

Relationship dynamics and perpetration of intimate partner violence
among female Chinese college students

by

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Abstract

In China, most violence studies focus on male intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration and female victimization, and studies on dating violence and female IPV perpetration are less common. Although female IPV perpetration and gender symmetry in IPV in China has surfaced with very recent research, there have been limited studies examining the factors related to female perpetration in dating relationships in China. In the current research, we aim to examine how relationship factors, including anger management, communication problems, relationship conflict, and relationship distress are linked with female physical and psychological IPV perpetration. We included 857 female college students in three regions in China from the International Dating Violence database. A single path analysis model was performed to answer three questions: 1) Is the participants' level of anger management skills associated with lower levels of physical and psychological IPV perpetration; 2) Is the participants' level of communication problems, relationship conflict, and relationship distress associated with higher levels of physical and psychological IPV perpetration and; 3) Does the participants' level of anger management skills moderate the negative effects of relationship conflict and distress in predicting their self-reported level of IPV perpetration. We found that Chinese college women's anger management skills and communication problems were both significantly associated with physical and psychological abuse on both minor and severe levels, relationship conflict was significantly associated with minor physical, minor psychological and severe psychological abuse, and anger management skills moderated the negative effects of relationship conflict on female IPV perpetration. Our findings suggest that it may be important to explore the role of college women's anger management skills, communication problems and conflict resolution skills in their dating relationships, as well as to develop female-based

intervention programs to increase Chinese college women's anger management, communication skills and conflict resolution skills, in order to reduce their levels of IPV perpetration.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious and critical public health concern that significantly impacts people mentally and physically across different ages and races all over the world. Dating violence is a specific subtype of IPV that has been reported at high prevalence rates in universities (Straus, 2004). Previous research has shown that 30% to 34% of dating partners report physical assault and 93% to 98% of them report psychological aggression (Riggs & O'Leary, 1996). Straus's (2004) international dating violence study, which gathered data from 31 universities worldwide, reported that 17% to 45% of dating relationships included physical assault. With its worldwide high prevalence, dating violence has brought about a number of serious negative health outcomes, such as increased risk of sexually transmitted disease, chronic or temporary health problems, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, fear and anger (Amar, Gennaro, 2005). (Pennison, 2000).

Traditionally, it is believed that men are the primary perpetrators of IPV. However, increasing studies have found that women initiate and commit as much or more IPV than men (Archer, 2002; Melton & Belknap, 2003). Among college students, Straus's 2004 international dating violence study found that female students reported perpetrating similar levels of both psychological and physical assault towards their partners as did male students. Even though male students inflict more injuries than do female students, female students report similar levels of perpetrating IPV. The National Violence Against Women Survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) found that women's violence led to 40% of all the past year's injuries and created 27% of the injuries requiring medical attention (Pennison, 2000).

The focus of this thesis is dating violence in China. IPV in China is a complicated and serious social problem. It is a multi-faceted issue that is intertwined with traditional Chinese

beliefs favoring gender inequality, family unity, and societal conditions that devalue women (Zhao & Yuhong, 2001). However, with the increasing economic development in the past 30 years in China, women's access to education and their economic resources have dramatically increased, so women's power and status in their intimate relationships in China is increasing (Tang, 2008). It is unclear how these changes will affect the dynamics of IPV perpetration and victimization in China. Another significant change about IPV in China is that China's Parliament passed the country's first anti-domestic violence law in 2015, which protects unmarried cohabiters in its first time in the history of fighting against domestic violence in China (Su, 2017). With this new law, it is also important to study dating violence in China.

Currently, IPV studies are predominantly focused in the US. Although there is some previous research on IPV in China, these studies mainly focus on male perpetration and female victimization, (Hsieh, Feng & Shu, 2009; Leung, Leung, Lam & Ho, 1999; Shen 2014; Xu et al., 2005). Very recently, research on female IPV perpetration and mutual IPV in China has surfaced, however, there have been limited studies examining the factors related to female perpetration in dating relationships in China. To address this concern, this study aims to examine relationship factors that could lead to increased female IPV perpetration among Chinese college students. More specifically, the objective of the present study is to examine how relationship factors, including anger management, communication problems, relationship conflict, and relationship distress are linked with female physical and psychological IPV perpetration. This study extends previous research on IPV in China in two ways. First, it expands on previous research on IPV in China by solely focusing on female IPV perpetration in China. Second, responding to Kamimura, Assasnik, and Franchek-Roa (2016a)'s request that future studies should examine factors associated with IPV perpetration in China, particularly in women, the

study uses a path analysis to systematically explore four relationship factors that may contribute to female IPV perpetration among college students in China, and also if anger management can moderate the effects of relationship conflict and distress on female IPV perpetration in this population.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Gender Symmetry and Female IPV Perpetration in China

Although Chinese citizens have been increasingly exposed to Western values calling for freedom and gender equality, traditional Chinese beliefs and values emphasizing gender inequality and patriarchy, are still deeply influencing people's behaviors and lives today. Based on the emphasis of gender inequality in traditional Chinese beliefs, it is easily assumed that IPV is a more gendered phenomenon in China. Straus (2011) proposed the gender symmetry model, referring to a position that men and women are equally likely to perpetrate IPV. This model updates our traditional view on IPV and also encourages us to include women on IPV research in China.

A few recent studies on IPV in China have brought female perpetration and gender symmetry in IPV to our attention (Anderson et al., 2011; Chen & Chan, 2019; Kamimura, Nourian, Assasnik & Franchek-Roa, 2016a; Wang, Petula, 2007). A qualitative study of Chinese women's aggression found that female-perpetrated violence in dating relationships was more accepted by both women and men (Wang & Petula, 2007). This study also sheds light on how contemporary Chinese women make use of the social narratives related with gender, love and sex to justify their aggressive behavior and interactions with each other (Wang & Petula, 2007). Another exploratory study indicated that Chinese men and women share relatively similar attitudes toward male perpetrated and female perpetrated IPV (Anderson et al., 2011). A new study focusing on IPV experiences and mental health among countries and regions in Asia, including Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, using the International Dating Violence Study found that the self-reported prevalence of IPV perpetration was higher among women than men in this data set (Kamimura, Nourian, Assasnik & Franchek-Roa, 2016b). The same research

group conducted another study specifically focusing on factors associated with IPV perpetration among college students in China and found that 48.3% of women reported perpetrating physical IPV, whereas only 26.3% of men did (Kamimura, Nourian, Assasnik & Franchek-Roa, 2016a). This study also found out that IPV perpetration and victimization often co-occur among young Chinese adults (Kamimura, Nourian, Assasnik & Franchek-Roa, 2016). A very recent study in 2019 examined gender symmetry and mutuality in IPV in China, and found gender symmetry in regard to physical assault and psychological aggression in China (Chen & Chan, 2019). The present study aims to build on this previous research, as well as to explore relational factors that may contribute to female IPV perpetration in China.

Relationship Dynamics: Relationship Factors linked with Female IPV Perpetration

Johnson and colleagues (Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000) studied different relational dynamics surrounding violence and came up with four relationship patterns (or types of violence): intimate terrorism, violence resistance, mutual violent control, and situational couple violence. Among these four types, it is hypothesized that situational couple violence is the most prevalent type of relationship violence (Simpson, Doss, Wheeler & Christensen, 2007, as cited in Stith, McCollum, & Rosen, 2011) and is perpetrated by both men and women (Johnson, 1995, 2006; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). When talking about situational couple violence, Johnson suggested that “the core problem is one of communication skill deficiencies for which an individual compensates with verbal aggression that then escalates into violence” (Johnson, 2006, p. 18) and a significant portion of situational IPV originates from relationship conflict (Stith, McCollum, & Rosen, 2011). Based on these findings Stith and colleagues (2011) emphasized the importance of viewing situational IPV within a relationship context and helping couples to change and manage their relationship dynamics may be the most appropriated treatment for

couples where situational violence occurred (Stith, McCollum, & Rosen, 2011). Therefore, this research study will specifically examine how relationship factors are associated with female college student IPV perpetration in China.

Many studies have examined relationship factors, such as couples' anger management strategies, communication problems, conflict, dominance, jealousy and relationship distress as significant factors contributing to relationship violence (Goussinsky, Michael, Yassour-Borochowitz, 2017; Kamimura, Nourian, Assasnik & Franchek-Roa, 2016; Lasley & Durtschi, 2017; Patt & Markham, 2016). There is also research suggesting that relationship satisfaction and couple commitment is related to decreased levels of dating violence (Slotter et al., 2012).

A study looking at motivations for perpetration among college women reported that anger, retaliation for emotional hurt to get partner's attention, and jealousy were all common reasons for perpetrating partner violence among college women, and suggested that anger, emotion, and stress regulation skills should be included in the IPV prevention and intervention programs (Leisring, 2013). A new study examining factors associated with perpetration of IPV among college students including men and women in China, found that female perpetrators of IPV were more likely to have anger management issues than men and women who did not perpetrate IPV (Kamimura, Nourian, Assasnik & Franchek-Roa, 2016a). The study also found that among women, anger management issues, communication problems and other risk factors increased the risk of perpetrating physical IPV (Kamimura, Nourian, Assasnik & Franchek-Roa, 2016a). Based on these previous findings, it is important to further research how these different relationship factors are linked with female IPV perpetration in China.

Present Study

The purpose of this study was to examine if reported levels of anger management skills, communication problems, relationship conflict, and relationship distress in intimate relationships were associated with the likelihood of female psychological and physical IPV perpetration among Chinese college students. This study also sought to explore if anger management skills moderated the negative effects of relationship distress and conflict on female IPV perpetration. Therefore, this study had the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: The participants' levels of positive anger management skills will be associated with lower self-reported levels of physical and psychological IPV perpetration.

Hypothesis 2: The participants' levels of problematic avoidant and/or disrespectful communication patterns, their reported levels of relationship conflict, and their reported levels of relationship distress will be associated with higher self-reported levels of physical and psychological IPV perpetration.

Hypothesis 3: Participants' levels of anger management skills will minimize or cancel out the negative effects of relationship conflict and distress in predicting their higher self-reported levels of physical and psychological IPV perpetration.

Chapter 3 - Method

Data and Chinese Sample

This study used data from the International Dating Violence Study, conducted by a consortium of scholars across 32 nations from 2001 to 2006. The main focus for the initial data gathering was to examine cross-national differences in rates of various forms of abuse and the associated differences in personal or relationship characteristics. The data were obtained through questionnaires administered to university students who were informed of the voluntary nature of the research.

The Chinese data set is combined from four subsamples from Beijing (10 universities), Shanghai (4 universities), Hong Kong (1 university) and Taiwan (1 university). Because this study aimed to test female perpetration, participants who were male were excluded from the analysis. Our sample also excluded participants who had never been in a dating relationship, or were in a relationship for less than 1 month. Lastly, in order to focus on college students for this study, participants who were of ages that drastically deviated from a typical college age (i.e., ages greater than 33), were excluded too, leaving in a sample of 964. For the remaining sample, the participants' relationship status was classified as: dating ($n = 857$, 89%), engaged ($n = 79$; 8.2%), married ($n = 13$; 1.3%) and cohabitating ($n = 14$; 1.5%). Since the focus of this study was on female perpetration in dating relationships, participants who were engaged, married and cohabitated with partners were also excluded, thus resulting in a total operational sample of 857. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 33 years old ($M = 21.76$, $SD = 2.81$).

Measurements

Physical and psychological IPV perpetration

Both physical and psychological abuse perpetration were measured using the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus et al. 1996). It has been used in the United States as in many other countries in the world (Straus, 2008), and Hong Kong of China (Tang, 1994).

Physical IPV perpetration. The CTS2 had 12 items to measure physical IPV, and includes incidents such as kicked, pushed or shoved, or used a knife or gun (perpetration). The CTS2 also differentiated between minor and severe levels of physical IPV perpetration. Minor physical abuse included five items, and examples of minor physical abuse perpetration included “I threw something at my partner that could hurt” and “I pushed or shoved my partner.” Severe physical abuse included seven items, and examples of severe assault perpetration/victimization included “I punched or hit my partner with something that could hurt” and “I slammed my partner against a wall.” Minor assault perpetration was measured by averaging these five items, and severe assault perpetration was measured by averaging these seven items. The internal consistency scores of minor and severe physical abuse perpetration for this sample was ($\alpha = .67$) and ($\alpha = .58$), separately. Similar with Lasley and Durtschi’s (2015) research where the internal consistency of severe assault victimization were also pretty low ($\alpha = .47$), in this study, the internal consistency of severe physical abuse was also questionable. The CTS2 as a measurement tool of IPV may need additional refinement when used with Chinese samples.

Psychological IPV perpetration. The CTS2 has eight items to measure psychological IPV perpetration (psychological aggression). The CTS2 also differentiates between minor and severe levels of psychological IPV perpetration. Minor psychological abuse has four items and examples of minor psychological abuse including “I insulted or swore at my partner,” and “I

shouted or yelled at my partner.” Severe psychological abuse has seven items on the scale, and examples include “I called my partner fat or ugly” and “I threatened to hit or throw something at my partner.” The internal consistency scores of minor and severe psychological abuse perpetration for this sample was ($\alpha = .70$) and ($\alpha = .45$), separately. Questionably, the internal consistency of severe psychological abuse was low too in this sample, further suggesting future studies should refine CTS as a measurement tool of IPV to be culturally sensitive in China.

Straus et al. (1996) described five ways of recoding and scoring the CTS2, including year prevalence, chronicity, ever prevalence, modes, and year frequency. In this study, the year frequency (how often the behavior occurred within one year of the survey) of physical and psychological perpetration of IPV was used for analysis. However, due to extreme skewness in the data where most scores on IPV were zero or low, we adjusted the overall scale of these measures to allow for an acceptable rate of skewness and kurtosis to proceed with the study. The total scores on each of the four outcome variables were recoded as: 0 = 0 acts of violence perpetration, 1 = 1 act of violence perpetration, 2 = 2 acts of violence perpetration, 3 = 3-10 acts of violence perpetration, 4 = 11-20 acts of violence perpetration, 5 = 20-150 acts of violence perpetration.

Anger management

Anger management was measured using the Anger Management Scale (Stith & Hamby, 2002) from the Personal Relationship Profile (PRP) instrument (Straus, Hamby, Boney McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). It consisted of three subscales, namely behavioral self-soothing, recognizing signs of anger, and self-talk. Unlike many other relationship factors, the anger management scale measured a protective factor rather than a risk factor. Examples of the items include, “I can calm myself down when I am upset with my partner” (behavioral self-soothing), “I recognize when I

am beginning to get angry at my partner” (recognizing signs of anger) and “When I feel myself getting angry at my partner, I try to tell myself to calm down” (self-talk). The scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Responses were summed across items and then averaged, with a higher mean score indicating a higher degree of anger management exhibited by the participant in a relationship. The Internal consistency in this sample was adequate ($\alpha = .64$).

Communication problems

Communication ability was measured by the Communication Problems Scale from PRP instrument (Straus, Hamby, Boney McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). It consists of eight items and two subscales, including avoidant/withholding and disrespectful/mean spirited communication. This scale measures the ability of a participant to express oneself verbally to one’s current partner. Examples of the items include, “I don’t tell my partner when I disagree about important things” (avoidant/withholding), and “when my partner says something mean, I usually say something mean back” (disrespectful/mean-spirited). The scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Responses were summed across items and then averaged, with a higher mean score indicating a higher degree of communication problems exhibited by the participant in a relationship. Internal consistency in this sample was less adequate ($\alpha = .54$). However, due to the theoretical relevance of communication problems for this study, the scale was retained. Although PRP instruments have demonstrated good internal validity and reliability in the US, few studies have examined the effectiveness of the scale when used in a Chinese cultural context. The questionable internal consistency of the communication problems measure in this study suggests it is necessary for future research to improve the PRP measurements for the Chinese culture.

Relationship conflict

Relationship conflict was measured by the Conflict Scale from the PRP instrument (Straus, Hamby, Boney McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) and has 9 items. The scale measures the areas of disagreement between the partners. Examples of items included “My partner and I disagree about what types of affection are okay in public”, “My partner and I disagree about when to have sex”, and “My partner and I disagree about how much time we should spend”. This scale also used a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Responses were summed across items and averaged, with a higher mean score indicating a higher degree of relationship conflict. Internal consistency in this sample was adequate ($\alpha = .68$).

Relationship distress

Relationship distress was measured by the Relationship Distress scale from the PRP instrument (Straus, Hamby, Boney McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The scale measures the degree of dissatisfaction with the current relationship, characterized by high conflict and few positive interactions. It includes eight items that measure two subscales, which are negative interactions and negative affect. Examples of items included “I have thought seriously about ending my relationship with my partner” (negative affect), and “There are more bad things than good things in my relationship with my partner” (negative interactions). This scale also used a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Responses were summed across items and averaged, with a higher mean score indicating a higher degree of relationship distress. Internal consistency in this sample was adequate ($\alpha = .65$).

Control variables

Though the majority of the population is in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan are comprised of the ethnic Chinese Han people, who share a substantial overlap of language,

cultural values and heritage. There is also obvious diversity in politics, society, socioeconomic development among these three places through the course of history (Shi, 2001). Therefore, regional origins were held constant as a control variable. Two dummy variables were created, Hong Kong and Taiwan with Mainland China as the reference group.

Data Analysis Plan

The study used MPlus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2011) to conduct a path analysis. In addition to the examination of the direct associations between the four relational factors (i.e., anger management, communication problems, relationship distress and conflicts) and the four IPV perpetration outcomes (i.e., minor physical IPV perpetration, severe physical IPV perpetration, minor psychological IPV perpetration, and severe psychological IPV perpetration), the analysis also tested the potential moderating effects of anger management skills on these associations. Standardized predictor and moderator variables were entered into the path analysis to ease interpretation of the interaction results and to provide a meaningful zero. The interaction term was generated by multiplying the standardized scores of anger management with relationship conflict and relationship distress. These interaction terms (e.g., anger management z -score \times relationship conflict z -score; anger management z -score \times relationship distress z -score) were entered as a predictors of the four IPV perpetration variables. Significant interaction terms were plotted at one standard deviation high and low on the predictors and moderators.

Chapter 4 - Results

Correlations

Table 1 shows the correlations among the predictors and outcome variables, which revealed important findings. Anger management was significantly, negatively correlated with the four outcome variables, including minor physical perpetration ($r = -0.24, p < .001$), severe physical perpetration ($r = -0.20, p < .001$), minor psychological perpetration ($r = -0.30, p < .001$), and severe psychological perpetration ($r = -0.22, p < .05$). Communication problems were significantly, positively correlated with the four outcome variables including minor physical perpetration ($r = .19, p < .001$), severe physical perpetration ($r = .16, p < .001$), minor psychological perpetration ($r = .29, p < .001$), and severe psychological perpetration ($r = .23, p < .001$). Relationship conflicts were also significantly, positively correlated with the four outcome variables including minor physical perpetration ($r = .17, p < .001$), severe physical perpetration ($r = .13, p < .001$), minor psychological perpetration ($r = .20, p < .001$), and severe psychological perpetration ($r = .27, p < .001$). Relationship distress was shown to only be significantly, positively correlated with minor psychological abuse ($r = .08, p < .05$) and severe psychological perpetration ($r = .19, p < .001$).

Table 1: *Correlations among anger management, communication problems, conflict, relationship distress, physical abuse and psychological perpetration (N = 857)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Anger management	–							
2. Communication Pro	-0.30***							
3. Conflict	-0.30***	.45***						
4. Relationship distress	-0.22***	.30***	.50***	–				
5. Minor physical	-.24***	.19***	.17***	.009	–			
6. Severe physical	-0.20***	.16***	.13***	-0.05	.56***	–		
7. Minor psychological	-0.30***	.29***	.20***	.08*	.60***	.45***	–	
8. Severe psychological	-0.22*	.23***	.27***	.19***	.49***	.43***	.58***	–

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Path Analysis Results

All hypotheses were tested in a single path analysis that included all main effects and interactions effects onto the four outcomes of interest (minor physical IPV perpetration, severe physical IPV perpetration, minor psychological IPV perpetration, and severe psychological IPV perpetration). This model was a just-identified model with no misfit between the raw data and the specified model. The model fit indices were $\chi^2(0) = 0.00$, RMSEA = 0.00, CFI = 1.00, and SRMR = .00.

Our first research hypothesis examined whether Chinese college women's high level of anger management skills (protective relational factor) would predict lower self-reported levels of physical and psychological IPV perpetration. We found that higher scores on reported anger management were significantly associated with lower scores on all four outcomes of interest, including minor physical assault perpetration ($\beta = -0.20, p < .001$), severe physical assault perpetration ($\beta = -0.18, p < .001$), minor psychological perpetration ($\beta = -0.24, p < .001$), and severe psychological perpetration ($\beta = -0.15, p < .001$).

Our second research hypothesis examined whether the other three relationship factors including communication problems, relationship conflict, and relationship distress (risk factors) would be associated with higher self-reported levels of physical and psychological IPV perpetration. We found that communication problems was significantly associated with the higher IPV on these four outcomes variables, including higher minor physical assault perpetration ($\beta = .12, p = .001, p < .05$), severe physical assault perpetration ($\beta = .11, p = .003, p < .05$), minor psychological perpetration ($\beta = .22, p < .001$), severe psychological perpetration ($\beta = .12, p = .001, p < .05$). Regarding more relationship conflict, we found that it was significantly associated with more minor physical perpetration ($\beta = .13, p = .001, p < .05$), severe physical

perpetration ($\beta = .11, p = .008, p < .05$), severe psychological perpetration ($\beta = .15, p < .001$), yet only marginally associated with minor psychological perpetration ($\beta = .08, p = .052$). With respect to relationship distress, we found it was significantly negatively associated with minor physical perpetration ($\beta = -0.13, p < .001$) and also with severe physical perpetration ($\beta = -0.17, p < .001$), but not significantly associated with minor and severe psychological IPV perpetration.

Table 2: Summary of path analysis for the association between relationship factors and physical IPV perpetration ($N = 857$)

Variable	Minor Physical Abuse			Severe Physical Abuse		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Anger Management	-0.30***	0.15	-0.20	-0.24***	0.05	-0.18
Communication						
Problems	0.18**	0.06	0.12	0.15**	0.05	0.11
Relationship Conflict	0.19**	0.06	0.13	0.14**	0.05	0.11
Relationship distress	-0.19***	0.06	-0.13	-0.23***	0.05	-0.17
Anger \times Conflict	-0.11*	0.05	-0.08	-0.13**	0.05	-0.10
Anger \times Distress	0.10	0.05	0.07	0.09	0.05	0.07
Hong Kong	0.19*	0.10	0.13	0.17	0.10	0.13
Taiwan	-0.11	0.15	-0.07	0.23	0.13	0.17

Note: Anger \times Conflict = Anger Management \times Relationship Conflict; Anger \times Distress = Anger Management \times Relationship Distress; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 3: Summary of path analysis for the association between relationship factors and psychological IPV perpetration ($N = 857$)

Variable	Minor Psychological Abuse			Severe Psychological Abuse		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>
Anger Management	-0.42***	0.06	-0.24	-0.24***	0.05	-0.15
Communication						
Problems	0.39**	0.06	0.22	0.19**	0.06	0.12
Relationship Conflict	0.14	0.07	0.08	0.25***	0.06	0.15
Relationship distress	-0.11	0.07	-0.06	0.11	0.06	0.07
Anger \times conflict	-0.14*	0.06	-0.08	-0.23***	0.06	-0.14
Anger \times Distress	0.02	0.06	0.01	0.07	0.05	0.04
Hong Kong	0.61***	0.12	0.34	0.70***	0.11	0.43
Taiwan	0.24	0.17	0.14	0.31*	0.16	0.19

Note: Anger \times Conflict = Anger Management \times Relationship Conflict; Anger \times Distress = Anger Management \times Relationship Distress; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Our last research question was to test whether or not Chinese college women's anger management skills would minimize or cancel out the negative effects of relationship conflict and distress in predicting their self-reported level of physical and psychological IPV perpetration. We found anger management skills significantly moderated the association between relationship conflict and the four outcome variables, including minor physical abuse ($\beta = -0.08, p = .03, p < .05$), severe physical abuse ($\beta = -0.10, p = .005, p < .01$), minor psychological abuse ($\beta = -0.08, p = .02, p < .05$) and severe psychological abuse ($\beta = -0.07, p < .001$). We found anger management did not significantly moderate the association between relationship distress and the four outcome variables. However, anger management skills was marginally significant as a moderator for the association between relationship distress and minor physical abuse ($\beta = .08, p = .06$) and severe physical abuse ($\beta = .01, p = .07$).

The interaction between anger management and relationship conflict on minor physical abuse perpetration is plotted in Figure 1. From this figure, we can see that Chinese college women with high levels of anger management skills reported low levels of minor physical abuse perpetration both at low and high level of relationship conflict. In the figure, we observe a significant moderation effect in that at high levels of relationship conflict and high level of anger management, Chinese college women reported low level of minor physical abuse perpetration, but in the context of high levels of relationship conflict and low levels of anger management, they reported high levels of minor physical abuse perpetration, which are almost 1 standard deviations above the level of physical abuse perpetration under the high anger management skills.

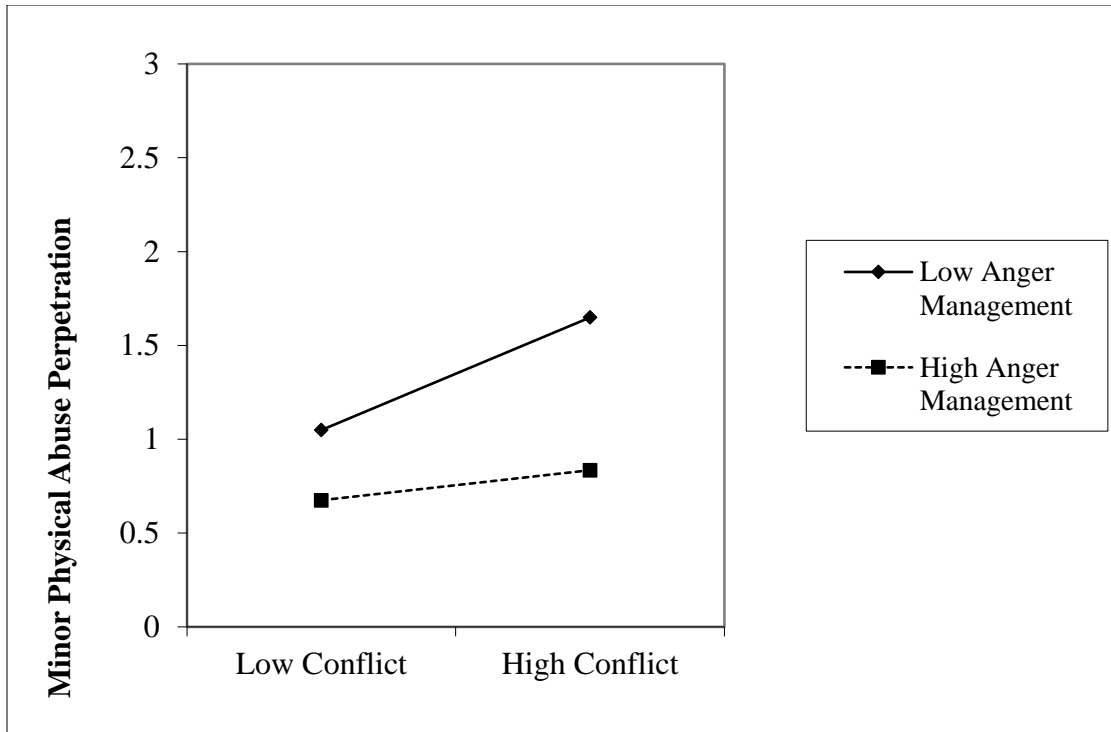


Figure 1: *Interaction effects of anger management and relationship conflict on reported levels of minor physical abuse perpetration*

The interaction between anger management and relationship conflict on severe physical abuse perpetration is plotted in Figure 2. From this figure, we also observed a significant buffering effect in that at high levels of conflict and high levels of anger management, the severe physical abuse perpetration was very low. However, in the context of high relationship conflict and low anger management, the reported levels of severe physical abuse perpetration were almost 1 standard deviations above the level of severe physical abuse perpetration under high anger management skills.

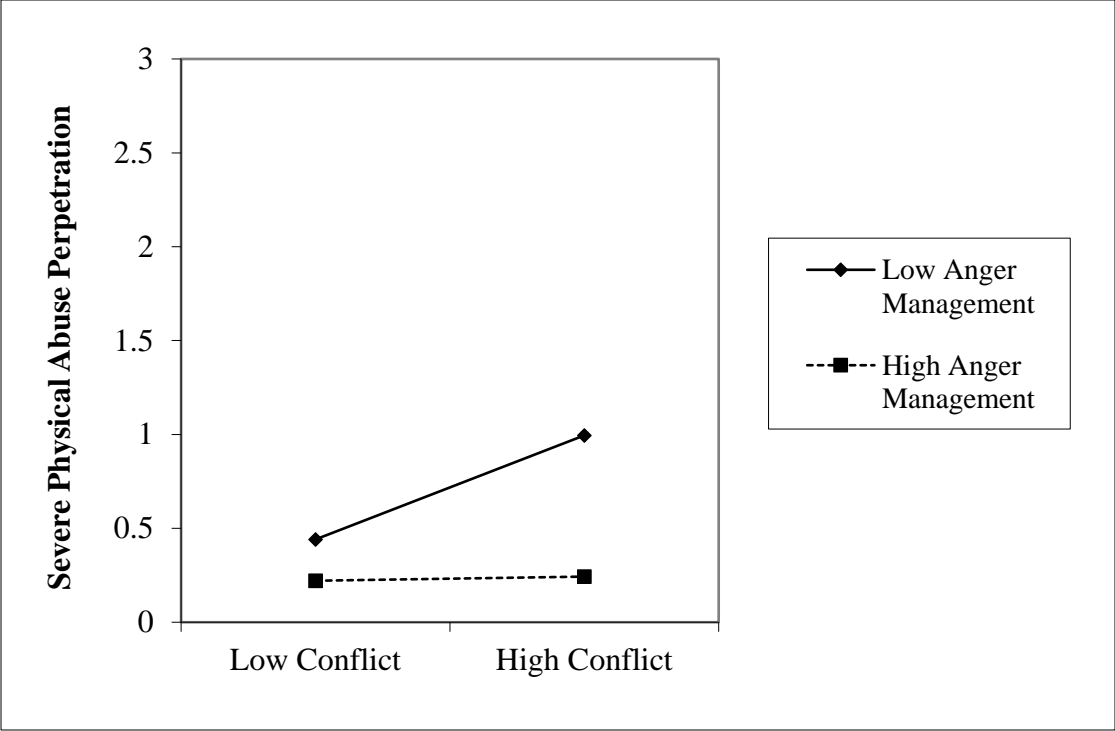


Figure 2: *Interaction effects of anger management and relationship conflict on reported levels of severe physical abuse perpetration*

The interaction between anger management and relationship conflict on minor and severe psychological abuse perpetration are plotted in Figure 3 and 4. From these two figures, we also observed similar significant buffering effect in that at high levels of conflict and high levels of anger management, the minor and severe psychological abuse perpetration was very low. However, in the context of high relationship conflict and low anger management, the reported levels of minor and severe psychological abuse perpetration were 1 standard deviations above the level of psychological abuse perpetration under high anger management skills.

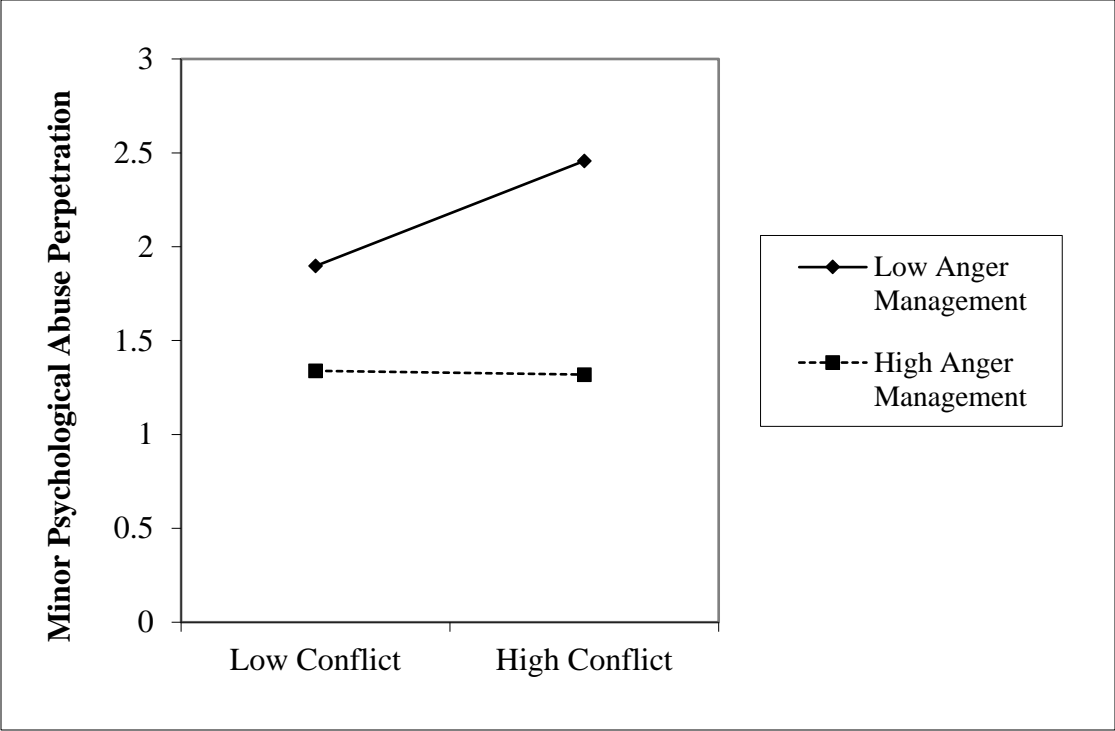


Figure 3: *Interaction effects of anger management and relationship conflict on reported levels of minor psychological abuse perpetration*

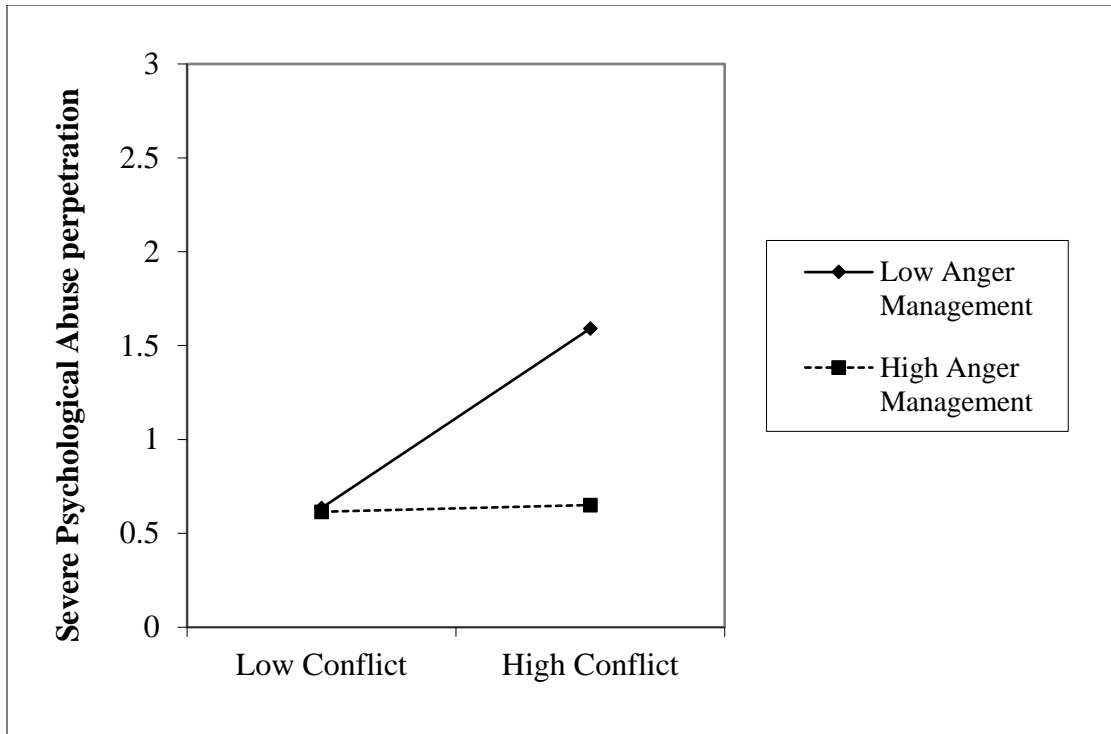


Figure 4: *Interaction effects of anger management and relationship conflict on reported levels of severe psychological abuse perpetration*

Control Variables

We controlled the regional origin and found that Chinese college women from Hong Kong reported significantly higher scores of minor physical abuse perpetration ($\beta = .13, p < .05$) and psychological abuse perpetration outcomes than those from Mainland China, including minor psychological abuse perpetration ($\beta = .34, p < .001$), and severe psychological abuse perpetration ($\beta = .43, p < .001$). We also found that Chinese college women from Taiwan reported significantly higher scores of severe psychological abuse perpetration than those from Mainland China ($\beta = .19, p < .05$).

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the association between female physical and psychological IPV perpetration among Chinese students and four relational factors including anger management, communication problems, relationship conflict and relationship distress. We also tested a potential moderating effect between anger management skills and relationship conflict, and relationship distress on female IPV perpetration in China. We found that high scores on reported anger management were associated with lower scores on all four outcomes of IPV, including minor physical assault, severe physical assault, minor psychological abuse and severe psychological abuse. The study also found that higher scores on reported communication problems were significantly associated with much higher scores on all four outcomes, too. Also, the study found that relationship conflict was positively, significantly related to minor physical, minor psychological and severe psychological abuse perpetration.

These findings suggest that Chinese college women who have higher level of anger management skills and lower level of communication problems report committing significantly less physical and psychological abuse, both on minor and severe levels. Women with lower levels of relationship conflict reported perpetrating significantly less minor physical, minor psychological and minor severe psychological abuse perpetration. More importantly, when relationship conflict is present in the dating relationship, Chinese college women who have better anger management abilities are significantly less likely to perpetrate the four types of IPV, including minor and severe physical and psychological abuse perpetration. Our findings support Johnson's argument that communication skill deficiencies and relationship conflict contribute to the escalation of couple violence (Johnson, 2006) and Stith's proposal of viewing situational IPV

in the context of relationship dynamics and developing appropriate treatment for couples addressing relationship problems when violence occurred (Stith, McCollum, & Rosen, 2011).

Our findings also match of Kamimura et al.'s (2016) conclusions that among Chinese college women, anger management issues, communication problems and other risk factors increase the risk of physical IPV (Kamimura, Nourian, Assasnik & Franchek-Roa, 2016a). However, our findings also add evidence to the literature that anger management skills would help decrease the risk of psychological IPV perpetration, and communication problems and relationship conflict would increase the risk of psychological perpetration among Chinese college women.

We found the participants' levels of relationship distress was negatively associated with their self-reported levels of physical and minor psychological IPV perpetration. This suggests our research findings do not support one of the hypotheses that Chinese college women's high levels of their reported relationship distress will be associated with higher self-reported levels of physical and psychological IPV perpetration. We propose Chinese college women's self-reported levels of relationship distress reflects more about the relationship with IPV victimization, so we recommend future study should examine the association between relationship distress and IPV victimization with this population.

We also found that when female Chinese college students were from Hong Kong, they reported significantly higher levels of minor physical violence, minor psychological violence, and severe psychological violence than those from Mainland China. We also found that when female Chinese college students were from Taiwan, as compared to Mainland China, they reported higher levels of perpetration of severe psychological abuse. No previous research has examined the differences in female IPV perpetration among these three regions, but some

previous research findings may help to provide some background context. Kaminura et al.'s (2016) research on IPV-related experiences and mental health among college students in Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, found that Taiwanese women reported highest levels of PTSD and gender hostility compared to other places and these women also reported higher level of perpetration than males (Kamimura, Nourian, Assasnik, & Franchek-Roa, 2016b). Though this research does not provide direct support as to why being from Taiwan was related to higher levels of self-reported severe psychological abuse perpetration, compared with Chinese college women from Mainland China, it does highlight the importance of addressing any serious mental health problem like PTSD, and gender hostility among Taiwanese Chinese women. Previous research about IPV in Hong Kong found that 53% of the respondents were identified as victims of situational couple violence, indicating a high prevalence of mutual IPV (Tiwari et al., 2015), which suggests it is very likely there is a high prevalence of female IPV perpetration in Hong Kong.

It is also important for us to remember differences in the cultural definition of women's aggression between the Chinese context and the Western culture. Wang's qualitative study of women's aggression in dating relationships in Beijing sheds light on the unique cultural understanding of women's aggression in China (Wang & Petula, 2007). Wang and Petula (2007) found that under the context of dating relationships, Chinese men and women do not think women's aggression should be counted as violence, instead, they define it as normal, playful and Ren Xing (being willful). This study also found that they also see this type of aggression as a means of expressing affection and communication between couples. On one hand, this double standard creates a distorted justification, allowing women's aggression to be more acceptable in the society and giving women more ethical and social power to perpetrate more violence towards

their partners. On the other hand, we cannot overlook the unique function women's violence serves for Chinese couples. It may help couples to increase affection to each other, therefore, we cannot totally negate women's aggression in Chinese cultural context. Future research and practice should take this cultural perspective into account and design culturally sensitive interventions.

Traditional Chinese Confucianism teaches women to be tender, moderate and humble, but modern Communist discourse suggest that "women sustain half the sky" and emphasizes "men and women are equal", in a way, promoting women's power to express their emotions and rights (Wang & Petula, 2007). Influenced by Western ideas of gender equality and life quality, modern Chinese women are becoming more assertive to fight for what they need from the relationship. Another important point to consider is that the population from Mainland China in this study was of the first generation to be affected by the one-child policy in China. There, young adults grew up in an unusual environment where they were seen as "a pearl in the palm" by their parents, which may lead to a lack of toleration of violence from their boyfriend (Wang & Petula, 2007). Young Chinese women are embracing the idea of an assertive and aggressive image to redefine their traditional Chinese gender roles. However, it is possible that while they are embracing their power and rights in intimate relationships, they might not know how to express them properly, leading to anger management problems, communication problems and relationship conflict with their partners. This study mainly examined how relationship factors increase the likelihood of Chinese female perpetration, however, further research should have a more comprehensive examination about the factors associating female perpetration.

Implication for Practice

The present study has important implications for clinical interventions and future research. Based on the study findings, it is important for clinicians working with Chinese clients to develop female-based interventions addressing problems with anger management, communication problems and relationship conflict for Chinese young women. The population of this study is Chinese college students, so it is important for Chinese colleges to develop educational relationship classes to teach young couples how to develop and maintain healthy and safe relationships. Clinicians who work in a college counseling service center need to be more intentional in exploring how Chinese young women express their anger, communicate about difficult topics with partners and deal with couple conflicts, and how these relational factors may play a role in relationship dynamics. It will also be important to carefully recognize possible relationship risk factors related to IPV perpetration that young women may have, such as communication problems and relationship conflicts, and help them to learn effective ways to express their anger and cope with couple conflicts. Domestic violence-focused couples therapy (DVFCT) (Stith, McCollum & Rosen, 2011) is an intervention program which has shown empirical effectiveness in reducing couple violence by research. This program targets more on situational couple violence (Stith, McCollum & Rosen, 2011), so it is applicable to Chinese dating violence and other situational intimate relationship violence. We recommend clinicians who work for this population to introduce this program to the Chinese context and develop culturally responsive couple therapy for IPV in China. In this book, it also examines the effectiveness of mindfulness-based anger management programs (Stith, McCollum, Rosen, 2011), so we also recommend clinicians add mindfulness elements to their interventions.

In addition, clinicians should also pay attention to the cultural meaning of violence that young Chinese couples make in their romantic relationships as they might interpret their violent behaviors as normal, playful or a way to show affection and love to each other (Wang & Petula, 2007). By adopting a culturally sensitive perspective, we recommend clinicians first acknowledge and validate the meaning underlying the violent behaviors and honor the unique cultural symbols and languages Chinese people use to express their affections. Here we are not trying to convey an idea that we should acknowledge and validate the behaviors of violence, because the behaviors can be problematic and escalate into severe and on-going violence; however it is the cultural meaning of the behavior we are trying to understand and respect. Secondly, we recommend clinicians use Narrative Therapy (White, 2007) to deconstruct these potentially harmful gender narratives and help the couples to form healthy expectations of gender expression. Clinicians can explore where the messages come that lead some women to form the narrative that it is normal and expected for girls to be violent towards their boyfriends and if that stands for their personal values to be a modern woman.

It was only in 2015 that China acknowledged dating violence in its first anti-domestic violence new law. Though dating violence is prohibited by law officially, there is a still strong stigma that violence that happens outside marriage is not recognized and protected, let alone when the victims are men, and the perpetrators are women, as in this study. We suggest that policy makers, educators, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), Non-Profit Organization (NPO) and other social organizations work together to bring awareness of dating violence, and female perpetration to the public.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First of all, it included the severe psychological abuse and communication problems measures despite their questionable internal consistency. The study sought to examine the dynamics between relationship factors and female IPV perpetration, and communication problems is an important relationship factor based on previous research and literature, so it makes sense to include both factors. However, the use of a measure with lower reliability increases measurement error, and reduces its measurement precision. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted cautiously when looking at the findings related with communication problems and severe psychological abuse. In order to avoid further measurement error, the study did not look at the moderation effect between anger management and communication problems. In addition, the questionable internal consistency of severe psychological abuse and communication problems measures in this study suggests it is necessary for future research to improve the CTS2 and PRP measurements in Chinese culture.

Second, because the measure of communication problems could not be directly reverse-coded as a measure for communication ability, the study did not examine whether communication can serve as a protective, moderation factor between relationship conflict, distress and female IPV perpetration, though this was one of the research hypotheses of this study. Third, the CTS2 can be used to report both an individual's own and their partner's frequency of assaults. For this study specifically, we included female IPV data but we did not report the context in which the physical and psychological violence occurred, which would include IPV victimization. It is possible that when these young women perpetrated violence, it was a means of self-defense, instead of trying to harm and control the other partner. The study

suggests future research should collect and use dyadic data to further understand relationship violence among Chinese dating couples.

Conclusion

Chinese young women are becoming more assertive and expressive with their power and emotions in their dating relationships, but it can be very problematic if they do not know how to appropriately manage their anger, communicate relationship problems, and handle their relationship conflict as they embrace the power. Our research found that there were significant associations between anger management, communication problems and conflict with self-reports of Chinese college women's physical and psychological IPV perpetration. We suggest future research to have a more comprehensive examination of different factors that contribute to high female IPV perpetration in China. We also encourage clinicians to validate, and also challenge, the cultural narratives that support Chinese women to perpetrate violence in their intimate relationships. Lastly, we also encourage the development of gender-based intervention programs to address these problems related with female IPV perpetration. Chinese policy makers, educators and other social organizations should take active actions to publicly oppose dating violence on college campuses.

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