

# **A Study on Family Violence**

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## **I. The General Situation of Family Violence in China**

This paper focuses on the husband's physical violence against his wife which is considered a crime in China.

A survey on women's position made by the China Women's Federation in 1992, showed that 0.9 % claimed to be battered among whom 36 % were city women. The investigation into 3,300 divorce cases between 1991 to 1992, made by the People's Court in Beijing, indicated that one fourth of the divorce cases were caused by abuse and battering between husbands and wives who were from various professions, age groups, cultural groups, social groups as well as regional groups. Another sample investigation (2,118 Beijing residents), made by the Beijing Marriage or Family Research Center in April 1994, showed that one percent of the wives were often battered, 4.4 % of the wives were sometimes battered and 15.9 % of them were seldom battered, making a total 21.3 % altogether.

The sample survey made by the Population Research Institute of China Academy of Social Sciences between October 1991 to October 1992 into 9,033 couples ages between 20 to 54 in six cities and provinces showed that conflict and disagreement were common between husband and wife; 71.16 % in urban areas claimed to have conflict and 71.86 % in the rural areas. It also showed that the percentage of battered women in the rural areas was 3.11 higher than those in the urban areas. The following study is based on the investigation of four places: Shanghai, Guangdong, Shanxi and Sichuan.

## **II. Analysis of Offenders and Victims**

### **A. Offenders: Husbands**

The study has shown that those who batter their wives have some characteristics in common:

- a) Feeling depressed, they pour out their dissatisfaction with life by committing violence. Some men lose their psychological balance when they find themselves relying on their wives, so they assert themselves through violence.
- b) Influenced by Chinese traditional ideas, most of them are male chauvinists. For a long time, the society was male - centered which led to male chauvinism. In their families, they are used to asserting their power and solving problems through violent means. The old saying is "Wife belongs to a man, just like a horse belongs to its master." A sample investigation of 52 divorce cases caused by family violence shows that 34.6 % of the men are male chauvinists. Others may batter their wives, (1) when they suspect them of having lovers (2) when they give birth to female babies; (3) to make them compliant and obedient. In addition, 19.2 % do it upon their mother's request and 9.6 % do it to get a divorce.
- c) Affected by the difficult economic situation, men in dire straits tend to commit violence. Many life experiences such as unemployment or the lack of money, tend to drive these men into a negative mood. When they can no longer endure their depression, they channel their negative energy into senseless violence. Quarrels are usually a precipitative factor. A study shows that money, jealousy, sex and alcohol drinking are the frequent causes of fights which result in a husband's violence against his wife.
- d) Influenced by childhood experiences, a man from a violent family tends to repeat the pattern of violence in his family. The research shows that family violence can be passed from generation to generation. Those who were often battered or witnessed their fathers' violence against their mothers

are now following their fathers' example. It is to be noted that very few women are battered by drunk husbands.

### B. *Battered Wives*

#### a) Being battered is a vicious circle

If the battered woman resigns herself to her husband's violence without asking for help from others, the whole situation may become a vicious circle. It involves three periods. In the first period, when women are abused for the first time, they do not show their resentment but criticise themselves instead. Their patient suffering does not help solve the problem, but only leads to more serious violence and reinforces the husbands' idea that they (the husbands) have the right to beat the women.

Then, the husbands beat them as a matter of course. In this period, women are both physically and psychologically hurt, feeling the end of their love. Being frightened by their husbands' violence, women do not have the courage to admit what happened to them and they are reluctant to let anyone know how seriously they are hurt. Feeling hopeless, battered women will cease to care and just wait out the end of the "storm". This is the hardest period for battered women.

In the last period, some husbands may ask their wives for forgiveness promising an end to the battering after realizing what they have done, so this is a peaceful time for some of them. For others who commit violence for a particular purpose such as to get a divorce, violence may be committed again when they find that their goal has not been reached. In a word, a victim will not escape from the fate of being battered repeatedly if she chooses to be obedient and suffer in silence.

What makes the battered women stay with their husbands? *Firstly*, they hope their husbands will change for the better. *Secondly*, they have nowhere to stay. *Thirdly*, they are afraid of their husbands' revenge; *Fourthly*, they sacrifice themselves for the children believing that they need their fathers' love and that they are totally dependent on the fathers. *Lastly*, they depend on their husbands economically and psychologically believing that

the family is the center of their life, thus leaving them with a dearth of choices. Being afraid to lose their family and to be scorned, they are hurt both physically and psychologically.

- b) An analysis of battered women in city and country areas in China

The analysis shows that there is a great diversity among battered women in urban and rural areas.

1. Battered women cover all age groups. In the urban areas, 58 % comprise battered women aging between 35 to 44. In the rural areas, young women under the age of 39 make up 79.3%. Further study also indicates that an age difference between husband and wife does not make much difference.
2. In the rural areas, women of all cultural backgrounds may become victims among whom high school graduates take up 45.9%, for middle school graduates 37.5%, those with associate or higher degrees 9.5% and primary school graduates and illiterate women take up only 6.9%. In contrast, the majority of battered women in rural areas are not well-educated. Among them 35.7% are illiterates, 29.5% are primary school graduates, 20.1% are middle school graduates. The above difference between the educational background of battered women suggests, on the one hand, that the popularization of middle school and high school education makes the battered women share a relatively good educational background; on the other hand, the educational attainment of battered women is lower than the average level which suggests that less educated rural women with traditional ideas tend to become victims of family violence.
3. From the point of view of profession, the percentage of battered women in the rural areas (1.59%) is higher than those in the urban areas (4.70%). Among all the battered women, urban women take up 25.5% while rural women take up 74.5 %. Among the battered urban women (a sample investigation of 72 battered women) workers take up 47.2%, technicians 23.6%, clerks 12.5%, attendants 8.3%, executives 5.6% and others 2.8%.

4. Battered women also share a monthly family income that is lower than the average. In Shanghai, for example, the average annual family income in 1994 was 2,303 RMB yuan (191.9 RMB yuan monthly) but 34.4% of the victimized women's monthly family income is less than 100 RMB yuan and 84.4% of them have their monthly family income of less than 200 RMB yuan. In rural areas, nearly 90% of the victimized women have their monthly family income of less than 100 RMB yuan. So families with family violence both in urban and rural areas share the problem of low living standards.
5. The victims both in urban and rural areas tend to regard man as superior to woman. For example, "when husband and wife share different opinions", 31.6% of the victimized women give in, about 12.2% higher than that in families with no conflicts. In Guangdong province, 33.3% of the victimized women obey their husbands, 14.5% higher than that in families without family violence; "when it appears difficult to maintain the normal relationship between husband and wife", 31.6% of the victimized women will passively endure abuse about 10.9% higher than that of ordinary women.

In Guangdong province, victimized women sharing the same attitudes occupy 29.2% of the whole or 11.1% higher than that of ordinary women; while in Shanxi, it is 48%, about 18.7% higher than ordinary women. The percentage of the victimized women who advocate divorce is very much lower than that of ordinary women. Shanghai is 20% lower, while in Guangdong province it is 25.6% and Shanghai province, 22%. From this research report, we may see that though victimized, few of them want to have a divorce.

### III. Causes of Ill-treatment of Women in Families

We base our analysis on different theories detailed below:

#### 1) *Psychotherapy*

This theory asserts that family violence happens because of the husband and wife's unhealthy mental conditions. If the husband

is very weak in controlling himself, then, very often under the influence of alcohol, he will possibly maltreat his wife. Obviously, this belief only touches the phenomenon and does not actually deal with the essential aspects of the phenomenon.

## 2) *Economics*

From the point of view of economics, family violence occurs mainly because of the pressures from life and family. The factors that cause poverty, like low salary, unemployment, no fixed income, poor living conditions, low economic status and too many children, may possibly lead to family violence and ill-treatment of the wife. This has been reflected in some literary materials. It is reported that husbands who ill-treat their wives often have little education and hold down poor jobs. However, research from some unreported cases show that in middle and high ranked families, cases of ill-treatment of women also occur. Families of this kind often hide the truth, which causes some problems to research workers. The statistics from above show that the phenomenon of ill-treating women often occur in families that have a low family income.

## 3) *Woman's inferiority*

This belief emphasizes that man is the master of the house. It is necessary for a woman to accept ill-treatment. Man maltreats his wife in order to control his family. Man is the breadwinner. He has the right to maltreat his wife. Woman is inferior to her husband. She is only a tool to satisfy her husband physically, give birth to and rear children. Ill-treatment is the reflection of power competition. This theory does not explain why woman is ill-treated by her husband, but it indicates something to us, specifically, that traditional beliefs about men and women's different roles exert a subtle influence on people's behavior.

## 4) *Psychology*

This theory originates from Freud's theory. It emphasizes that the ill-treatment of the wife results from psychological factors. It focuses on a person's childhood. The husband tends to regard his relationship with his wife as the same as his relationship with his mother. Man is self-contradictory in that he depends on his wife

while at the same time he is hostile toward her. When his wife becomes something that he can rely on, he will try to control his unfriendliness towards her, otherwise, he will abuse his wife physically or psychologically or both. Their beliefs are similar to theories in psychology that regard family violence as a conditioned reflex. The husband transfers his terror of his wife by ill-treating his wife. This theory overemphasizes the individual's psychological features and ignores the effects of social and cultural factors. A theory on psychological superiority in social life insists that the husband ill-treats his wife to maintain his superior position in the family since the woman's liberation movement is now vigorously going on. Superiority manifests itself in one's profession in the individual's capability and ability to control resources and materials. Man who has these superior indicators will not maltreat his wife while a man without these attributes tends to vent his violent behavior towards his wife to assert his superiority. Research shows that husbands who take to violent behavior in the family are often those who are inferior to their wives in education and profession. So, very often, a woman who has a good education, high achievements in career and higher functions in the family than her husband will experience more occasions for ill-treatment. The husband in this kind of family often has a sense of feeling lost. He ill-treats his wife to show his wife and himself that he is still the master of the family. This theory demonstrates man and woman's different feelings in the process of striving for equality between man and woman.

Another belief maintains that some people, especially women intrinsically regard themselves as inferior to men. Woman's traditional roles conflict with actual life. Some of the women just put up with their disadvantageous position. Family violence balances husband's and the wife's position to some degree in that the husband gains a sense of superiority and weakens his wife's sense of superiority by ill-treating his wife.

##### 5) *Family Factors*

This theory points out that family violence happens because the husband mistakenly follows the former generation's example and believes that his violent behavior may change his wife. At the

same time, the victimized wife, following her mother's example, endures her suffering. This has become something habitual in some families. The former generation's behavior affects the younger generation's behavior a lot.

#### 6) *Social Environment and Culture*

Violence in marriage has a lot to do with social environment and sense of values. If "a husband's ill-treatment of his wife" is not criticized by society, the husband may be encouraged to behave violently towards his wife. China has a long history of feudal culture which favors the husband's primary position and violent behavior in the family. Hence society is also responsible for familial violence.

#### 7) *Social Modernization*

In the process of social development, the nuclear family becomes predominant while the big family ceases to be the norm. Moreover, the relationship among neighbors appears not as close as before. This weakens the power to patch up family quarrels since a big family and a good neighborhood are the main sources of external mediating power. Family quarrels now get worse and worse.

### **IV. Protection and Prevention**

#### 1) *Strengthening the power of the law and influential powers in society*

The fifth meeting of the Seventh National People's Congress held on April 3, 1992 passed the law of "Protecting Chinese woman's rights". It defines "No discrimination, ill-treatment and violence on woman" (Chapter 1:2). Besides the principles in National law, No. 104 in civil law, No. 182 in criminal law, No. 3 in marriage law; woman protection law, No. 22 in public security law and laws enacting woman protection in each cities, zones and provinces all set specific regulations for the protection of woman's rights. Though these laws ensure woman's rights, influential powers from society are still needed to enact these laws effectively.

2) *Establishing a public prosecution system on family violence*

Woman's legal rights have been clearly defined in laws, but marriage is often regarded as a contract and a mutual responsibility. Family violence often relies much on private prosecution which is not enough. Naturally we should take public prosecution into consideration.

3) *Setting up asylums for women*

Researches from foreign countries show that it is very necessary to send the victimized wives to women centers or women asylums for a short period of time in order to help these wives become themselves again. The victimized wives may learn something from some liberal minded women who have broken away from suffering. This would train these victimized wives to become independent economically and psychologically in family life. Living apart from each other may not only improve a husband and wife's relationship but also strengthen their mutual independence.