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Anthropology and Ethnology Open Access Journal
ISSN: 2639-2119

Sexual Violence and Worthy Victims in Postsocialist China

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Research Article

Volume 9 Issue 2

Received Date: September 13, 2026

Published Date: November 27, 2026

DOI: 10.23880/aeoaj-16000266

Abstract

Sexual Violence and Worthy Victims in Postsocialist China

Drawing on women lived experiences of sexual violence and sexual coercion in their lives, this paper uncovers the cultural system of power hierarchy that creates injustice and inequity. Women in my research who have experienced sexual coercion by their partners have chosen not to report it in court. In their minds, the damage and contamination to their bodies have been done. Publicizing their names with a public sex scandal can only intensify and expand the damage to their lives. Their sense of disgrace and shame runs so deep that they are afraid that publicizing it can invite condemnation and humiliation and ruin their social reputation. Tarnishing their moral status can undermine and jeopardize their family relationships, future romantic relationships, and professional jobs. Such fear perpetuates and reinforces public silence and social tolerance of this issue. Cultural discourse also blurs the boundary between sexual coercion and consensual sex in a relationship and dichotomize the unworthy vs worthy victims of sexual violence. This worthy vs unworthy victim distinction embodies the cultural system of gender hierarchy and a politics of sexuality that polices and regulates women's bodies and sexuality.

Keywords: Sexual Violence; Sexual Assault; Victims; Social Justice; Gender; Medical Discourse; China

Introduction

"I have been with my boyfriend for more than two months. Even though we had occasionally shared a bed together, we had never had sex. He had asked for sex, and I had steadfastly refused him. I didn't want to have sex with him because he had so many shortcomings that I wasn't sure if we would have a future together. A few days ago, we had a huge fight. I felt so depressed that I got drunk. He found me and took me to his apartment. He started undressing me. I told him to stop what he was doing and that I was having my period. He didn't stop. I tried very hard to push his knees away from me, but his knees didn't move. It was so painful that I kept yelling 'no' and that he was hurting me. He continued pushing himself in despite my plea. I was in tremendous agony. I bled so much. He said he loves me, and this is how he loves me. I took emergency contraceptive pills the next day. I told him that when I needed comfort the most, he took advantage of me to satisfy his own desire. I told him that he is a scoundrel and that we are over… I feel so ashamed of myself. I feel my pride humiliated and my life destroyed. I hate him. I can't tell anyone about this. I feel that even if I find a man that I like in the future, I won't have the courage to be with him, as I'm not worthy of him. I don't deserve being loved, and I don't deserve being proud. Now I can't stop showering myself every day, as I feel that I can't rinse myself clean no matter what I do. Maybe I deserve this. Now I just want to end my life, as I feel so dirty. I want to die, and I want him to live in guilt all his life. I want to die. I am in such despair. I don't want to live any more".

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Sexual violence or sexual assault is defined by the World Health Organization as sexual acts or attempts via violence or coercion, directed against a person's sexuality, regardless of the relationship to the victim [1]. It encompasses a wide range of acts from verbal harassment to forced penetration, including rape, unwanted sexual advances or sexual harassment, and sexual abuse. It is regarded as a serious public health and human rights problem with both short- and long- term consequences on women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health [2].

In China, although sexual harassment was included in the "Law to Protect Women's Rights" in 2005, it provided no legal definition of, or punishment for, the act, only stipulating the nature of sexual harassment as a civil affair, rather than a criminal violation [3]. It was reported that in China, from 2010 to 2017, out of an estimated 50 million court cases, only 34 involved sexual harassment, and only two of these were initiated by the victims of sexual harassment [4]. Both cases were rejected by the court due to insufficient evidence [5].

In China, the archetypical definition of sexual violence is forced penetration of a victim through violence or intimidation. Such a definition does not apply to women who are in a relationship with their assailant. In rape law, there is no such a thing as marital rape. This legal definition generally absolves intimate partners - boyfriends and husbands - from the crime of sexual violence. Based on interviews with victims of sexual violence and a survey of medical, popular, and legal discourses and legal cases, this paper investigates the underlying reasons for the perceived division between worthy vs unworthy victims of sexual violence and uncovers the cultural system of gender power hierarchy that creates injustice and inequity.

Ethnographic Research

Since the summer of 2014, I have been conducting research in online chat groups organized by women who are victims of intimate partner violence that includes sexual violence. I have been an active participant in these groups on a daily basis, with my identity and research purpose fully disseminated to the women in the groups. At the beginning of my research, I looked for chatrooms that specifically address the issue and joined five chatrooms out of twenty I had surveyed. Each of the chatrooms had over 200 (some had 500) participants who were in conversation with each other every day. Daily i was in these online rooms chatting with the women and lending my sympathetic ear. Over time I became friends with many participants in the chatrooms due to my daily presence and conversations with them in the chatroom and on the phone. Women in these online chatrooms told me that they were not able to tell anyone about the violence they experienced at home due to the stigma and embarrassment surrounding the topic. In their desperate need to talk about their experiences and seek support, they searched online chatrooms and found these groups that centre on the issue of intimate partner violence. In these chatrooms they exchanged their stories, comforted each other, received emotional support, and offered advice to each other. Women told me that these chatrooms provided a space wherein they were able to talk about their suffering, vent repressed agony and anguish, and receive others' supportive responses, a process that most resembles talk therapy sessions. The majority of these women were in the age range of 25-40, ranging from stay-at-home mothers and full-time wives to working women. Some used their phones to access these chatrooms, some used computers, and others used internet cafes. During my research, I have formed close friendships with about fifty women, and have been in regular contact with them via email and telephone. I have also travelled to China to meet some of them in person to learn more about their lives.

Cultural and Political Economic Approach to Sexual Violence

The literature on intimate partner violence in China has avoided the issue of sexual violence between partners and focused on collected oral stories of women, training materials to doctors and law officers, legal aid, international influences and organizations, and surveys and questionnaires to couples to determine the relationship between intimate partner violence and individuals' educational background, childhood experiences, and marital happiness [6]. These studies have attributed intimate partner violence to a plethora of individual factors such as age, education, socioeconomic status, marital conflicts, history of abuse in childhood, and alcohol and drug use. Attention only to individual characteristics, however, reduces this social problem to a private, family issue. An exclusive cultural approach in feminist writings also obscures the political factors and economic conditions that spawn gender inequality and intimate partner violence.

Research on sexual violence has attributed this problem to individual factors. These factors include but are not limited to religious beliefs, health issues, psychological or mental problems, stress, intergenerational continuity of abuse, alcohol use, substance abuse, unemployment, ethnic identity, age, education level, and occupation [7]. For instance, sociologists Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz [8]. offer a list of reasons for violence at home that include stress factors such as isolation, alcoholism, unemployment, intimacy, the decline of community, competition, individualism, and changes in women's status. Gelles [9]. points to eleven factors to explain violence at home, including the duration of time family members spend together, the extent to which

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family members commit to each other, privacy, age and sex differences, ascribed roles, involuntary membership, and vulnerability to stress.

While previous research has focused on individual factors, they ignore and dismiss the fact that the macro-level social and cultural hierarchy of power is reflected in the micro-level relationships between intimate partners. Therefore, to understand the complexities of intimate partner violence, I argue that we have to address and analyse this macro-level social and cultural structure. Recent works on gender-based violence have argued that the cultural system such as patriarchy, asymmetry of gender ideologies, warfare, colonialism, land disputes, and kinship structure can lead to gender-based violence [10]. As Gilsenan contends, "the study of violence can tell us much about the ways in which groups and persons organize and imagine themselves, constitute relations of power and hierarchy, and create social identities and meanings [11].

This paper opposes the individual-factor approach and argues for a sociocultural and political economic framework to study intimate partner violence. Linking cultural ideologies with structural factors in China, this paper connects the personal with the structural to explore the broader cultural context that informs sexual violence and structures women lived experiences. It demonstrates the ways in which violence is supported and bolstered by cultural discourses and broader social structures in China that depict men's violent rage as instinctual, biological, and uncontrollable, that portray men's sexual urges as implicated in violence, that distinguish worthy victims of sexual violence vs unworthy victims, and that blur the boundary between sexual coercion and consensual sex between intimate partners. These gender-based discourses represent a biologically based general governance in postsocialist China.

Medical and Popular Discourses

A survey of contemporary Chinese medical textbooks reveals that women's sexuality is depicted as passive and receptive, needing to be awakened by men. Men's sexuality is portrayed as the opposite of women's sexuality - passionate, uncontrollable, dominant, aggressive, with unruly biological urges (Li 2007). One Chinese medical textbook states that "Men's sexual desire is much stronger than women's. Before marriage, some men may have experiences of masturbation, and almost all men have experiences of nocturnal emission… A man can become sexually aroused in only one or two minutes. Upon stimulation, men are biologically pressured to desire immediate sexual intercourse. Ejaculation occurs within minutes [12]. For women's sexuality, the book continues, "Except for certain individuals, women do not experience sex drive or masturbation. After marriage, their sex drive is much weaker than men's, and their sexual reaction is much slower than men's. Women's sexual pleasure must be awakened by men's sexual stimulations such as kissing, hugging, and touching sexual organs… A large number of women do not experience any sexual pleasures at the beginning of marriage, and some never do for life. Women pursue emotional satisfaction much more than sexual pleasure [13]." (These biological differences between men and women are the overarching themes in medical textbooks, which accentuate that women's low sex drive must be awakened by men [14]. While these textbooks argue that the differences between men and women are biological, most scientists would argue that the differences are largely cultural, rather than biological. Patriarchal societies in general intend to socialize women to repress their sexual desires, which is tied to women's respectability and acceptability in society. China is no exception to this general principle.

This medical discourse portrays men as "biologically pressured" to have uncontrollable sexual urges and to desire immediate sexual intercourse upon stimulation. Women slow sexual reaction and weak sex drive, however, indicate that their sexual desire and sexual pleasure only derive from sexual experiences with men. In portraying sex as male action and female reception, medical discourse attributes dominance and aggression to male sexuality. It is considered men's responsibility to take charge of sexual relationships with women and awaken their sexual desire. Since women are expected to refuse sex due to biological and cultural reasons, men may consider physical persuasion or certain physical force to be acceptable, appropriate, or even necessary precursor to awaken women's sexual desires and fulfil their own sexual pursuits. In other words, the word "seduction" is important in explaining the male role. Seduction is a necessary part of a complete sexual fulfilment for both men and women. The assumption that men should sexually overpower women with physical force or persuasion blurs the line between coercion and consent. At the same time, due to men's uncontrollable sexual urges, women are held responsible for men's sexual behaviours. They are advised to refrain from possibly stimulating men, including not staying in the same room with a man, not going to remote areas with a man, and not acting provocatively or seductively in front of a man [15]. As such, medical discourse makes women bear the brunt of sexual violence, while at the same time obscuring the line between coerced and consensual sex.

Unworthy vs Worthy Victims of Sexual Violence

Popular discourse perceives sexual coercion between intimate partners as a result of men's passion. Xiao Hui, whose story was narrated at the beginning of this paper,

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told me that after she posted her story on Weibo (Chinese version of twitter), she was flooded by commentaries that chastised her for her tempting behaviors. She said, "People told me that I should not have been in the same bed with him, because a normal man cannot resist such temptations. It's like putting a dumpling next to a dog. Flies do not bite an uncracked egg, they said. They comment that a normal man thinks with the lower part of his body and cannot resist temptations. They said I was cruelly torturing him when I was in bed with him but refused sex. In their words, I asked for it because I tempted him. They also said that it was all a pretense on my part, as I must have achieved orgasm, to which I responded that I achieved nothing but agony and utter humiliation. They insisted that in a relationship, an unworthy woman may appear to be traditional, but deep in her heart, she always desires to do dirty things with her man. They also claimed that posting such a 'vulgar' story does nothing but destroy your own reputation." Implicit in this criticism is the distinction between a natural woman who is less sexually inclined and an unnatural woman who is highly sexual, therefore unworthy.

As seen in these public commentaries, women like Xiao Hui are condemned as unworthy victims who are responsible for men's coercion sexual aggression because they allow themselves to be in the same bed with men, tempting men into sex. This cultural logic, rather than focusing on male violence, blames women by dividing women into two types: worthy victims who deserve justice vs. unworthy, seductive women who contribute to their own downfall. Worthy victims are defined as pure virgins who have never had sexual experiences and have no sexual knowledge. Their purity causes them to resist male aggression, even if it cost them their lives. Worthy victims also report the incident to the police immediately. Unworthy temptresses are embodied by their seductive wardrobe, salacious demeanor, loose sexual morality, and provocative conduct such as tantalizing and flirtatious interactions with men. In the case of Xiao Hui, she was compared to "a cracked egg" that invited flies to assault her. Because she was engaged in the seductive behavior of being in the same bed with her boyfriend, she was deemed an unworthy temptress, responsible for sexual coercion that she herself had invited.

Public responses to Xiao Hui's experience evince the popular perception that sexual coercion between intimate partners results from men's natural sexual desire, inflamed by women's temptations and secretly desired by unworthy women's deep psyche. Implicit in this cultural logic is that women like Xiao Hui secretly desire sex but are culturally pressured to appear chaste. Therefore, they are perceived as obligated to verbally resist sex and conceal their deeply seated sexual desire. Unworthy women's verbal resistance is thus seen as nothing but a ruse to tempt men into sex, which is what their heart wants but are culturally forbidden to demonstrate. Such a cultural perception of blurred divisions between consensual and coercive sex fundamentally casts doubt on unworthy women's refusal.

Sexual Assault and Women's Responsibilities

Women are expected to regulate and control men's passions through their own behaviour's. Indeed, popular discourse advises women to avoid behaviours that will subject them to sexual assault or rape. Sexual assault is thus reconfigured as women's individual responsibilities, to produce self-regulating, self-governing, and crime-avoiding female citizens. In 2015, the Public Security Ministry in He Nan Province published a document entitled "Eight Types of Women That Are the Easiest Targets for Sexual Assault [16]. The document singles out "unworthy" victims who wear clothes that expose skin, flirt with men, drink and smoke, take advantage of men financially, seek professional advancement or promotion through an ambiguous relationship with their superior, worship celebrities, enjoy dating men on the internet, and engage in sex work. This official document emphasizes that "Most female victims of sexual assault have failed to protect themselves adequately. Women must remember that flies do not bite an uncracked egg. There is no free lunch in the world. No free pies will drop from the sky. Therefore, the best way a woman can prevent sexual assault is to have self-esteem, self-respect, self-improvement, and self-reliance [17]. The document provides a detailed account of the ways in which behaviors of these "unworthy" victims lead to sexual assault. For instance, women who wear skimpy clothes can arouse men who are not strong-willed into sexual assault. The underlying logic is that if a woman is sexually assaulted, she must be responsible for it.

This official document redefines sexual assault as the responsibilities of these eight types of women who are calculating and manipulative. It is these "unworthy" victims who are identified as being responsible for men's sexual assault. Informed by such official and popular discourse, it is not a surprise that women like Xiao Hui are publicly accused of engaging in immoral behaviors that have invited sexual assault.

Women are advised in popular discourse to never be alone in a room with a man, never drink alcohol with a man, wear modest clothing, and act in a demure and proper way, and so on [18]. A lesson learned by many women is that sexual assault happens to women who are perceived as seductive. Xiao Chen, for instance, told me her story:

One day in Junior High, I was forced by a boy to kiss him. I had always been a modest girl and was afraid to tell

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my mother about this. However, she learned about it later from the teacher. When she returned home, she went crazy. She scratched my face so hard that my skin cracked, and I bled a great deal. She then took out the scissors and cut almost all my hair. She cursed me, calling me debased and shameless for flirting with boys at such a young age. The next day, she forced me to wear ugly clothes to school. None of my classmates even recognized me.

Xiao Chen said that, at a young age, she learned that the reason she was harassed was because she dressed up too much and that it was her fault. When she was a freshman in college, she was sexually assaulted. She did not tell anyone due to this entrenched idea. She was afraid that her mother would cut her hair and scratch her face again. She said what hurt her the most was not the incident, but her mother's response. Women like Xiao Chen told me that they kept silent about sexual assault to avoid being accused of being temptresses. They believe that talking about it can only ruin their reputation. As one woman told me, "If you are sexually assaulted, you must be at fault. If my colleagues and friends knew about the incident, the damage and distress would be 1,000 times greater than the incident itself."

A victim of sexual assault - a female university student at Beijing University, Yan Gao, faced public defamation as a seductive temptress. She committed suicide at the age of 21 due to public slander related to the assault upon her [19]. In her freshman year, 19-year-old Yan was given special care by Professor Shen, a married man who offered her free rides from school to her home every week. One day she was asked by Professor Shen to deliver her assignment to his house. Yan told her best friend that at his house, "he attacked me like a hungry wolf." Professor Shen stripped all her clothes and sexually assaulted her. He attributed his sexual assault to his love for her and continued this behavior after the first incident. At the same time, however, Shen had sexual intercourse with another student, to whom he spread the rumor that it was Yan who had initiated sex with him, throwing herself into his arms and seducing him. This rumor quickly spread across campus, rendering the victim of assault the public target of malicious slander. Tortured by his sexual assaults and his defamation of her as a salacious woman, Yan committed suicide. After her suicide, Professor Shen announced that it proved nothing except his charm and charisma. During the investigations, Shen admitted kissing, hugging, and having had sex with Yan [20]. Beijing University labeled his behavior "unethical in the teaching profession" (weifan shide) but gave him nothing more than a disciplinary warning as a member of the Communist Party. Since Yan's suicide, Shen has been appointed a full professor, department chair, Ph.D. advisor, and Distinguished Changjiang Professor by various key universities in China [21].

As a victim of sexual assault, Yan was shamed and her reputation tainted. As shown in this incident, it was the victim who was enveloped by vicious gossip and slander, not the assailant. The destruction of their reputation serves as an effective weapon, silencing women. Although Yan never reported Shen's sexual assaults to the university, as a victim, she still faced a smear to her reputation, causing her to take her own life at the age of 21.

Victims of sexual assault are subject to not only defamation, but also structural, institutional, and legal obstacles. The recent #metoo movement in China, led by female university students, encountered insurmountable structural opposition. In 2015, five female university students were arrested, detained, and jailed by the police for planning to disseminate stickers about sexual harassment on public transportation to commemorate International Women's Day in Beijing, Guangzhou, and Hangzhou [22]. Despite the crackdown, this incident marked the first planned resistance against sexual harassment in China. In 2017, a former victim of sexual assault, Leilei Zhang, was forced by the police to move out of Guangzhou and cease carrying an anti-sexual harassment sign in public, an activity that was emulated by 200 women from various cities in China [23]. Under pressure from the police, Zhang moved out of Guangzhou and posted an online note, publicly announcing her retreat from her anti-sexual harassment activities [24].

Universities also tend to dismiss reports made by female university students against sexual assaults by male professors. In 2017, four female students and one female professor in Sun Yat-Sen University reported Professor Peng Zhang's sexual assault and sexual harassment, including unwanted kissing and touching from 2011 to 2017. In one incident, his sexual assault on a freshman in a lab after 10:30pm was caught on the surveillance video, which was undeniable proof. However, despite the videotaped evidence, Zhang only received a disciplinary warning as a member of the Communist Party. My interviews with professors at the school in 2019 revealed that university leaders, at a campus-wide faculty meeting, dealt with the situation by reassuring the accused professor "not to feel any pressure and not to shoulder any burden about this accusation, as the school will take care of it." I was told that the accusations had no impact on his work or his status at the university and that he continues working without any interruption.

Legal Cases

In Chinese Criminal Law, rape is defined as coerced sexual penetration against women's will, with violence, force, and threat [25]. This Criminal Law does not recognize marital rape, as "in marriage, both parties have the duty

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to copulate with each other and have a sexual relationship [26]. The 2016 Anti-Domestic Violence Law only lists mental and physical violence by family members, leaving out sexual violence [27].

The following two legal case are examples where husbands are found innocent after inflicting sexual violence on their wives [28]. In the first case of a strained marital relationship, due to the wife's refusal of sex, the husband asked two male colleagues to help him tie his wife to bed, strip her clothes, and force intercourse on her. The wife reported it to the police right afterwards. In the second case, after a divorce agreement was reached in the Justice office, the husband forced sex on his wife, who drank poison and committed suicide right afterwards. Because the final divorce paper was not in hand in the second case and marriage was still intact in the first case, the husbands were found innocent [29]. It was reported that many wives went to the police with severe physical injuries caused by their husbands' sexual violence, only to be sent home because it was considered a private affair [30].

Criminal regulations often dismiss sexual violence in intimate relationships and tend to identify rape as forced sexual penetration by a stranger on a woman through violence or intimidation. This is further justified when the woman fights back, having sustained physical injuries, and then reports it to the police immediately afterwards. Rape charges can be considered credible and convictable only with medical proof of penetration such as a broken hymen, injuries resulting from violence which has been resisted by the victim, unambiguous relationships with the perpetrator, and immediate reporting after the incident. Failure to prove one of these conditions can result in unsuccessful rape charges [31]. Many reports of rape were disregarded and dismissed by police simply because of the ambiguous relationships between the victim and the perpetrator [32]. In 2015, for instance, a senior college student reported to the police that she was raped by a professor at his home [33]. Although she filed a report right after the incident and the professor admitted having had sexual intercourse with her, her rape charge was still revoked by the police. The professor was found innocent due to her non-resistance, her ambiguous relationships with the professor, as well as her medical exam that showed an unbroken hymen [34].

In some situations, only the choice of death over dishonor was sufficient evidence to prove rape. In one instance in 2016, a stay-at-home wife was raped by her neighbor despite her physical resistance [35]. She reported the incident to the police, but her account was revoked due to the lack of evidence. The woman went home and committed suicide the next day. Only after her suicide did the police trust her rape charge and arrest the assailant [36]. As indicated in this case, rape charges are only successful when women can prove their resistance or honor through self-inflicted death. To the police, lacking the evidence of injuries from resisting with their life or embracing death shows that the incident is a consensual encounter. The true meaning of rape, to the police, is embodied by a woman's willingness to sacrifice her life to protect her chastity and honour.

The Chinese Supreme Court's Legal Directive indicated in 1984 that "some women have consensual intercourse with men, but blackmail them with rape charges when their relationships turn bad. This situation should be treated as women's 'half pushing and half acquiescing" (bantui banjiu), not rape [37]. Even though this Directive became defunct in 2013, it continues exerting a paramount influence in current legal practices in China. This Directive pinpoints unworthy victims as cunning, immoral, and manipulative, and blurs the lines between consent and coercion. The phrase "half pushing and half acquiescing" is drawn from a Chinese classic love story titled Romance of the Western Chamber [38]. "Half pushing and half acquiescing" means that unworthy women pretend to refuse but in fact have already agreed to it. It captures the popular construction of women's role as always resisting sex but in fact secretly desiring it in their heart, rendering an unworthy woman's verbal refusal irrelevant, untrustworthy and discredited. An unworthy woman's resistance is perceived as dishonest and perfunctory, not representing her true sexual desire. This kind of woman desires sex, but understands that her culture expects her to be modest. Therefore, she pretends to resist sex as a virtuous woman would, as in "half pushing," though her heart yields to her secret desire for sex, as in "half acquiescing." In other words, she does not resist hard enough. The cultural logic underlying this phrase indicates that this kind of woman will never initiate sex or admit the desire for sex, so it is a man's responsibility to fulfil her true wish and dismiss her performative refusals. The appropriation of this phrase in the law not only deems "unworthy women" untrustworthy and unreliable but also blurs the line between consent and coercion. As such, this Directive from the Chinese Supreme Court requires judges to ignore objective evidence, the fact that the woman has been forcibly raped, in favor of the judge's subjective judgment as to whether or not she has adequately resisted.

Informed by this Directive, police first investigate a woman's moral character, reputation, lifestyle, behavior and attitude before and after the incident, the place and time of the incident, whether she is a virgin, whether she knows the perpetrator, whether she has socialized with him prior to the rape, and whether she continues contact with him [39]. A woman is determined to be an unworthy victim if she appears seductive, manipulative, acts provocatively, has an ambiguous relationship with the man, socializes or flirts

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with him prior to the incident, continues contact with him after the incident, or willingly follows him into the hotel [40]. In these cases, despite evidence from her physical resistance, it is considered acquiesced sex, and her rape charge is dismissed [41].

While women's sexual reputation and sexual modesty are scrutinized to determine their moral character, men's character is drawn from non-sexual issues, such as his family background, career, education degree, and relationships with his spouse and children [42]. In a legal case in 2018, for instance, a woman reported being raped by a man [43]. In court, the man was determined to be moral and nonviolent because he was a state employee with an advanced degree, a good family background, and a close relationship with his wife and a "polite and graceful daughter [44]." Despite the evidence of scratches on the woman's hands and under her neck, she was found to have socialized with the man prior to the incident and was judged to be flirtatious, seductive, and provocative. As a result, her account was ruled not credible and unreliable. The man was found innocent [45-47].

Conclusion

As shown in this paper, victims of sexual assault face institutional, cultural, structural, and legal impediments. Legal cases as well as medical, legal and popular discourses obscure the boundary between coercion and consent and dichotomize unworthy vs worthy victims of sexual violence. Medical and popular discourse depicts men's sexuality as unruly biological urges that are implicated in violence and difficult to control. This is considered an extenuating circumstance in favor of the man's action. Women's sexuality, however, is portrayed as passive with a low sex drive. Women's sexual pleasure is perceived to be awakened by men through physical or verbal persuasion. Unworthy women are described as secretly desiring sex but as understanding that they are culturally obligated to resist. The legal discourse of "half pushing and half acquiescing" deems an unworthy woman's verbal refusal perfunctory, dishonest and discredited. Therefore, men may perceive certain physical force or physical persuasion to be acceptable or even necessary to awaken women's sexual desire and fulfil their deeply seated, true wish. This cultural logic redefines sexual assault as women's responsibility, as women are expected to shoulder the dual responsibility for their own as well as their partners' sexual behaviors. As shown in legal cases, it is women's sexuality that is under harsh moral scrutiny, whereas men's non-sexual matters are assessed and evaluated.

As demonstrated in the paper, worthy victims are identified as pure, chaste women who are willing to redeem their honour through sacrificing their lives against assailants, with whom they have never socialized and have never had any ambiguous relationships. Unworthy victims are immoral, seductive, and provocative temptresses who are blamed for having invited their own downfall. They are suspected for not having behaved responsibly, made transgressive or provocative actions, and acquiesced to sex. The fact that they are not virgins prior to sexual assault can also invalidate their accusations. If they have socialized with their partners intimately prior to the assault, it is their moral character and sexual modesty that are questioned, challenged and blamed.

Women in my research who have experienced sexual coercion by their partners have chosen not to report it in court. In their minds, the damage and contamination to their bodies has already been done. Publicizing their names with a public sex scandal can only intensify and expand the damage to their lives. From Yan Gao's suicide to those malicious public commentaries to Xiao Hui's account of her boyfriend's rape, publicizing it can only invite condemnation and humiliation and ruin their social reputation. A tarnished reputation can only undermine and jeopardize their family relationships, future romantic relationships, and professional jobs. Such fear perpetuates and reinforces public silence and social tolerance on this issue.

Sharon Block contends. "In a society built around the central pillar of marriage, sex was crucial to the appearance of social order. Sexual relations used wrongly could profoundly threaten the very social structures that they were meant to confirm." Sexual power is inextricably connected with political, economic and cultural power. As shown in this paper, legal institutions, police forces, medical doctors, and popular discourse form a formidable bulwark against a woman's ability to report sexual violence. These structural forces work together to draw the distinction between worthy vs unworthy victims, normalizes the aberrant practice of sexual coercion, conflates uncontrollable sexual desires with coercive sex, and blurs the boundaries between violent and consensual sexual practices. It embodies a violent structural system of gender inequality and a politics of sexuality that polices and regulates women's bodies and sexuality.

Acknowledgement: Content of this paper previously appeared in Zheng, Tiantian. 2022. Violent Intimacy: Family Harmony, State Stability, and Intimate Partner Violence in Postsocialist China. Bloomsbury Publishing.

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