

Op Ed: Intimate Partner Violence in China

Diamond Ragin

As reported by Emily Ruahala, Chinese woman Li Hongxia, age 23, was brutally strangled to death in a hospital by her husband after years of enduring physical abuse. Her own family members discouraged her from seeking a divorce despite knowing about the abuse because they believed it would give her a bad reputation in the community. Today her body rests in a refrigerated casket in the home she once shared with her husband as a reminder to the citizens of China to protect the victims of domestic violence rather than to reject their pleas for help.

Unfortunately, Li's case is not uncommon. In China, thirty percent of women suffer from domestic violence at some point in their marriages. Many victims of domestic violence don't divorce because their lives are being threatened by their partners. They also may have nowhere else to go, and many are pressured by family members and friends to stay married.

Victims of domestic violence in China have limited options for refuge. If they cannot get assistance from family members then they must resort to government-funded domestic violence shelters. These shelters provide temporary housing where victims can get legal, medical and psychological aid. However, there are not many of these facilities open and they are usually connected to homeless shelters; this causes female victims not to feel safe. There is also a fear of social criticism and community ostracism when going to stay at these facilities.

On February 1st, 2016 the day after Hongxia was murdered, the Chinese government passed a law aimed to protect the victims of domestic violence by making it easier for them to get restraining orders and government aid should they divorce their husbands. However, because

of the lack of enforcement from local officials, this law is doing little to help the victims. Judicial officials are hesitant to provide restraining orders and disrupt families due to societal views on family that states a that a fully functioning home is one what has an obedient wife and a dominant husband. Therefore, it is seen as taboo for a woman to divorce or separate from her husband.

Unless these women get the help, they will continue to suffer. Unable to obtain divorces, many believe that their only hope of peace will come in the form of suicide. Forty-seven percent of suicides in China are the result of spousal abuse. To make this law more effective and protect the victims of domestic abuse, the Chinese government needs to make domestic abuse and other intimate partner-related violence crimes with punishable offences. The government must also take action to make sure that officials enforce the law. This could be done by implanting training courses on the proper protocol should a victim or bystander report a possible demotic abuse situation.

Another important step to protect women is to encourage more women to seek careers, so that they can contribute to family finances and gain more power relative to their husbands. Greater financial autonomy will also enable women to divorce if necessary because they will be better able to obtain custody and care for children. Building more domestic violence shelters made specifically for women and children will allow women to get the assistance they need without the worry of being attacked by predators outside the home.

As China is continues to change and modernize and adjust its laws to reflect its new outlook, the government must develop a way to ensure that its laws are being enforced. This is an ongoing issue many counties seen to have; especially when creating laws that diverge from a traditional norm.

Diamond Ragin attends East Carolina University and is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Anthropology. She hopes to continue to research different cultures and incorporate her skills in her career field.