was categorized into *completed middle school or below, completed high school, completed an associate diploma, completed college*, and *completed a master's degree or higher*. Income was categorized into *monthly earnings below 2,000 Chinese Yuan, between 2,000 and 8,000 Chinese Yuan*, and *above 8,000 Chinese Yuan*. Employment status included three categories: *employed, unemployed students*, and *unemployed non-students*. Status of residence was measured using three categories: *rural regions or village towns, in a county or prefecture-level region*, and *in provincial capital or municipal regions*.

Analyses

The LCA included eight indicators: participants' experience of both victimization and perpetration of four types of IPV (i.e., psychological aggression, threatening/controlling behavior, physical violence, and sexual violence). To assess model fit, we used the following fit indices: Log-likelihood (LL), Akaike information criterion (AIC), Bayesian information criterion (BIC); adjusted Bayesian information criterion (ABIC); Lo–Mendell–Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test (LMR Adj. LRT), and bootstrapped likelihood ratio test (BLRT). In addition, we also took into consideration the parsimony principle and conceptual interpretability. Multinomial logistic regression analyses, as part of the three-step LCA approach (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014) in Mplus 8.3, were employed to estimate the predictive power of eight auxiliary variables: age, marital status, education, residence status, income, employment, acceptance of male dominance, and justification of IPV. Other analyses were conducted in SPSS 25.0.

Results

As shown in Table 1, the prevalence rates for specific types of IPV victimization in the past 12 months ranged between 19.6% and 55%, with psychological aggression being the most prevalent and sexual violence the least. For IPV perpetration, the prevalence for psychological aggression was the highest (67.9%), followed by threatening and controlling behavior (22.8%), physical violence (10.1%), and sexual violence (5.8%).

With respect to the LCA, we first examined the fit indices. As shown in Table 3, both a five-class solution and a four-class solution demonstrated good model fit with the five-class solution having better ABIC and entropy values. Although the parsimony principle may suggest the four-class solution, it is also imperative that we carefully consider the interpretability of the model candidates (Porcu & Giambona, 2016). A five-class solution appeared to be the best-fitted model from a conceptual or interpretational perspective, as it added a key class that fits the type of mutual violent control in Johnson's (2006) IPV typology, and this BIPV pattern has also been identified in other population samples (e.g., Grest et al., 2018) and aligns with the theoretical hypothesis of gender symmetry. This class had the smallest sample size ($n = 43$), representing a group of women who not only experienced multiple types of IPV victimization but simultaneously perpetrated these types of violence against their partners in mainland China. However, such incidents are not as prevalent as other BIPV patterns. We retained the five-class solution.

Class Memberships and Prevalence Rates

As shown in Figure 1, the largest class identified in the five-class model comprises women who both experienced psychological aggression by their partners and perpetrated psychological aggression against their partners in the past 12 months (34.6%, $n = 450$); we named this class *bidirectional psychological aggression* (B-PA). The next two classes were equally prevalent. One was made up of women with high to medium probabilities of experiencing psychological aggression, threatening and controlling, and sexual violence by their male partners as well as perpetrating psychological aggression, threatening and controlling against their partners (26.3%, $n = 342$); we denoted this class as *bidirectional multi-types without physical violence* (B-M w/o PH). The other one featured extremely low or close to zero probabilities of all forms of IPV victimization and perpetration (26.9%, $n = 350$) and was, therefore, labeled as *minimal violence* (NON). The fourth class consisted of women with high to medium probabilities of experiencing victimization of all four types

Table 3. Model Fit Indices for Latent Class Models From One to Seven Classes ($N = 1,301$).

Model	# pars	LL	AIC	BIC	ABIC	Entropy	LMR Adj. LRT	BLRT p value	Smallest sample size (n)
1 class	8	−4,938.557	9,893.114	9,934.481	9,909.069	—	—	—	—
2 classes	17	−4,406.054	8,846.108	8,934.013	8,880.012	.734	1,048.756 ($p < .0001$)	$p < .0001$	458
3 classes	26	−4,308.243	8,668.487	8,802.930	8,720.341	.675	192.636 ($p < .0001$)	$p < .0001$	277
4 classes	**35**	**−4,271.710**	**8,613.420**	**8,794.401**	**8,683.223**	**.834**	**71.952 ($p < .0001$)**	**$p < .0001$**	**156**
5 classes	44	−4,242.107	8,572.214	8,799.733	8,659.966	.843	58.303 ($p < .0001$)	$p < .0001$	43
6 classes	53	−4,227.617	8,561.233	8,835.290	8,666.935	.727	28.539 ($p = .2108 > .05$)	$p < .0001$	42
7 classes	62	−4,214.620	8,553.239	8,873.834	8,676.890	.769	25.597 ($p = .0757 > .05$)	$p = .05$	42

Note. # pars = number of estimated parameters; LL = Log-likelihood; AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; ABIC = adjusted Bayesian information criterion; LMR Adj. LRT = Lo–Mendell–Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test; BLRT = bootstrapped likelihood ratio test.
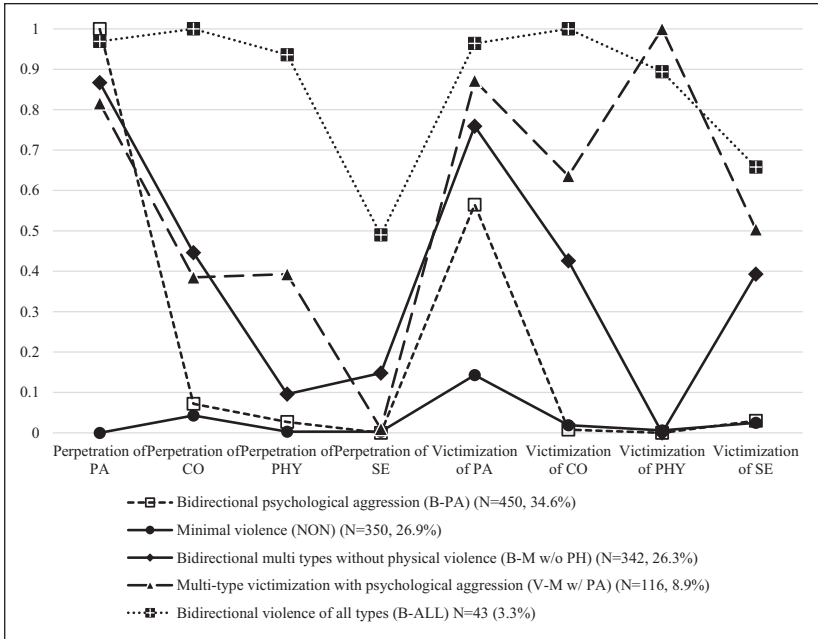
Figure 1. Latent class probabilities of IPV victimization and perpetration based on the five-class model.

Note. IPV = intimate partner violence.

with high psychological aggression but a disproportionately lower perpetration of other IPV types (8.9%, *n* = 116), and we named the class *multi-type victimization with psychological aggression* (V-M w/PA). The least prevalent class featured high to medium probabilities of both victimization and perpetration of all four IPV types (3.3%, *n* = 43), named *bidirectional violence of all types* (B-ALL).

Risk Factors

Multinomial logistic regressions were conducted to examine potential BIPV risk factors. As demonstrated in Table 4, five factors were found to be predictive of different classes of BIPV, including marital status, education, employment status, acceptance of male dominance, and justification of IPV. Looking at the first model (NON vs. B-PA), both married women (odds ratio [OR] = 2.06, *p* < .005), and those in cohabiting relationships (OR = 1.69, *p* < .05)

Table 4. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results: All Other Classes Versus NON.

Variables	B-PA vs. NON[a] OR (95% IC)	B-M w/o PH vs. NON[a] OR (95% IC)	B-ALL vs. NON[a] OR (95% IC)	V-M w/PA vs. NON[a] OR (95% IC)
Age	0.99 [0.97, 1.02]	0.98 [0.95, 1.00]	0.99 [0.91, 1.08]	0.99 [0.95, 1.03]
Marital				
Married	2.06** [1.40, 3.02]	0.93 [0.63, 1.42]	0.21 [0.01, 5.36]	0.91 [0.49, 1.70]
Cohabiting	1.69* [1.06, 2.69]	1.06 [0.63, 1.79]	3.37* [1.29, 8.81]	1.07 [0.55, 2.07]
In a relationship/Relationship ended/Other (ref.)				
Education				
Below college[b]	1.30 [0.78, 2.18]	1.87* [1.06, 3.27]	2.42 [0.42, 13.94]	2.01 [0.99, 4.08]
Completed college	1.00 [0.74, 1.39]	1.11 [0.76, 1.60]	1.32 [0.20, 8.86]	1.50 [0.86, 2.62]
Completed graduate school or above (ref.)				
Status of residence				
Rural/town	1.36 [0.74, 2.49]	1.37 [0.72, 2.60]	1.33 [0.35, 5.01]	0.55 [0.20, 1.50]
County/prefecture-level	0.88 [0.65, 1.20]	1.11 [0.80, 1.53]	1.09 [0.47, 2.51]	0.90 [0.6, 1.35]
Provincial capital or municipality (ref.)				

(continued)

Table 4. (continued)

Variables	B-PA vs. NON[a] OR (95% IC)	B-M w/o PH vs. NON[a] OR (95% IC)	B-ALL vs. NON[a] OR (95% IC)	V-M w/PA vs. NON[a] OR (95% IC)
Income				
Below 2,000 Chinese Yuan	1.18 [0.64, 2.20]	0.84 [0.41, 1.76]	0.58 [0.04, 9.21]	0.57 [0.19, 1.73]
2,000–8,000 Chinese Yuan	1.23 [0.82, 1.87]	1.11 [0.68, 1.83]	1.26 [0.11, 14.27]	0.95 [0.51, 1.77]
Above 8,000 Chinese Yuan (ref.)				
Employment				
Unemployed students	1.38 [0.80, 2.37]	1.41 [0.75, 2.66]	1.58 [0.37, 6.68]	1.01 [0.40, 2.56]
Unemployed nonstudents	1.98 [0.98, 4.03]	2.80* [1.27, 6.16]	2.10 [0.19, 23.49]	1.24 [0.39, 3.97]
Employed (ref.)				
Acceptance of male dominance	1.03 [0.97, 1.09]	1.08* [1.02, 1.15]	1.12 [0.96, 1.30]	1.09* [1.02, 1.18]
Justification of IPV	1.08 [0.99, 1.19]	1.14* [1.03, 1.27]	1.35** [1.15, 1.59]	1.13 [1.00, 1.27]

Note. B-PA = Bidirectional psychological aggression (Class 1); B-M w/o PH = Bidirectional multi-types without physical violence (Class 2); B-ALL = Bidirectional violence of all types (Class 3); NON = minimal violence (Class 4); V-M w/PA = multi-type victimization with psychological aggression (Class 5); OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

[a]Reference group is NON. [b]Below college = Completed middle school or below/completed high school/completed an associate diploma.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .005$.

were more likely to experience B-PA. In the second model, which presents the comparison between B-M w/o PH and NON, four variables stood out. Women with an education level of below college (OR $= 1.87$, $p < .05$), being an unemployed nonstudent (OR $= 2.80$, $p < .05$), higher endorsement of male dominance (OR $= 1.08$, $p < .05$), and higher levels of IPV justification (OR $= 1.14$, $p < .05$) were more likely to be exposed to B-M w/o PH. Two variables were significant in the third model. Women who reported higher levels of IPV justification (OR $= 1.35$, $p < .005$) and those in cohabiting relationships (OR $= 3.37$, $p < .05$) were more likely to experience B-ALL. Only one variable was significant in the last model. Women who endorsed male dominance were more likely to encounter V-M w/PA (OR $= 1.09$, $p < .05$).

Table 5 displays more comparisons using the group of B-PA as the reference group. In the first model, interestingly, being married became a protective factor that decreased the risks of B-M w/o PH (OR $= 0.45$, $p < .005$) and V-M w/PA (OR $= 0.44$, $p < .05$), respectively. This protective effect, however, was not found significant when comparing B-ALL with B-PA. Women who reported higher levels of IPV justification were more likely to experience B-ALL (OR $= 1.25$, $p < .05$), but this effect was not found for other BIPV classes.

Discussion

This article examined the bidirectional patterns of IPV among heterosexual women in China. Only a handful of studies have explored IPV bidirectionality in the Chinese population, all of which classified different types of violence independently on the basis of their physical, psychological, or sexual nature (Chen & Chan, 2019; Hou et al., 2010; Parish et al., 2004). The present study is a first attempt to include Chinese women's victimization and perpetration of multiple types of IPV all together in a latent class model to investigate how different forms of IPV may cluster together forming unique patterns. Whereas some patterns we found coincide with findings in previous studies with populations in different countries, others are quite unique to Chinese women, furthering our understanding of the heterogeneity and dyadic nature of IPV in the context of mainland China.

Consistent with previous studies that reported a comparably higher prevalence of bidirectional psychological violence in China (Chen & Chan, 2019; Hou et al., 2010), both victimization and perpetration of psychological aggression clustered in the present sample and formed the largest class, B-PA (34.6%). That B-PA surfaced as a distinct type in Chinese women was also in line with several prior studies in Western populations (Grest et al., 2018; Haynie et al., 2013). A recent study of women in the United States, however,

Table 5. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results (continued): B-M w/o PH, B-ALL, and V-M w/PA Versus B-PA.

Variables	B-M w/o PH vs. B-PA[a] OR (95% IC)	B-ALL vs. B-PA[a] OR (95% IC)	V-M w/PA vs. B-PA[a] OR (95% IC)
Age	0.98 [0.96, 1.01]	1.00 [0.92, 1.09]	0.99 [0.96, 1.03]
Marital			
Married	0.45** [0.28, 0.72]	0.10 [0.00, 2.59]	0.44** [0.24, 0.83]
Cohabiting	0.63 [0.34, 1.15]	2.00 [0.75, 5.29]	0.63 [0.32, 1.25]
In a relationship/Relationship ended/Other (ref.)			
Education			
Below college[b]	1.43 [0.78, 2.63]	1.86 [0.32, 10.76]	1.54 [0.77, 3.12]
Completed college	1.09 [0.71, 1.66]	1.31 [0.19, 8.78]	1.48 [0.84, 2.60]
Completed graduate school or above (ref.)			
Status of residence			
Rural/town	1.01 [0.53, 1.93]	0.98 [0.27, 3.61]	0.41 [0.16, 1.06]
County/prefecture-level	1.26 [0.86, 1.83]	1.24 [0.53, 2.88]	1.02 [0.67, 1.55]
Provincial capital or municipality (ref.)			
Income			
Below 2,000 Chinese Yuan	0.72 [0.33, 1.55]	0.49 [0.03, 7.75]	0.48 [0.16, 1.44]
2,000–8,000 Chinese Yuan	0.90 [0.51, 1.59]	1.02 [0.10, 11.64]	0.77 [0.40, 1.45]
Employment			
Unemployed students	1.02 [0.55, 1.89]	1.14 [0.28, 4.74]	0.73 [0.30, 1.78]
Unemployed non-students	1.41 [0.72, 2.76]	1.06 [0.10, 11.28]	0.63 [0.22, 1.79]
Employed (ref.)			
Acceptance of male dominance	1.05 [0.99, 1.13]	1.09 [0.94, 1.26]	1.06 [0.99, 1.15]
Justification of IPV	1.05 [0.95, 1.16]	1.25* [1.06, 1.47]	1.04 [0.93, 1.16]

Note. B-PA = Bidirectional psychological aggression (Class 1); B-M w/o PH = Bidirectional multi-types without physical violence (Class 2); B-ALL= Bidirectional violence of all types (Class 3); NON = minimal violence (Class 4); V-M w/PA = multi-type victimization with psychological aggression (Class 5); OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.
[a]Reference group is B-PA. [b] Below college = Completed middle school or below/completed high school/completed an associate diploma.
*$p < .05$. ** $p < .005$.

found that B-PA was not a unique class but clustered with bidirectional physical violence to form a pattern (Weiss et al., 2017).

We also found that both being married and in cohabiting relationships increased the risk of B-PA, using the minimal violence class (NON) as the reference group. The risk effect of being married is consistent with previous research on marital status and BIPV in the United States (e.g., Mennicke & Wilke, 2015; Renner & Whitney, 2012). For the present study, it is also worth noting that being married also showed a significant protective effect against B-M w/o PH and V-M w/PA when using B-PA as the reference group. It seems that being married, on one hand, may increase the risk of bidirectional physical aggression in heterosexual relationships but may prevent escalation

into more severe forms of bidirectional partner violence (i.e., B-M w/o PH and V-M w/PA), on the other hand. It may be that some married couples work through their relationship conflicts through having milder forms of BIPV. Also, women in cohabiting relationships had higher odds of experiencing B-ALL, but this risk did not emerge for married women. It may be that some couples who lived together were still adjusting to the cohabiting relationship, and the fact that they spent more time with each other could potentially increase the chances of having interpersonal conflicts. In fact, the effect of women's marital status on IPV is best understood with richer contextual information related to the relationship, such as conflict resolution styles, length of marriage/relationship, and relationship satisfaction. These factors have been examined in previous IPV research in China (Chen & Xia, 2016; Xiao & Feng, 2014; Xu, 1997) but need to be explored further in studies focused on BIPV.

Consistent with previous research that revealed the association between Chinese women's lower socioeconomic status and increased odds of experiencing controlling behavior and sexual violence (e.g., Lin et al., 2018; Xue et al., 2018), we found that both lower levels of education and unemployment increased the risk of B-M w/o PH, but these two factors did not significantly predict any other class of BIPV. This finding is also consistent with research on BIPV in the United States (e.g., Melander et al., 2010; Mennicke & Wilke, 2015).

The class of V-M w/PA was dominated by women's victimization of all IPV forms. A class characterized by female-dominated perpetration did not emerge in the present sample. Our findings align with those from both China and elsewhere, showing that men in heterosexual partnerships, in general, are more likely than women to perpetrate more severe forms of violence, such as sexual and physical violence in heterosexual partnerships (Chen & Chan, 2019; Mulawa et al., 2016). Furthermore, acceptance of male dominance was found to be a significant risk factor for V-M w/PA. Women's perpetration of psychological aggression was clustered into V-M w/PA, which may reflect the self-defensive response in the context of male partner violence suggested by Johnson (2006) and Swan and Snow (2002). The class of V-M w/PA represents a bidirectional partner violence situated in asymmetric power relations, whereas the other four classes reflect more balanced dyadic relationship power dynamics.

The emergence of the class of B-ALL suggests that women may be both a victim and a perpetrator of all types of violence in heterosexual relationships. Furthermore, while acceptance of male dominance was not a significant predictor for B-ALL, women's stronger justification of IPV was found to be a risk factor for B-ALL, compared with the minimal violence group and those

who only experienced bidirectional psychological aggression. These findings imply that women's perpetration may be grounded in a stronger belief that the use of multiple forms of violence is reasonable under some circumstances. Taken together, women who perpetrate a similarly high level of IPV as their male partners may not be simply seen as passive defenders living in a patriarchal family culture that justifies men's domination over women. China's open-door economic policy since the 1980s has led to dramatic social and cultural changes. The traditional Chinese family values of male dominance and superiority in relation to women have been confronted by the increased societal status of women and awareness of gender equality (Zhang & Zhao, 2018). Nevertheless, the B-ALL class remained the least prevalent (3.3%) among all five classes and was also much lower in frequency than that of women in the United States (15%; Weiss et al., 2017). This emerging type of BIPV ought to be further assessed in future studies with the Chinese population.

Several limitations of the present study need to be acknowledged. First, the self-reported and retrospective nature of the data may be subject to memory recall bias, leading to potential misreporting of past-year experience. We only obtained self-reported IPV experience from women, and their male partners' reports of IPV victimization (women's perpetration) and perpetration (women's victimization) were not included in the study. Second, we did not account for social desirability in the present study, another bias that might have led to underreporting of IPV perpetration (Costa et al., 2007). Third, because the data were cross-sectional, we were able to neither examine longitudinal changes (e.g., how would IPV patterns change over time) nor to make causal inferences (e.g., did justification of IPV cause an increased risk of women's victimization, or vice versa). Fourth, the use of a nonrandom sample limits the extent to which our findings can be generalized, especially given that women from rural regions were a rather small group in the sample. Finally, IPV victimization and perpetration indicators included in the latent class model were dichotomous, measuring whether each type of IPV occurred in the past 12 months. Therefore, the frequency of the occurrence of IPV was not taken into consideration. In addition, several other risk factors found to be influential on IPV, such as relationship length, social support, and risk behaviors, were also not included in our analyses.

Implications

Our findings bear some implications for social programs aimed at reducing IPV. First, our analyses showed that those more prevalent patterns of IPV, in fact, did not involve physical violence but consisted of either bidirectional

psychological aggression or a combination of psychological aggression and controlling behavior. As documented in a comparative study between Chinese and American college students (Lin et al., 2016), what was perceived to constitute violence varied drastically between the two populations, and the definition of what constituted IPV was still rather narrow among the Chinese participants. Therefore, a greater focus on public education about IPV should be incorporated in social interventions. As the new Anti-domestic Law in China has been established to protect victims from a wide range of forms of violence, such as psychological abuse and physical violence, it is also imperative to raise public awareness of victims' legal rights under this legal framework. Second, a few risk factors identified in the present study also demonstrate significant practical importance. We found that being in a marriage increased the risk of bidirectional psychological aggression but acted as a protective factor preventing psychological aggression from escalating to more intense forms of BIPV. The complex role of marital status ought to be seriously considered when developing programs for public education. In addition, given that the Anti-domestic Violence Law does protect violence that takes place in cohabiting relationships, awareness of the legal rights should also be raised among couples who are not married but live together, given the results of the present study that this group was more likely to be exposed to B-ALL. Finally, both lower education and unemployment were found to be risk factors, suggesting that social programs targeting on women's education and economic empowerment may be effective to prevent B-M w/o PH. Higher IPV justification was found to increase the risk of multiple BIPV patterns, indicating that attitudinal change, as part of the public education about IPV, should be a consistent focus alongside other interventions.

More directions for future research should be considered. First, IPV-related research involving Chinese women should incorporate not only the experience of victimization and perpetration but also how different types of physical, psychological, and sexual IPV co-occur with one another. The interpretation of the experiences should be grounded in the social-cultural contexts being studied as well as the situational contexts where violent behaviors are triggered. Rather than merely considering women's perpetrating behaviors as a self-defensive response (e.g., Johnson, 1995, 2006; Swan & Snow, 2002), these behaviors should be viewed in light of women's particular experience with their intimate partner and situated in dyadic interpersonal and power dynamics. Second, given the paucity of China-based research examining IPV bidirectionality, future research should consider extending this work to other population samples, such as people with other gender identities and with diverse sexual orientations, and to diverse social or clinical contexts, such as rural regions and criminal justice systems. Third, latent class modeling has the

promising methodological advantage in examining unique IPV-related behavioral patterns among individuals and revealing pattern-specific predictors and characteristics (Bogat et al., 2005), and yet it has not been extensively applied to population samples in China. Therefore, future research may also consider employing person-centered techniques (e.g., LCA, cluster analysis) to complement variable-based approaches in the examination of IPV patterns and associated influencing factors in the context of China. Finally, as IPV is both contextual and dynamic (Capaldi & Kim, 2007), it is imperative for future studies to give more conceptual attention to both the sociocultural and interpersonal contexts and individual motivations under which IPV victimization and perpetration take place. In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to understand further how IPV patterns and risk factors may change over time as an intimate relationship develops and across different life stages.

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Funding

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Note

1. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, in the year of 2015, the average annual personal income was 1,831 Chinese Yuan.

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