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Chinese police officers' attitudes toward domestic violence interventions: do training and knowledge of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law matter?*

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ABSTRACT

In March 2016, China's Anti-Domestic Violence Law became effective. The main objective of this study is to empirically test the effects of training and knowledge on the recent anti-domestic violence legislation on Chinese police officers' attitudes toward law enforcement interventions into domestic violence. Performing Path Analysis on survey data collected from 623 police officers in Jiangsu, China, this study found that training and knowledge on the law, while mediating the positive effects of organisational support and previous experience of handling domestic violence on officers' proactive attitudes toward policing domestic violence, did not have a direct connection to pro-arrest attitudes. Organisational support is the strongest predictor of endorsement of domestic violence interventions as important police work and pro-arrest attitudes. Implications for criminal justice policies and practice are also discussed.

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Policing; domestic violence; China; Anti-Domestic Violence Law

Introduction

In Chinese society, there is a longstanding tradition of viewing domestic violence (DV hereafter) against women as more or less justifiable and a private matter that should be kept within the household, free from public (including police) intervention (Tang *et al.* 2002). In recent years, however, DV has received rapidly growing public attention. The widespread use of social media has publicised multiple high-profile incidents of partner abuse (Xue *et al.* 2018; Allen 2019), fuelling public condemnation of DV and the underlying hegemonic masculinity. In addition to public outrage, the Chinese state, after years of lobbying by women's rights groups (Leggett 2017), has taken a policy initiative against DV. In December 2015, the Chinese national legislature passed the Anti-DV Law (or the Law hereafter), introducing the first statutory definition of DV in China (Han 2017).

The extent to which the anti-DV Law could translate into actual and better protection for women in abusive situations remains in question. Traditionally, police intervention into DV is considered by the Chinese public as an illegitimate use of law enforcement resources (Sun *et al.* 2011b) and is not prioritised by Chinese police officers (Zhao *et al.* 2018). As mediation remains a signature mechanism of China's overall approach to dispute resolution, informal mediation by locally organised and community-based committees, as opposed to police warnings and arrests, has long been the preferred method in resolving DV and remains a central 'preventive' measure in the new legislation (Palmer 2017).

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Even if the police are called and discover misdemeanour assaults, they are directed to mediate ‘disputes’¹ among family members (Han 2017). Considering the recently introduced legislation against DV may have an effect on officers’ attitudes toward DV, this study examines the effects of training and knowledge of the Law on Chinese police officers’ attitudes toward police intervention into DV by analysing survey data collected from over 600 police officers in Jiangsu Province, China.

The current study contributes to three areas in the existing literature. First, this study extends the recent literature in the West (e.g. Hoyle 1998; Lee *et al.* 2013; Tatum and Pence 2014; Roark 2016; Myhill 2019) and in China (Zhao *et al.* 2018) that focuses solely on officers’ behaviour of or attitudes toward arrest by further examining officers’ perceived legitimacy as well as efficacy of *various types* of police involvement in DV. Given the traditional view of police intervention into DV as illegitimate (Sun *et al.* 2011a, 2011b, 2012), it remains a question whether knowledge and training of the recently introduced Anti-DV Law can alter officers’ perceptions.

Second, past studies on attitudes toward police intervention into DV in China have relied heavily on data collected from college students (Sun *et al.* 2011a, 2011b; 2012) and police cadets (Qu *et al.* 2018; Hayes *et al.* 2020). Considering that these groups had no or only limited experience in handling cases of DV, findings from prior studies cannot adequately reflect officers’ occupational outlooks and operational styles in responding to DV. This study utilises survey data garnered from frontline officers and their supervisors, with the majority of them having experience in dealing with DV incidents over the past few years.

Third, the path analytic models adopted in this study allow us to not only control for important demographic and organisational factors (i.e. clear policies and procedures on DV and training on how to handle DV) but also explore the possible mediating effects of training and knowledge of the DV Law on the relations between demographic and organisational characteristics and officers’ attitudes toward police interventions into DV. The findings from the current study reveal the complicated and nuanced mechanisms among the critical predictors of police attitudes.

Domestic violence in China

Like in many Western countries, DV is a serious social problem in China. The lifetime prevalence of domestic abuse by an intimate partner reported in the general population is within a range of 17.4–24.5% for psychological violence, 2.5–5.5% for physical violence, and 0.3–1.7% for sexual violence using national survey data (Yang *et al.* 2019). In addition to commonly identified risk factors of DV such as social and economic strains, substance use, and gender role ideology (e.g. Xu *et al.* 2005; Chan *et al.* 2008; Xiao and Feng 2014; Tu and Lou 2017; Lin *et al.* 2018), studies have also documented risk factors specific to the social and cultural context of contemporary China. For instance, conflicts with in-laws are a significant predictor of DV perpetration and victimisation in China, given the more common practice of sharing a living space with the husband’s parents (Chan *et al.* 2009).

Traditional Chinese culture also contributes to DV in China. The traditionally Chinese view of ‘face’, which tends to prefer keeping ‘domestic shames in the household’, also predicts higher risks of DV (Chan 2012). Besides, norms centring on male superiority and dominance are rooted in China’s imperial and patriarchal past (Tang *et al.* 2002) and has a lingering influence on contemporary Chinese society. Comparative studies (e.g. Lin *et al.* 2016; Sun *et al.* 2016) have also found that traditional gender role and male dominance ideologies were more widely accepted and played a more central role in shaping pro-violence attitudes in China, in comparison to their effects in the West. Male dominance ideology predicts beliefs justifying DV against women (Li *et al.* 2017) and attitudes favouring nonintervention from the police (Sun *et al.* 2011a).

Policing domestic violence in China

It has long been argued and gained some empirical support that arresting DV perpetrators (versus simply issuing them a warning) effectively deters future violence (Sherman and Berk 1984). Although

the cumulative evidence on the deterrence effect of arrest is mixed (see Sherman 2018 for a comprehensive review), often dependent upon such suspect characteristics as employment status, all states in the US have enacted mandatory arrest or pro-arrest laws and policies since the 1980s. Police officers in all 50 US states are legally empowered to make warrantless arrests, given probable cause. For all nonfatal DV victimizations occurring between 2006 and 2015, US police arrested an offender during their initial response in 23% of these reported victimizations (Reaves 2017). In the UK, the arrest rate of domestic abuse offenders is even higher. Official statistics showed that the domestic abuse arrest rate in England and Wales registered at 45 arrests per 100 domestic abuse-related offences in the 12 months prior to 30 June 2017 (HMICFRS 2019).

In contrast, law enforcement intervention into DV is much rarer in China. Until recently, DV was almost exclusively resolved through informal mediation by family members, employers, and quasi-governmental organisations such as the Women's Federation and village and neighbourhood committees. In the past few years, formal legal interventions by police and the courts have assumed a more visible role through Central and local initiatives, but mediation remains a cornerstone of China's DV intervention strategy (Han 2017; Palmer 2017). Even in cases of misdemeanour assaults that legally can subject perpetrators to administrative detentions of 15 days or less, police are directed to mediate 'disputes' among family members (Han 2017). As a result, police intervention has not generally been considered a legitimate and effective approach to addressing domestic abuse in China. Self-reported surveys of college students in China indicated that the majority of the student surveyed did not see the police as a legitimate or preferred force of DV intervention; compared to their American counterparts, both male and female Chinese students were less likely to favour proactive response (i.e. viewing law enforcement intervention as effective and supporting interventions ranging from warnings, mediation, to arrest) and more likely to support traditional response (i.e. viewing law enforcement intervention as ineffective and supporting nonintervention) (Sun *et al.* 2011a, 2011b). Viewing DV as a crime also promotes a wider definition of partner abuse that includes milder forms of physical abuse as well as psychological abuse among Chinese college students (Lin *et al.* 2016).

The Anti-Domestic Violence Law in China

In December 2015, China's National People's Congress passed the Anti-DV Law. The Law, which came into effect in March 2016, introduced China's first statutory definition of DV as 'the inflicting of physical, psychological or other harm by a family member on another by beating, bondage, injury, restraint and forcible limits on personal freedom, recurring verbal abuse, threats and other means' (Art. 2). It also declares that 'the state prohibits any form of domestic violence' and that 'the police should deploy forces in a timely fashion upon receiving reports of domestic violence' (Art. 15).

While the Law was celebrated by the state as a milestone in the development of legal protection against DV, it has received wide criticisms, largely directed at the *contradicting* imperatives to protect victims and punish offenders on the one hand, and to maintain 'family harmony' on the other (Han 2017; Jiang 2019). For example, the Law continues to emphasise the role of informal mediation in the 'prevention' of DV where violence would have already been perpetrated. Furthermore, while the Law, in principle, affirms the legitimacy of law enforcement intervention, it favours informal sanctions, such as verbal and written warnings, over arrest. As a result, the victim's safety may be at risk (Han 2017; Palmer 2017). Although the Law introduces court-issued restraining order as a new form of legal protection of victims, 'court protective orders are undermined by the lack of police enforcement and criminal sanction against violations (Han 2017, p. 5)'.

The Law predominantly serves the purpose of raising public awareness about the prevalence and potential severity of domestic abuse rather than actually punishing (and deterring) DV offenders through the criminal justice system. It positions itself as a 'social law' that continues treating DV as minor deviance instead of a punishable criminal offence (Han 2017).

Considering that the Anti-DV Law is still in its nascency, there has been very little research on its effect on law enforcement and the public's perception of family violence. The only two existing studies that tested the effect of the Law were based on data from police cadets rather than police officers. The first study found no significant association between police cadets' knowledge of the Anti-DV Law and their attitudes toward dating violence (Qu *et al.* 2018). The second study examined the effect of DV training (which included training on the Anti-DV Law) on police cadets' attitudes toward DV and found that training generally improved cadets' previously problematic attitudes toward DV (Hayes *et al.* 2020). A couple of recent studies on Chinese police officer's attitudes toward DV conducted after the Anti-DV Law took effect showed that police officers were still much more likely to adopt verbal or written warnings as opposed to arresting any suspect on the scene (Zhao *et al.* 2018; Wang *et al.* 2019).

Police attitudes toward law enforcement intervention into domestic violence

Police attitudes toward law enforcement treatment of domestic disturbances may be affected by demographic and organisational factors. The US literature suggests that demographic characteristics, such as gender and years of service, are predictive of officers' decision to make arrests in cases of a domestic disturbance, with female officers and older officers less likely to make arrests than their male and younger counterparts (Martin 1993; Stalans and Finn 1995; Robinson and Chandek 2000).

In contrast, recent studies of police officers in China did not find consistently significant gender and age effects on officers' decision to make arrests in hypothetical scenarios but did show significant effects of officers' educational attainment and marital status on their likelihood of making arrests, with better-educated officers less likely to make arrests (Zhao *et al.* 2018; Wang *et al.* 2019) and married officers preferring warning and mediation over arrest (Wang *et al.* 2019).² A study of police officers in Taiwan (Chu and Sun 2014) found that while there was no gender difference in officers' attitudes toward arrest, female officers were more likely to perceive DV as a serious issue and disagree with a noninterventionist approach to handle DV.

Organisational support is another factor shaping police attitudes toward intervention into DV. In the field of policing, studies have shown that organisational support in terms of fair and just supervisory treatment is instrumental in promoting job satisfaction, reducing job turnover, enhancing commitment to and compliance with rules and policies, and improving officer delivery of procedural justice to citizens (e.g. Tankebe 2010; Bradford *et al.* 2014; Nix and Wolfe 2016; Wu *et al.* 2017; Sun *et al.* 2018). When it comes to DV intervention specifically, organisational support, measured as the availability of formalised policies and procedures on DV cases and the existence of a mandatory arrest policy, was found to be predictive of US police officers' higher likelihood to make arrests (Eitle 2005; Johnson 2010; Johnson and Dai 2016).

The importance of training, which can be viewed as an indicator of organisational support in enhancing officers' awareness and knowledge of DV, has long been acknowledged (Belknap 1990). While there exists little consistent evidence that police officers fully comply with mandatory or pro-arrest laws and policies in the US (Eigenberg *et al.* 2012; but see Sherman 2018 and Simpson *et al.* 2006), academy and in-service training is a plausible way of enhancing officers' knowledge about legal mandates and subsequently their active responses to DV. In the US, more training on DV is correlated with a higher proportion of DV calls, resulting in arrests across agencies (Johnson 2010; Johnson and Dai 2016). In India, training was found to improve female police officers' working knowledge and techniques of dispute resolution and petitioner interview in family conflicts (Natarajan 2006).

The current study

As is discussed in the previous section, while several recent studies (e.g. Zhao *et al.* 2018; Wang *et al.* 2019) have examined Chinese police officers' pro-arrest attitudes in DV incidents, none has directly

assessed the connections between training and knowledge of the Anti-DV Law and officers' attitudes toward police intervention into family conflicts. Although studies have explored the effects of DV training (Hayes *et al.* 2020) and training of the Law (Qu *et al.* 2018) on the attitudes of police cadets toward DV intervention, no study has examined these effects among frontline officers with recent frontline experience handling DV situations. Studying the attitudes of these officers provides a closer glimpse of the actual law enforcement attitudes toward DV, which will help indirectly assess the efficacy of national policies such as the Anti-DV Law on DV policing and offer implications for future policymaking and practice.

Given the aforementioned gaps in the literature, the current study was conducted to empirically assess: (1) the effects of training and knowledge of the anti-DV legislation on police officers' attitudes toward law enforcement intervention into DV, net of demographic and organisational factors and (2) the potential mediating mechanisms of training and knowledge on the Law in connecting demographic and organisational factors with officer attitudes toward police intervention into DV.

Methodology

Data

Data used in this study were gathered as part of a broader research project titled Policing Domestic Violence in China (PDVC). The project was initiated by a group of bilingual researchers in several universities across three countries (Canada, China, and the US). Building on the existing literature and team researchers' relevant work, a survey instrument with 70 items was designed to elicit information about police officers' knowledge and training of the Anti-DV Law as well as their experience and attitudes toward law enforcement intervention into DV. The survey also includes questions about the organisational support officers received in policing DV as well as questions about their demographic characteristics. The survey was pre-tested on a small sample of Chinese police officers, and minor revisions were made based on feedback garnered from the pre-test.

Survey data were collected from police officers in Jiangsu, China. Jiangsu is a province on the southeast coast of China within proximity to Shanghai and one of the most economically and culturally developed areas with the second-highest gross domestic product (GDP) among Chinese provinces. In Jiangsu, data collection was coordinated and conducted by local officials and police administrators who are acquaintances of the researchers, and after being debriefed about project purpose and procedures, they agreed to distribute paper surveys to police officers in two cities of the province. Despite some potential limitations, relying on police administrators and local officials to administer surveys has the advantage of getting us access to the population of interest. Chinese police are highly reluctant to fill out surveys distributed by people they do not personally or indirectly know. Earning their trust and willingness to participate in a study is thus difficult without any insider connection.

This study utilised a convenience sample; officers who were available during visits for data collection were asked to participate in the survey. The researchers assured the officers that participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, that the data collected was entirely anonymous, and that the data would be kept confidential. In one of the two cities, a total of 500 officers in 15 field stations (*paichusuo*) were given the survey by project coordinators, and 423 officers returned the survey. To diversify our samples, in the second city, a total of 300 surveys were distributed to officers in 4 police stations (*fenjü*), and all 300 surveys were returned to project coordinators, resulting in a response rate of 90% from the two cities. The high response rate is in line with those reported in recent studies on Chinese police officers and cadets (see Qu *et al.* 2018; Wang *et al.* 2019; Wu *et al.* 2019).

After excluding unusable surveys as well as missing cases³, 623 cases were included in the final sample for analysis. We conducted further analysis and found no significant difference along key variables between cases excluded and cases included in this study. As is shown in Table 1, 74% of the respondents were male officers and the average age was 35 years old.

Slightly more than 20% of the officers were unmarried (single or divorced). Among the respondents, 86% had experience in handling DV incidents over the past three years. Information on officer background characteristics in each unit is not openly available to the public, but our personal knowledge about the Chinese forces indicates a reasonable resemblance between the sample and the population.

Variables

Three endogenous variables were used in this study. The survey instrument contains 9 items designed to assess police officers' attitudes toward appropriate police interventions for DV. Modelled after similar items used in previous research (Chu and Sun 2014), the 9 questions were expected to reflect police attitudes toward different ways of dealing with DV. A list of these items was provided in Table 2, and their response categories ranged from 1 'strongly disagree' to 4 'strongly agree'. Exploratory factor analysis was performed on these items to determine their dimensionality. As expected, three distinct dimensions were identified in the exploratory factor analysis, labelled respectively as '*DV as Important Police Task*', '*Minimal Police Involvement*', and '*Pro-Arrest*', with the first and the last dimensions representing proactive attitudes toward DV intervention. Cronbach alphas for items in each dimension (ranging from .69 to .73) also indicate good inter-item reliability. Three additive scales were constructed accordingly as the endogenous variables of this study.

Two mediating variables, *Knowledge on the Anti-DV Law* and *Training on the Anti-DV Law* were constructed. *Knowledge on the Anti-DV Law* was measured by a single item stating, 'How much do you know about the Anti-DV Law?' Response categories to this item ranged from 1 'Never heard about it' to 4 'Know it very well'. *Training on the Anti-DV Law* was also measured by a single survey item, 'Has your work unit organized training on the Anti-DV Law in the past three years?' Response categories included 'No' (=0) and 'Yes' (=1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of All Variables (N = 623).

Variable	%	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Endogenous variables					
Minimal police involvement	Agree/Strongly Agree	11.01	2.95	4.00	16.00
<i>Police involvement unhelpful</i>	66%				
<i>Police arrival heightens tension</i>	47%				
<i>Responding to DV detracts from crime prevention and intervention</i>	61%				
<i>DV best handled by social service providers</i>	66%				
Policing DV important task		12.04	3.09	4.00	16.00
<i>Responding to DV an important part of police work</i>	61%				
<i>It is important for officers to be sympathetic and understanding</i>	77%				
<i>It is the police's responsibility to refer victims to sources of help</i>	67%				
<i>Arresting the offender cannot resolve DV</i>	74%				
Pro-arrest		5.26	1.89	2.00	8.00
<i>Police should arrest the abuser despite victim wishes</i>	50%				
<i>Arresting offenders for DV is a good policy</i>	57%				
Mediating variables					
Anti-DV Law training		0.45	0.50	0.00	1.00
Knowledge of Anti-DV Law		2.73	0.71	1.00	4.00
<i>Have at least some knowledge about DV Law</i>	67%				
Exogenous variables					
Male		0.74	0.44	0.00	1.00
Age		34.86	8.68	20.00	59.00
Educational attainment		2.61	0.69	1.00	4.00
<i>Bachelor's degree and above</i>	70%				
Unmarried		0.22	0.41	0.00	1.00
Experience policing DV		0.86	0.35	0.00	1.00
Organisational support		5.61	1.78	2.00	8.00
<i>Unit has clear regulations for handling DV</i>	60%				
<i>Unit trained frontline officers on DV</i>	76%				

Table 2. Construction of Composite Endogenous Variables through Factor Analysis and Reliability Test ($N = 623$).

Variables and items	Rotated Factor Loadings			α^*
	1	2	3	
<i>Policing DV as important police task</i> (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree)				.74
Responding to DV is an important part of police work	.74			
It is important for officers to be sympathetic and understanding the victim	.74			
It is the police's responsibility to refer victims to sources of help	.75			
<i>Arresting the offender cannot resolve DV</i>	.64			
<i>Minimal police involvement</i> (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree)				.68
The involvement of police in DV cases cannot help resolving the conflicts		.68		
Police officers' arrival usually worsens the problem by increasing the tension level		.71		
When police respond to fights between couples they are not really dealing with crime or crime preventions		.71		
In most cases, DV is best handled by social service providers, such as All Women's Federation, neighbourhood resident committees and DV service centers, rather than by the police		.70		
<i>Pro-Arrest</i> (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree)				.69
Police should arrest the abuser even if the victim does not want them to			.77	
Arresting offenders for DV is a good policy			.88	
Eigenvalues	3.06	1.94	1.23	
Percent of variance explained	31	19	12	

* α = Cronbach's alpha.

The exogenous variables can be divided into two groups, *Background Characteristics* and *Organizational Support*. *Background Characteristics* included gender, age, educational attainment, marital status, and previous experience dealing with DV. Gender, marital status, and previous experience were coded as dummy variables with 1 representing male, unmarried, and having experience handling DV in the past three years. Age was measured in years. Educational attainment was a four-category variable ranging from 'high school and below' (=1) to 'graduate degree and above' (=4). *Organizational Support* was measured by a combination of two survey items, 'In addition to the Anti-DV Law, my agency has clear regulations in stipulating how to handle DV' and 'My agency requires all frontline officers to receive training in handling DV'. Their response categories ranged from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=4). The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .71, indicating good inter-item reliability. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for all the variables used for modelling.

Based on these variables, we formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Organized training on the Anti-DV Law is positively associated with proactive/interventionist attitudes (i.e. DV an important police task and pro-arrest) among officers, net of officers' knowledge of the law and officers' demographic characteristics.

Hypothesis 2: Knowledge of the Anti-DV Law is positively related to proactive/interventionist attitudes among officers, net of officers' demographic characteristics.

Hypothesis 3: Training and knowledge on the DV Law mediate the relationships between officer characteristics and organizational support and officer attitudes toward DV intervention.

Hypothesis 4: Training is positively connected to officer knowledge on the DV Law.

Analytic strategy

Path Analysis (PA) was adopted as the primary analytic approach for this study. PA, the oldest member of the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) family, is widely used in the social sciences (e.g. MacCallum and Austin 2000; Lee *et al.* 2010). Compared to regression techniques, PA assesses all predicted pathways in a single model and reports coefficients for both direct (i.e. specified paths directly connecting two variables) and indirect (i.e. unspecified associations between two variables indirectly connected by a third variable) effects. The ability to estimate all the direct and indirect effects at once is crucial to unveiling the potential mediating mechanisms in a straightforward

manner, one of the main objectives of the current study. Compared to SEM, PA reduces the burden of estimation and allows a model to converge more easily. It also allows a more straightforward display and interpretation of the results. Considering that the overarching research goal of this study lies in disentangling the relations between the key variables, not in measurement refinement, PA was chosen as the analytic strategy.

To render valid measurements of the latent variables, we deployed Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for constructing the composite scales to be used in the path models (summarised in Table 2). The results from the EFA greatly enhance confidence that these measurements are valid and can be directly estimated as a composite scale in the Path Analysis. Path Analysis in this study was performed using Stata 16.

Model specification

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model and all the relations that we specified and tested. Among *Background Characteristics*, only officers' previous experience with DV was specified to predict organised training on the DV Law. Organised training tends to be mandatory in China; thus demographic variables are unlikely to affect the likelihood of attending these training sessions.

Results

As is shown in Table 1, on average, over half of all respondents tend to agree to all three aspects of police intervention into DV, with the endorsement of policing DV as an important task being the strongest (averaging 69.8%), and pro-arrest being the weakest (averaging 53.5%).

Table 3 provides the correlation matrix of all the variables. As is shown in Table 3, the three composite scales are mildly and positively correlated to one another, and they are each correlated to training and knowledge of the Law, with the exception of minimal police involvement, which is only correlated to training of the Law. With the exception of minimal police involvement, the other two scales are correlated with organizational support, and all three scales are correlated with several demographic and experiential factors.

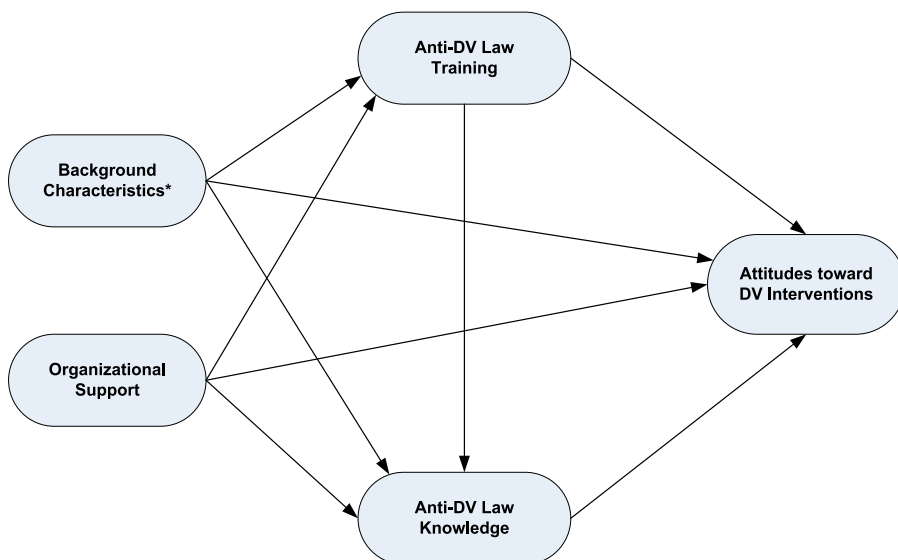


Figure 1. Theoretical Model of Officer Attitudes toward Domestic Violence Interventions.

*Among Officer background characteristics, only their previous experience of handling DV is predicted to be linked to training on the Anti-DV Law

Table 3. Correlation Matrix of All Variables (N = 623).

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Minimal police involvement	1.00										
2	Policing DV important task	.26**	1.00									
3	Pro-arrest	.11**	.36**	1.00								
4	Anti-DV Law training	-.11**	.08*	.12**	1.00							
5	Knowledge of Anti-DV Law	.04	.15**	.13**	.43**	1.00						
6	Sex	.06	-.12**	-.09*	-.02	.02	1.00					
7	Age	.03	-.05	.12**	.06	.12**	.14**	1.00				
8	Educational attainment	.15**	-.02	-.13**	-.14**	-.13**	.06	-.09*	1.00			
9	Marital status	-.12**	.04	.00	-.01	-.11**	-.03	-.47**	-.03	1.00		
10	Experience policing DV	-.14**	-.08*	-.11*	.12**	.05	.15**	-.04	-.07	-.04	1.00	
11	Organisational support	-.03	.36**	.22**	.28**	.18**	-.12**	.01	-.21**	-.11*	.09*	1.00

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Figures 2–4 summarize the results of path analysis on each of the three endogenous variables of attitudes toward policing DV.⁴ While all the variables described in the previous section were included in the analysis and all the paths specified in the conceptual model were tested, we only displayed the paths where the coefficients were found statistically significant for more explicit illustration. As demonstrated by the Goodness-of-Fit Indices attached to each figure, all three models exhibited excellent model fit.

Figure 2 displays the results for the model of officers' attitudes toward minimal police involvement. Four exogenous variables are linked to minimal police involvement in DV directly, indirectly (through training and knowledge on the DV Law), or both. Unmarried officers are less likely to be familiar with the DV Law ($b = -.09$) and less supportive of minimal police involvement in DV ($b = -.11$), meaning that they support more proactive police involvement. Officers with higher levels of education ($b = .14$) expressed greater support for minimal police involvement in DV (i.e. less supportive of police involvement). Officers with recent experience of handling DV reported a greater likelihood of having received training on the DV Law ($b = .10$) and a lower probability of favoring minimal intervention in family conflicts ($b = -.13$). As expected, organizational support was positively related to officer training on the DV Law ($b = .28$). In addition, the two mediating variables, training and knowledge on the DV Law, were positively correlated ($b = .41$). While training had a direct negative effect on minimal involvement in DV (i.e. strengthening endorsement of police involvement), it nonetheless also had an indirect positive impact on minimal involvement through knowledge on the DV law (i.e. reducing endorsement of police involvement). Two of the exogenous variables, previous DV experience ($b = .10$) and organisational support ($b = .28$) can affect training, which then first influences minimal involvement directly ($b = -.14$) and then also indirectly (indirect effect $b = .25$) through knowledge on the Law. Meanwhile, neither prior experience dealing with DV nor organisational support exerts an indirect effect, positive or negative, on minimal police involvement. Lastly, self-rated knowledge on the Law, which itself is directly affected by unmarried status ($b = -.09$) and indirectly by prior experience (indirect effect $b = .08$)

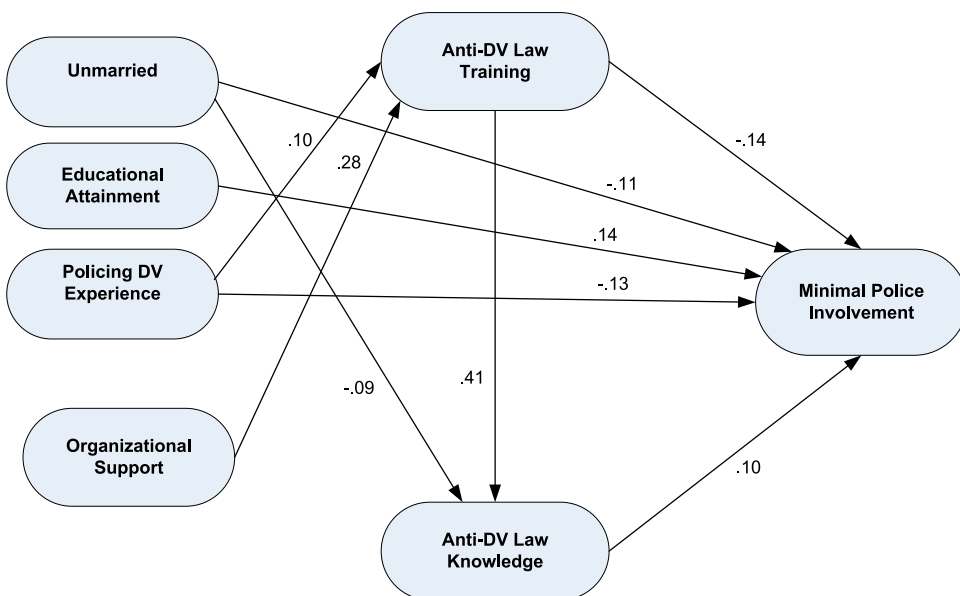


Figure 2. Officer Attitudes toward Minimal Police Involvement*.

*Only significant paths and coefficients are displayed. All coefficients are standardised. $\chi^2 = 6.46$, $df = 4$, $p = .17$; CFI = .99; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .03; and SRMR = .02

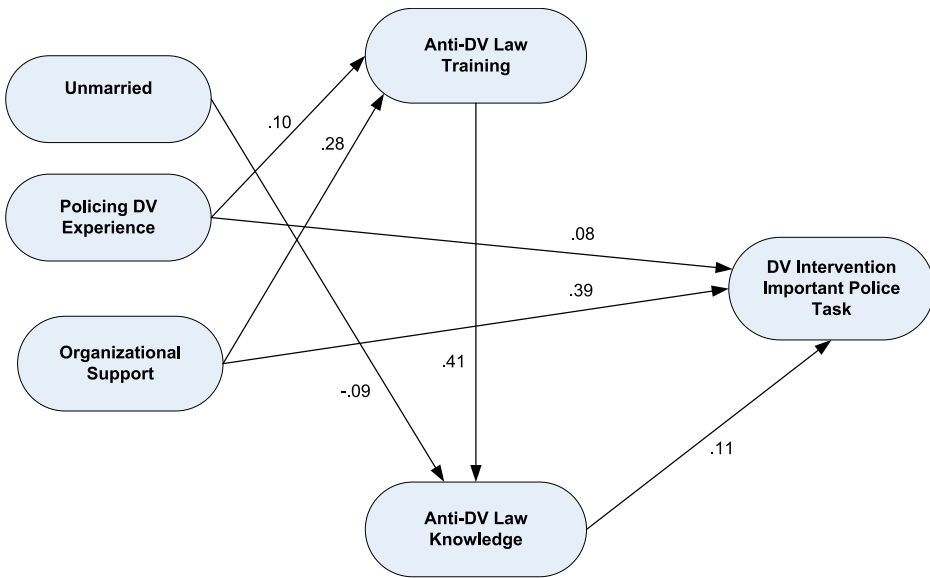


Figure 3. Officer Attitudes DV Intervention as Important Police Task*.

*Only significant paths and coefficients are displayed. All coefficients are standardised. $\chi^2 = 6.46$, $df = 4$, $p = .17$; CFI = .99; TLI = .96; RMSEA = .03; and SRMR = .02

and organisational support (indirect effect $b = .04$), was directly linked to a higher chance of favouring minimal police engagement ($b = .10$).

Figure 3 summarises the results for officers' views on handling DV as an important police task. The direct connections between marital status and educational attainment and the endogenous variable (i.e. policing DV as an important task) disappeared. Meanwhile, past experience of policing DV was

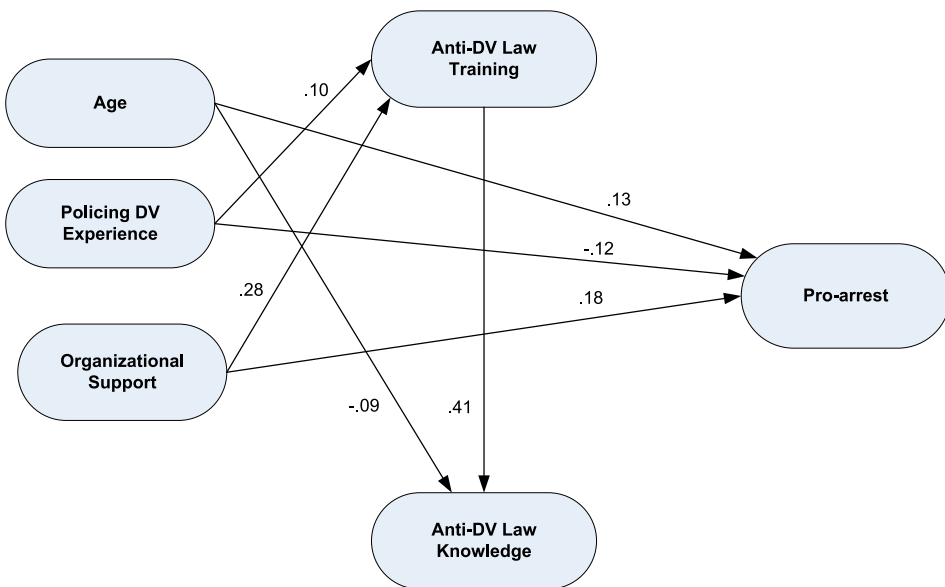


Figure 4. Officer Attitudes toward Pro-Arrest*.

*Only significant paths and coefficients are displayed. All coefficients are standardised. $\chi^2 = 6.46$, $df = 4$, $p = .17$; CFI = .99; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .03; and SRMR = .02

positively related to believing DV intervention as important police work ($b = .08$), while previously negatively associated with minimal police involvement. In other words, officers with past experience of policing DV are more likely to say intervening in DV is important police work, and less likely to express support for minimal police involvement. Organisational support was not predictive of minimal police involvement, but it positively ($b = .39$) predicted DV intervention as an important police task. While training was not a direct predictor of police intervention as important work, it exerted a significant indirect effect (indirect effect $b = .31$) via knowledge of the Law. Finally, knowledge remained a significant direct ($b = .11$) predictor of police intervention as important work. Again, experience of handling DV incidents during past three years (indirect effect $b = .08$) and organisational support (indirect effect $b = .04$) exerted significant indirect effects on knowledge on the Law through the mediating factor of training. While being unmarried predicts lower self-rated ($b = -.09$) knowledge of the Law, no indirect effect from marital status on perceiving DV as important police work was detected.

Figure 4 depicts significant connections to officers' attitudes toward pro-arrest policy. Regarding direct effects, age surfaced as a significant predictor of knowledge ($b = -.09$) and pro-arrest ($b = .13$), with older officers expressing lower familiarity with the DV Law but greater support for pro-arrest policy. Compared to the important police task model, previous experience of handling DV became a negative predictor of pro-arrest attitude, suggesting that officers with more experience of dealing with family violence actually preferred not to arrest the offender. None of the exogenous variables showed any significant indirect effects on pro-arrest attitudes. Training did not have a significant indirect effect on pro-arrest attitudes either. Experience of handling DV cases and organisational support affected knowledge on DV law indirectly via training.

Discussion

The current study was conducted to assess the potential impact of knowledge and training of the recently enacted Anti-DV Law, net of organisational and demographic factors, on Chinese police officers' attitudes towards law enforcement intervention in cases of family violence. There are several significant findings from the data analyses. First, the descriptive statistics, as well as the bivariate analyses reveal that the police officers surveyed seem to share conflicting views about the role of the police in the intervention into DV: most of the officers agree that the police should only be minimally involved in DV scenarios while also agreeing that policing DV constitutes an important police task and that (albeit at a lower proportion) arresting DV perpetrators is a good policy. This finding is not entirely surprising, as DV policies in China have been sending conflicting signals about the role of law enforcement intervention. Despite more coercive police actions such as warning and arrest being promoted in recent years as legitimate interventions into DV, informal mediation, as well as police and court mediation continues to dominate the state's preferred and actual response to DV (Han 2017; Palmer 2017).

With regard to the effects of knowledge and training of the Law specifically, the path analyses lent little empirical support to Hypothesis 1, as training was found to have a negative direct effect on minimal police involvement but no direct effect on officers' perceptions of policing DV as an important task or pro-arrest attitudes, net of all controls. Hypothesis 2 was partially supported: knowledge on the DV law positively predicts belief in minimal police involvement and perceptions of policing DV as an important task, but not linked to pro-arrest attitudes, net of all controls. Hypothesis 3 was also partially supported, with training and knowledge mediating the effects of demographic, experiential, and organisational factors on minimal police involvement, but not on policing DV as an important task or pro-arrest attitude. Hypothesis 4 is supported in all three analytic models with training connecting positively to knowledge.⁵ Taken together, the evidence suggests that while receiving training and possessing knowledge on the Anti-DV Law have direct and indirect connections to police attitudes toward minimal police intervention and general police intervention, training and knowledge did not seem to have promoted officer preference for arresting DV perpetrators as a policy or practice.

The mediating effect of training of the DV Law on the relations between experiential and organisational factors and minimal police involvement is not surprising, as units that deal with DV more frequently or take DV more seriously are conceivably more likely to offer and even mandate training on the Law. This should influence their understanding of policing DV. It is also possible that those who are not married are at lower risk of family conflicts and are thus less likely to support proactive police actions. They may also feel less incentivized to seek further knowledge of the new law, which would have contributed to more proactive law enforcement attitudes.

While direct and indirect effects were detected from the exogenous and mediating variables on the other two attitudinal dimensions of policing DV, knowledge and training of the Law, along with the demographic, experiential, and organisational factors, did not exert any influence on pro-arrest attitudes. It appears that although knowledge of the new legislation predicts a stronger conviction of the police's responsibility to intervene in cases of DV, such attitudes are manifested more along the line of providing better social services to victims as opposed to treating DV perpetration as a criminal offence that warrants arrest.

The absence of an effect from training and knowledge of the Law on pro-arrest attitudes resonates with the criticisms of the Law as essentially a social law with overly balanced, even contradicting imperatives yet lacking in a clear criminal justice mandate (Han 2017; Jiang 2019). Although still preliminary, the findings from the current study lend support to Michelson's (2019) observation that judicial 'progresses' in China, such as the legislation against DV, are often facades to show the international community that China has lived up to global standards in protecting human rights including women's rights, while the judiciary and law enforcement agencies were signalled by the state (through reading between the lines of the law or governmental propaganda efforts, for instance) to prioritise the preservation of family harmony over the safety and liberties of the victims. Just as the Marriage Law falls short of authorising the court to grant victims the much-needed distance from their perpetrators⁶, the Anti-DV Law balks at empowering the police to meaningfully protect the victims by arresting the offenders.

Noteworthy to mention, organisational support has a significant negative effect on minimal police intervention and significant positive effects on both general and proactive interventions. This finding is consistent with previous studies in the US (Eitle 2005) and Taiwan (Chu and Sun 2014), demonstrating that clearly defined policies and supportive attitudes from administrators predicted arrest or pro-arrest attitudes. It also further questions the efficacy of the ambivalently oriented Law in shaping on-the-ground police work.

Contrary to studies conducted in the US (Stalans and Finn 1995; Robinson and Chandek 2000), we found that older Chinese police officers, as opposed to younger ones, exhibit stronger pro-arrest attitudes. This finding also stands in contrast with recent studies on the Chinese police (Zhao *et al.* 2018; Wang *et al.* 2019), which found non-significant effects of age when it comes to the decision to arrest DV offenders. The divergent effects of age between China and the US may result from the rapid social transformation that China has been undergoing, which contributes to a tremendous generational gap on social attitudes, with the older generation being substantially more conservative and punitive to a greater extent than across generations in the US (Sun and Cheng 2018).

The findings of this study also point to two policy implications. First, the Anti-DV Law, as it stands, does not seem to provide adequate support for officers' propensity to adopting more proactive and punitive actions against DV offenders. If the intended purpose of the Law is to encourage swifter and more certain punishment, a more explicit legal mandate, perhaps along the line of a lower risk assessment threshold for arrest, ought to be introduced. Although there are wide criticisms of mandatory arrest policies in the US ranging from decreased reporting and increased offender reprisal (Iyengar 2009) to removing discretion and decision-making power from female victims (Goodmark 2009), it should be noted that the arrest rate of DV offenders in China represents only a fraction of those in the US (Reaves 2017) and the UK (HMICFRS 2019). There is plenty of room in China's response to DV for a more balanced policy that supplements the traditional response of informal mediation with legally mandated penal actions.

Second, it appears that organisational support at the local level has a much stronger effect on officers' proactive attitudes. Police administrators and frontline supervisors ought to clearly express their willingness and encouragement to actively and seriously respond to DV. A system of rewards and sanctions needs to be put in place for officers who display exemplary or questionable actions when dealing with DV.

Concededly, the current study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the survey data come from only one province in the economically developed coastal area of China. The generalizability of the findings to police practices in other parts of China is limited. Moreover, even within the province of study, despite efforts to include respondents from both field stations and the larger branches/precincts of the police bureaus, our sample cannot represent all the officers in the province. Second, we are aware of some inherent limitations associated with path analysis. Although our model specification was theoretically and empirically informed, including modifying the number and directionality of the paths with empirically derived modification indices, the issue of reverse causality is still possible. For example, officers who are proactive around responding to DV may seek out knowledge of the Law, as opposed to knowledge of the Law prompting more proactive attitudes.

Third, we did not collect data on organisational characteristics of the police units from which the sample was drawn. For instance, future research may include objective indicators of departmental regulations to explain officer attitudes. Finally, we are aware that training may not always be valued by officers, and thus, future studies should include measures that tap into officers' views on these training sessions as a potential mediating factor.

Conclusion

This study empirically tested the effects of training and knowledge on the recent anti-DV legislation on Chinese police officers' attitudes toward law enforcement interventions into DV. Analysing survey data collected from 623 police officers in Jiangsu, China, this study found that most officers simultaneously exhibit noninterventionist as well as interventionist attitudes toward DV, reflecting the contradicting imperatives of national polices on DV intervention. Path analysis further revealed that training and knowledge of the law, while mediating the positive effects of organisational support and previous experience of handling DV on officers' proactive attitudes toward policing DV, did not have a direct connection to pro-arrest attitudes. These findings suggest that training and knowledge of the new DV Law, while raising awareness around the severity of DV and the importance of intervention, may not translate into more punitive actions on the part of the police. There is room in China for a more balanced policy that supplements the traditional response of informal mediation with legally mandated penal actions. The current study represents one of the first to examine the relationship between training and knowledge of the Law and the attitudes toward law enforcement intervention into DV among Chinese police officers, the very group who is responsible for enforcing the Law.

Notes

1. This language is commonly used by the Chinese government to describe domestic violence.
2. It should be noted that along with the Chinese studies, research on arrest decision making in domestic violence conducted in the UK (e.g. Hoyle 1998; Myhill 2019) and the US (e.g., Durfee and Fetzer 2016; Eitle 2005; Robinson and Chandek 2000) have also identified situational factors such as officers' understanding of domestic violence (in particular coercive control) and evidence of visible injury and sexual assault as significant predictors of a proactive response. While these situational factors may be decisive in shaping actual decision making of arrest, they were unavailable in our data and thus were not included in the analysis.
3. Unusable surveys are surveys that had missing information on multiple essential modules, whereas missing cases are cases that happened to have missing information on one or more items that were used to construct the variables in this study.
4. Results of indirect effects were not included in the figures, but they were estimated and tested for statistical significance, and are discussed in this section.

5. Although it could be that those who are more knowledgeable of the Law seek out these training to attend, given that most training in police departments in China are mostly mandatory, there are good reasons to believe that training casts an influence on knowledge.
6. Upon analyzing over 140,000 adjudication decisions in two populous provinces in China, Michelson (2019) found that a plaintiff's claim of domestic violence did not increase the probability a court granting divorce, contrary to the stipulation of China's Marriage Law. In reality, first-time divorce petitions are almost always denied unless both spouses willingly agree to divorce. This highly institutionalized practice of decoupling in China constitutes a vivid example of the disconnect between the seemingly progressive, pro-rights legal norms that the Chinese legislative and judicial institutions ostensibly uphold, and the cold reality of a sizable population of female marital-violence victims that the actual legislative, judicial, and law enforcement practice fails to protect (Michelson 2019).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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