

CORRESPONDENCE

Informal social control and intimate partner violence

Emery *et al*¹ have conducted an important study to evaluate the protective effects of informal social control on intimate partner violence (IPV). They hypothesised that in China, where IPV prevalence is high and the formal social control of IPV is poor, informal social control might reduce IPV injuries and IPV. As indicated in their results, the acts of informal social control were associated with significantly less IPV injuries, but not the greater occurrence of IPV.

Authors made their hypothesis based on American literature that indicated a significant association between informal social control and low crime and homicide rates.² However, when they made their hypothesis, the authors might have missed one important point. That is, for crimes and homicides, strict formal social control is also available in the USA; the law prosecutes the perpetrators with heavy penalties.³

In China, however, police is not required to act against IPV unless it injures the victims.¹ Chinese society justifies IPV to preserve husbands' authority, but does not justify injuring wives.^{1,4} Under such a situation, only the informal social control might not prevent IPV. It can contribute to prevent IPV injuries in the light of social disapproval for such severe violence and the state sanctions against it.

Proving this, the authors indicated that IPV prevalence was high in Hutong

neighbourhoods in China than in apartments; Hutongs had high level of family community integration and informal social control than apartments.¹ However, IPV injury rate was significantly lower in Hutongs.¹ This could have been because Hutong residents have not intervened to protect wives from IPV unless the violence was severe enough to injure them. To prevent IPV and IPV related injuries effectively, communities might need the formal and informal social control measures against the acts of IPV.

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Competing interests None.

Provenance and peer review Commissioned; internally peer reviewed.



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To cite Jayatilleke A, Jayatilleke A, Jimba M, *et al*. *Inj Prev* 2015;**21**:70.

Published Online First 17 October 2014



► <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2014-041117>

Inj Prev 2015;**21**:70.

doi:10.1136/injuryprev-2014-041117

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