

Chinese Women's Acceptance of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women

Violence Against Women

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Abstract

Few studies have empirically examined factors influencing attitudes toward acceptance of intimate partner violence (IPV), and no study has yet studied the topic in China. We empirically test the effects of attitudes toward gender roles and exposure to violence during childhood on the acceptance of IPV and the moderating effects of education and income on these relationships. Using survey data collected from 600 Chinese women from southern China, we found that education and income moderate the relationship between belief in gender equality and acceptance of IPV. The effect of exposure to parental physical violence on the acceptance of IPV is moderated by education.

Keywords

acceptance of intimate partner violence, intimate partner violence, patriarchal culture, China, gender role attitudes, male dominance ideology, children exposed to domestic violence

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has gained significant attention over the past few decades and is now recognized as a violation of human rights and public health problem (World Health Organization [WHO], 2012). IPV is defined as “any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual, and psychological harm to those in the relationship” (WHO, 2012, p. 1). The WHO found that approximately one-third of the women from 56 countries have experienced physical and/or sexual assault

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by an intimate male partner during their lifetimes (WHO, 2013). One of the root causes of IPV consists of patriarchal cultural norms, which encourage men's use of authority and acceptance of IPV (WHO, 2013). Individuals living in societies that have a patriarchal social structure are more likely to hold views supportive of the use of IPV and report higher numbers of types of IPV perpetration (Li, 2022). Therefore, the prevalence and acceptance of IPV are suggested to be higher in traditional patriarchal societies.

The literature suggests that a strong correlate of IPV is acceptance of IPV. A meta-analysis synthesized 85 studies and found a large effect size for the relationship between attitudes toward the acceptance of IPV and men's use of physical IPV (Stith et al., 2004). Men who believe that IPV is acceptable are more likely to perpetrate IPV, and women who tolerate IPV are more likely to experience IPV (WHO, 2010). Acceptance of IPV is associated with women's victimization, such as controlling behavior, physical violence, psychological violence, and sexual abuse (Li et al., 2023). Attitudes toward accepting or justifying IPV are closely related to responses to violence and violence intervention (Giordano et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2012). Changing attitudes supportive of IPV can ultimately reduce the occurrence of IPV. Therefore, understanding the factors associated with acceptance of IPV may reduce IPV.

China provides an excellent cultural context to study the acceptance of IPV. Although China has been transformed into a market-based socialist economy since the 1980s and women's social status has become higher, the population's attitudes concerning IPV are deeply influenced by the traditional patriarchal ideology. However, only a few studies have yet examined the influence of the factors related to acceptance of IPV in China (Li et al., 2020; Wang, 2019). It is not known how the traditional patriarchal cultural norms may shape an individual's acceptance of IPV through the influence of attitudes toward gender roles, experiences of exposure to violence within a family, and prior victimization. Therefore, the present study examines this gap in the literature by analyzing data collected from 600 Chinese women to understand the factors that are significantly related to acceptance of IPV. Particularly, we investigate the impact of attitudes toward gender roles, prior experiences of exposure to violence and victimization, and sociodemographic factors on their acceptance of IPV against women.

IPV in China

China has a high rate of IPV. The Chinese Health and Family Life Survey showed that the prevalence of IPV against adult women during 1999 and 2000 was about 34% (Parish et al., 2004). The problem of IPV is more serious among women living in urban settings. The prevalence rate of IPV was almost 40% for women in Guangzhou (Teng et al., 2014). Therefore, it is important to mitigate the problem of IPV in China. Regarding legal intervention in response to the high rate of IPV, the police has been reluctant to intervene in IPV incidents because they see IPV as a private family matter between a couple (Sun et al., 2011, 2012). They regard IPV as

some conflict between a husband and his wife, and hence they tend to refuse to process victims' complaints (Liu, 2004). They view IPV as noncrime and often ask about the nature of the conflict and produce reports instead of arresting abusers. Compared with other countries like the United States, Chinese are more likely to hold a conservative attitude toward legal responses to IPV and support traditional gender roles (Sun et al., 2011). Therefore, it is difficult for Chinese women to address IPV other than by accepting the abuse of their partners.

Feminist theory suggests that IPV against women is rooted in one partner's abuse of power and control over another partner due to patriarchal cultural values and norms (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Connell, 2005; Li, 2023). Patriarchy has two components, patriarchal cultural norms and a social structure that encourages systems of male dominance and female subordination. The social structure rationalizes the hierarchical organization of institutions, implying that men have more control and power over resources, for example, women's social status being inferior to men's and women having less access to education and the political system. It was found that individuals living in countries with the above-mentioned patriarchal social structure are more likely to hold views favorable to the use of IPV and to use violence against their intimate partners (Li, 2022). On the other hand, the patriarchal cultural norms refer to an ideology that justifies men's dominance over women (Chen, 2017; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Li et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2016, 2018; Xue et al., 2018). Therefore, under this ideology, men's use of violence against women as a way of controlling women is promoted. Following this line of logic, the traditional patriarchal Chinese culture may contribute to the high rate of IPV and women's acceptance of IPV.

The traditional Chinese culture is heavily influenced by Confucian philosophy, which advocates patriarchal values and beliefs (Tang & Lai, 2008). The patriarchal ideology is reflected by rigid gender norms and values. One of the doctrines, *San Cong*, identifies three forms of obedience, namely, that women should obey their fathers, their husbands, and their sons. Another doctrine, *Si De*, states that there are four virtues to possess, such as fidelity, tidiness, propriety in speech, and commitment to needlework (Tang & Lai, 2008). Another type of gender norms is *Xian Qi Liang Mu*, which specifies that women should be good wives and mothers. With the above gender norms and roles, IPV is an acceptable way to treat women if they deviate from these norms. Additionally, Chinese women view IPV as a shameful experience and avoid seeking help (Chan, 2004). The Chinese cultural notion of "saving face" discourages women from bringing up their grievances (Tang & Lai, 2008; Yick & Agbayani-Siewert, 2000). China has been transformed into a market-oriented socialist economy since the 1980s, and women's social status has become higher. The slogan of "women hold up half the sky" was aimed at narrowing the gender-based gaps and offering opportunities for women to work and study. However, women's attitudes concerning IPV are deeply influenced by the traditional patriarchal ideology. Given the patriarchal ideology and rigid gender roles in China, women who experience IPV may choose to remain silent and prefer to accept IPV.

Acceptance of IPV refers to the extent to which one accepts the use of IPV. In the literature, only a few studies have examined the influence of factors related to

acceptance of IPV in China (Li et al., 2020; Wang, 2019). Li et al. (2020) compared university students from two Chinese and two US universities. They found that Chinese students have a higher tolerance for IPV. Their tolerance for IPV was affected by their attitudes toward gender roles and gender-based violence. Attitudes toward gender roles were operationalized as belief in male dominance and perceptions of gender equality in society. Wang (2019) focused on comparing the majority of study, age, gender, residence areas, and educational level between male and female university students in China. She found that the educational level was the most powerful predictor of attitudes toward IPV.

Correlates of Acceptance of IPV

Attitudes Toward Gender Roles

Influence of the patriarchal cultural norms and attitudes toward gender norms on acceptance of IPV against women has been found in other patriarchal societies, such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zimbabwe (Krug et al., 2002). If their wives fail to fulfill their roles, men's use of IPV is a legitimate way to punish their wives (Krug et al., 2002). Ozaki and Otis (2017) compared male Asian students from traditional societies, for instance, China, Japan, and South Korea, with European students from less traditional societies, such as Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. It was found that Asian students reported higher levels of approval of violence and a belief in male dominance. In Africa, people who are supportive of the patriarchal gender roles are more likely to tolerate IPV (Koenig et al., 2003). Moreover, perception of gender equality may also be associated with acceptance of IPV. When men and women are perceived as equal, the use of IPV is also more likely to be perceived as legitimate in interpersonal conflicts (Wall, 2014). It was because when women get more power within a patriarchal society, this triggers resentment from men who feel threatened in their initial privileges. Therefore, beliefs of male dominance and gender equality may be useful predictors for understanding the acceptance of IPV.

Prior Experiences of Exposure to Violence and Victimization

The influence of family violence on IPV has been studied extensively in the literature. Social learning theory, as one of the most predominant criminological theories, suggests that learning occurs when a person differentially associates with others who commit criminal behavior and who support violation of legal norms (Akers & Jensen, 2011). Family and parents are among the primary socializing agents in life development, and hence, they are among the major sources of learning. They act as observable behavioral models and also provide differential reinforcement for criminal or conforming behaviors through rewards and punishments. Children who have violent parents may not be exposed to nonviolent ways of solving conflicts, effective communication, and negotiation (Foshee et al., 1999). Children who are exposed to

interparental violence may learn that using violence is appropriate and acceptable. Copp et al. (2019) found that exposure to violence in the family was related to attitudes that support the use of IPV. Therefore, family violence may be linked to an individual's acceptance of IPV.

In the literature, the effect of prior IPV victimization on the acceptance of IPV is mixed. Some studies suggest that people who have experienced IPV are more likely to accept the use of IPV (García-Moreno, 2005). On the other hand, a systematic review found that IPV victims are less likely to support the use of IPV (Flood & Pease, 2009). However, no empirical studies specifically examined these influences under a patriarchal cultural context.

Sociodemographic Correlates

Several sociodemographic characteristics of women have been found to be correlated with acceptance of IPV (Copp et al., 2019; Hindin, 2003; Wang, 2019). Women reported a higher level of acceptance of IPV than men (Hindin, 2003). Hindin also found that women with secondary or higher educational level are less likely to accept IPV. Copp et al. (2019) found that educational level is a salient factor in predicting acceptance of IPV, after controlling for familial- and community-level risk factors. This is probably because those having higher level of education are more likely to learn nonviolent ways of resolving relationship conflicts (Boyle et al., 2009). Moreover, people living in countries with higher levels of gender equality, for example, where women have more access to education, are less likely to accept the use of IPV and hold beliefs about domination in intimate relationships (Li, 2022). Therefore, educational level may complicate the relationship between acceptance of IPV and attitudes toward gender roles and prior experiences of exposure to violence and victimization.

Socioeconomic status is also associated with acceptance of IPV (Doku & Asante, 2015). Women with lower wealth index are more likely to approve IPV compared with rich and middle wealth index categories (Doku & Asante, 2015). Perhaps, having more economic resources may allow women to expand their social networks and have more access to information. Thus, they may have higher self-confidence and self-empowerment and be less likely to accept the use of IPV against women (Jewkes, 2002). However, the findings on educational level and income are mixed. Straus et al. (1997) suggested that neither income nor education was related to approval of the use of IPV. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the influence of sociodemographic variables on the acceptance of IPV, particularly the extent to which education and income may moderate the relationship between acceptance of IPV and attitudes toward gender roles and prior experiences of exposure to violence and victimization.

The Present Study

The literature has presented several factors to explain acceptance of IPV, but most studies were conducted in Western societies and among college students. There is a

lack of research attention concerning the acceptance of IPV among Chinese women that has to be addressed. Using multiple regression analysis, the present study helps fill the research gap by examining how attitudes toward gender roles and prior experience of exposure to violence and victimization in a patriarchal cultural context influence Chinese women's acceptance of IPV against women. Moreover, the present study also assesses the moderating effects of educational level and income on the relationships between acceptance of IPV and the main independent variables, such as attitudes toward gender roles and prior experience of exposure to violence and victimization.

Method

Data in this study were collected from a large metropolitan area in southern China during a 1-year period between May 1, 2013 and April 30, 2014. Women participating in the present study received services from a government-funded Family Violence Intervention Center. The participants in the study were 600 females who were married or divorced, divided into two groups. The first group had 300 women aged 20 to 60. They were selected from 421 women who had reported their IPV victimization experiences and sought help from therapists in the community or directly from the Family Violence Intervention Center located in their district. Those 300 women were selected based on their relationship status. They were either divorced or going through the divorce process. Women who were widowed or were in a dating or cohabitating relationship were not selected. A purposive and convenience sampling method was used to recruit the second group of women. The second group, of the same size as the first, had 300 married women who were neighbors of the 300 women in the first group and had not previously reported IPV victimization experiences to either the therapists in the community or the Center. They were selected because a pilot study had found that the neighbors tended to share similar sociodemographic characteristics.

The data were collected from the respondents in their homes while their ex-husbands or current spouses were absent. The process followed the commonly accepted ethical research standards of voluntary participation and anonymity. The nature and purpose of the study were explained to the respondents. The respondents were given the opportunity for informed consent, and their responses were anonymous. They were told that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. During the interview, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their age, educational level, employment status, income, acceptance of IPV, attitudes toward gender roles, exposure to parental physical violence, physical violence victimization during childhood, and prior victimization of IPV. The survey instrument was created specifically for the unique cultural context in China, based on previous experience of working with IPV survivors in China. The research team conducted pilot interviews with them to ensure the validity and reliability of the measurements in the present study.

Measures

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable is the acceptance of the use of IPV against women. It was measured by asking respondents whether violence from husbands under seven circumstances was acceptable or not, where 1 = *completely unacceptable* and 4 = *completely acceptable*. The circumstances were as follows: (a) wives refuse to do housework, (b) wives go out without telling husbands, (c) wives refuse sex, (d) wives fail to take care of the children, (e) wives show disrespect for parents-in-law, (f) wives fail to give birth to a boy, and (g) wives fight with husbands. The dependent variable is the mean of the seven circumstances. The higher the value, the more likely an individual will accept the use of IPV against women.

Independent Variables

The independent variables comprise three categories: sociodemographic characteristics, attitudes toward gender role, and social learning factors. The first group, sociodemographic characteristics, includes marital status, age, educational level, employment status, and income level. Marital status is a dummy variable, where 1 = *married* and 0 = *divorced or going through the divorce process*. Age is a continuous variable which measures the actual ages of the respondents. Educational level is measured by an ordinal variable, where 1 = *elementary education* and 6 = *graduate education*. Employment status is coded as a dummy variable, where 1 = *employed* and 0 = *unemployed*. Income level measures monthly income. It is an ordinal variable, where 1 = *less than 1808 RMB (approximately US\$ 270)* and 13 = *more than 8001 RMB (approximately US\$ 1,193)*.

The second group of variables measures attitudes toward gender roles, which is operationalized by two variables. The first variable, endorsement of male dominance, consists of a scale of six items. Respondents were asked whether they agree with the following six statements: (a) men take care of affairs outside the household, while women should take care of those within; (b) wives should follow their husbands; (c) men should take charge of all family matters; (d) preserving men's face is of utmost importance; (e) nothing matters more to women than family; and (f) daughters belong to others; only sons belong to myself. The responses are given on a 4-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *strongly disagree* and 4 = *strongly agree*). A higher value indicates greater endorsement of male dominance. The second variable, gender equality, consists of a single-item scale which was assessed by asking respondents if they agreed with the statement "Men and women should be treated equally in society." The responses are given on a 4-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *strongly agree* and 4 = *strongly disagree*). A lower value indicates a higher level of belief in gender equality.

The third group of variables, social learning perspective, includes exposure to parental physical violence, being physically punished during childhood, and prior victimization. Respondents were asked whether they have ever witnessed parental physical violence as a child and whether they have ever experienced physical punishment by parents. Both variables are dummy variables, where 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no*. The

prevalence of prior victimization of IPV during the past year was also assessed. It is also a dummy variable, where 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no*. It measures whether the respondents have ever experienced physical violence, psychological violence, controlling behavior, or sexual violence during the past year. The IPV behaviors are measured by the conflict tactic scale (Straus, 1979). It is the most commonly used instrument in measuring IPV.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the variables mentioned above. Women in the present study had a low level of acceptance of IPV (1.37), meaning that they had low acceptance of the use of IPV. The mean age of the respondents was 40.22 years old. About 68% of them were employed. The respondents had medium level of endorsement of male dominance (2.31). The respondents also strongly believed in gender equality (1.55). Almost one-third (31.67%) had been exposed to physical violence between parents during childhood. About 40% had been physically punished during childhood. About 22% had experienced IPV victimization during the past year. All scales have acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.7.

Multivariate Analysis

Before conducting multivariate analyses, the variation inflation factors (VIFs) were checked. The VIFs were between 1.02 and 1.17, indicating that multicollinearity is

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables of Interest.

	<i>M/%</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Dependent variable: acceptance of IPV	1.37	0.47	1	3.14
Background characteristics				
Married	50%			
Age	40.22	8.32	22	60
Education	3.15	0.92	1	6
Employed	68.46%			
Income	6.25	3.7	1	13
Attitudes toward gender roles				
Male dominance	2.31	0.55	1	3.83
Gender equality	1.55	0.72	1	4
Prior experience in exposure to violence and victimization				
Exposure to parental physical violence	31.67%			
Being physically punished	40.17%			
Prior victimization	22.33%			

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; IPV = intimate partner violence.

not a problem among the independent variables. All statistical analyses were conducted in Stata 14. Table 2 presents results from the multiple regression analysis.

The findings show that women who held a strong endorsement of male dominance were more likely to accept the use of IPV ($\beta = .208$; $p \leq .001$). Also, women who had been exposed to parental physical violence were more likely to accept the use of IPV ($\beta = .134$; $p \leq .01$). Believing in gender equality and having been physically punished during childhood were not related to the women's acceptance of IPV. Women who had prior victimization of IPV during the past year were less likely to accept the use of IPV ($\beta = -.288$; $p \leq .01$).

Concerning the sociodemographic variables, the findings suggest that women with higher education and being employed were less likely to accept the use of IPV ($\beta = -.069$; $p \leq .01$ and $\beta = -.014$; $p \leq .05$, respectively). Women who were divorced were less likely to accept the use of IPV ($\beta = -.103$; $p \leq .05$). Other sociodemographic characteristics, such as income and age, were not related to the acceptance of IPV.

Education as Moderator

To further understand the moderating effect of education and income on the relationships between acceptance of IPV and the main independent variables, such as attitudes toward gender roles and prior experience of exposure to violence and victimization, we followed the procedures recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). Firstly, all the variables except the moderating variables (education and income) were included in the regression model (Model 1). Secondly, a moderating variable (education or income) was included in the regression model to examine the influence of that moderating

Table 2. Multiple Regression of Acceptance of Intimate Partner Violence.

	β	SE
Sociodemographics		
Married	−0.103*	0.044
Age	0.004	0.003
Education	−0.066**	0.025
Employed	−0.550*	0.257
Income	−0.011	0.006
Attitudes toward gender roles		
Male dominance	0.191***	0.039
Gender equality	0.013	0.032
Prior experience in exposure to violence and victimization		
Exposure to parental physical violence	0.120*	0.049
Being physically punished	0.017	0.047
Prior victimization	−0.288***	0.058
R^2	0.188***	

Note. SE = standard error.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

variable on acceptance of IPV when other variables were controlled for (Model 2). Lastly, the interaction term between either education or income and the main independent variable was added to assess the moderating effect. To avoid the potential problem of multicollinearity, the two variables in the interaction terms were mean-centered before creating the interaction terms.

Education moderates the effect of believing in gender equality on acceptance of IPV ($\beta = -.095^{**}$; $p \leq .01$) (Table 3). Believing in gender equality itself is not related to acceptance of IPV in both Tables 2 and 3. The findings suggest that education may empower those women with traditional patriarchal values to disapprove of the use of IPV.

Education also moderates the effect of being exposed to parental physical violence during childhood ($\beta = -.141$; $p \leq .01$) (Table 4). In Tables 2 and 4, being exposed to parental physical violence is positively associated with acceptance of IPV. In other words, women who were exposed to parental physical violence may learn that using IPV is acceptable. However, from Table 4, it appears that women with higher educational level and who had been exposed to parental physical violence were more likely to disapprove of the use of IPV. Education may have changed the way they view the use of IPV, hence, receiving higher level of education may inhibit the effect of exposure to physical violence on their acceptance of IPV. Therefore, those women who had been exposed to parental physical violence, but with higher educational level, tended to disapprove of the use of IPV.

Table 3. Moderating Effect of Education on Relationship Between Gender Equality and Acceptance of IPV.

	β	SE
Sociodemographics		
Married	-0.095*	0.044
Age	0.003	0.003
Education	-0.058**	0.025
Employed	-0.512*	0.254
Income	-0.011	0.006
Attitudes toward gender roles		
Male dominance	0.188***	0.039
Gender equality	0.017	0.031
Prior experience in exposure to violence and victimization		
Exposed to physical violence	0.110*	0.048
Being physically punished during childhood	0.024	0.046
Prior victimization	-0.273***	0.058
Interaction term		
Education \times Gender Equality	-0.095**	0.030
R^2	0.209***	

Note. SE = standard error.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 4. Moderating Effect of Education on Relationship Between Exposure to Parental Physical Violence and Acceptance of IPV

	β	SE
Sociodemographics		
Married	-0.104*	0.044
Age	0.004	0.003
Education	-0.065**	0.025
Employed	-0.557*	0.255
Income	-0.010	0.006
Attitudes toward gender roles		
Male dominance	0.190***	0.039
Gender equality	0.007	0.031
Prior experience in exposure to violence and victimization		
Exposure to physical violence	0.129**	0.049
Being physically punished during childhood	0.026	0.046
Prior victimization	-0.294***	0.058
Interaction term		
Education \times Exposure to Physical Violence	-0.141**	0.050
R^2	0.204***	

Note. SE = standard error.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

The moderating effect of education on the relationships between acceptance of IPV and other main independent variables, such as male dominance, being physically punished during childhood, and prior victimization, was not significant.

Income as Moderator

Income moderates the effect of believing in gender equality on acceptance of IPV ($\beta = -.024$; $p \leq .01$) (Table 5). In Tables 2 and 5, both income and believing in gender equality are not significantly associated with acceptance of IPV. However, the interaction term of income and gender equality becomes significant in Table 5. Thus, women with both high level of income and a strong belief in gender equality are less likely to accept IPV. Similar to having high level of education, perhaps, having high level of income may empower those women with traditional patriarchal values to disapprove of the use of IPV.

The moderating effects of income on the relationships between acceptance of IPV and other main independent variables, such as male dominance, being exposed to parental physical violence during childhood, being physically punished during childhood, and prior victimization, were not significant.

Discussion

The literature suggests that IPV acceptance is an important correlate of IPV. Understanding the factors associated with acceptance of IPV may reduce IPV.

Table 5. Moderating Effect of Income on Relationship Between Gender Equality and Acceptance of IPV.

	β	SE
Sociodemographics		
Married	-0.107*	0.044
Age	0.003	0.003
Education	-0.060*	0.025
Employed	-0.548*	0.255
Income	-0.012	0.006
Attitudes toward gender roles		
Male dominance	0.188***	0.039
Gender equality	0.008	0.031
Prior experience in exposure to violence and victimization		
Exposure to physical violence	0.108*	0.049
Being physically punished during childhood	0.018	0.046
Prior victimization	-0.275***	0.058
Interaction term		
Income \times Gender Equality	-0.024**	0.008
R^2	0.205***	

Note. SE = standard error.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Feminist theories suggest that patriarchal cultural norms influence individuals' justification of men's dominance over women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Hunnicutt, 2009). The cultural justification for IPV against women has been found in more patriarchal societies, such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zimbabwe (Krug et al., 2002). In those traditional societies, men are seen as the owners of their wives, and women are expected to be respectful to their husbands, stay home, and take care of children (Krug et al., 2002). If their wives fail to fulfill their roles, men feel entitled to use violence to punish their wives (Krug et al., 2002). Following this line of logic, Chinese women may have a high level of acceptance of IPV. However, most of the earlier studies of IPV were conducted in Western societies and among college students. It is not known how the traditional patriarchal cultural norms may shape an individual's acceptance of IPV through the influence of attitudes toward gender roles and early childhood developmental experience within a family. Therefore, there is a need to examine the factors for acceptance of IPV among Chinese women. Using a sample of 600 Chinese women living in a large urban city in the southern China, the present study investigated the influence of individuals' attitudes toward gender norms, violence in the family, and other sociodemographic characteristics on their acceptance of IPV. Several findings became apparent.

Firstly, the findings show that the impact of patriarchal ideology on acceptance of IPV was mixed. Attitudes toward gender norms, measured by respondents' beliefs concerning male dominance, are positively correlated with acceptance of IPV. In other

words, Chinese women who reported a higher level of belief confirming male dominance were more likely to accept the use of IPV against women. The finding is partially consistent with Li et al. (2020) who found that Chinese students' tolerance of IPV was influenced by their attitudes toward gender roles. Our findings suggest that due to the patriarchal cultural norms in China, behaviors that deviate from traditional gender norms may be regarded as warranting violence. This finding implies that more intervention programs are needed to change attitudes concerning gender norms. This may, in turn, improve attitudes toward acceptance of IPV against women.

In contrast to Li et al. (2020), our findings do not reveal a significant relationship between belief in gender equality and acceptance of IPV. This is probably because the operationalizations of belief in gender equality were different. In Li et al. (2020), gender equality was measured by three dimensions, namely, discrimination, opportunities for achievement, and limitation of women's opportunities. The measurement of gender equality in our study is more general. In future studies, gender equality should be measured by specific dimensions because it is possible that individuals may have different understandings of the manifestation of gender equality. Although belief in gender equality itself is not related to acceptance of IPV, this relationship is moderated by education and income. The results suggest that women with higher education and income level and those who have a strong belief in gender equality are less likely to accept the use of IPV. Perhaps, having high level of education and income may empower those women with traditional patriarchal values to disapprove of the use of IPV. Education may change women's attitudes toward IPV because having higher education may increase women's socioeconomic status (Boyle et al., 2009). They may be more aware of women's rights and gender equality, and thus they may be less willing to accept the use of violence against partners. Having more economic resources may also allow women to expand their social networks and have more access to information. Thus, they may have higher self-confidence and self-empowerment and be less likely to accept the use of IPV against women (Jewkes, 2002). These findings imply that narrowing the gender-based gap at the sociostructural level, such as increasing women's access to education and women's income level, may lower their acceptance of IPV and eventually reduce their IPV victimization (Li, 2022).

Secondly, the early childhood developmental experience within a family only exerted limited effects on the tolerance of IPV. Being exposed to parental physical violence was positively and significantly correlated with acceptance of IPV. This finding gives support to the social learning theory that individuals who witness IPV are more likely to accept the use of violence (Copp et al., 2019). Furthermore, education moderates the influence of exposure to parental physical violence. This finding is intriguing because it suggests that having higher educational level may mitigate the negative influence of exposure to parental physical violence on acceptance of IPV. Researchers have found that many people who have been abused by their parents do not physically assault their partners or children (Barnett et al., 2005). Perhaps other factors, for example, education, may expose them to alternative and perhaps more powerful attitudes toward acceptance of IPV and may guide them to disapprove the use of violence.

Being married, age, and being employed are statistically nonsignificant. These findings on sociodemographic characteristics imply that the improvement of public

awareness of the problem of IPV should be targeted at women with certain background characteristics, e.g., women with lower education and income level. Public education should focus on changing their attitudes toward norms concerning gender roles and IPV to reduce their level of acceptance for IPV.

The limitations of the present study should be mentioned. The data were collected before the passage of the very first Anti-Domestic Violence Law in China, which was enacted in December 2015 to mitigate this problem. The law prohibits physical violence and psychological violence between family members, such as married and cohabitating couples, children, and older family members. The law came into effect on March 1, 2016. The data were collected during 2013 and 2014, and hence, they may not reflect the latest level of acceptance of IPV. It is not yet known whether the legislation will be effective in reducing IPV and improving attitudes toward IPV. Future research is needed to examine how the passage of the law may affect Chinese women's acceptance of IPV.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study suggests that the traditional patriarchal culture in China provides an excellent context to understand the impact of patriarchal ideology and exposure to physical violence. The study contributes to the literature by finding that belief in male dominance and exposure to parental physical violence are associated with higher acceptance of IPV. Having higher education and income level may reduce women's tolerance of IPV. The findings allow us to improve prevention and intervention practices.

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