

## Unwanted Sexual Activity among Married Women in Urban China

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the precursors and consequences of unwanted marital sex in a national sample of 1,166 married urban Chinese women aged 20-64. Married women reported more unwanted sex when the relationship quality was poor (hitting, uncommitted husband, lack of daily intimacy and foreplay, and husband insensitive to wife's sexual needs). Women also reported more unwanted sex when they had higher expectations, a negative view of sex, fewer resources, childhood sexual contact and multiple sexual partners in a lifetime. In addition, physical and psychological problems, alcohol consumption, small children, and lack of support contributed to unwanted sex. Net of feedback effects, unwanted sex diminished women's psychological well-being.

*Key Words: unwanted sex, sexual submission, psychological well-being, married women, China*

## INTRODUCTION

The widespread prevalence of sexual coercion and its multiple harmful effects for women are well documented. Sexual coercion victims often suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), experiencing anxiety, depression, relationship and sexual difficulties, and poor health (Becker, Skinner, Abel, & Cichon, 1986; Feldman-Summers, Gordon, & Megher, 1979; Gidycz & Koss, 1991; Mandoki & Burkhart, 1991). Most research remains within the context of dating relationships (Impett & Peplau, 2002; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Studies of marital sexual coercion, short of rape, are rare (Basile, 2002; Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985; Im-em, Archvanitkul, & Kanchanachitra, 2004). Definitional and methodological issues inhibit research on this topic. Wives often report that unwanted sex is related not so much to force or threats of force as to a sense of wifely duty (what Finkelhor & Yllo (1985) called "social coercion") and to the fear that their husband will seek other partners if he is not satisfied sexually at home (Im-em, Archvanitkul, & Kanchanachitra, 2004). Studying unwanted marital sex provides clues as to how women perceive their sexual rights and why some wives have less satisfying sexual relationships (Christopher & Sprecher 2000). Though valuable insights about unwanted sex among couples have been gleaned from case studies, generalization to larger populations has been hindered by the paucity of systematic survey research on the topic.

Plausibly, unwanted marital sex within marriage could be common in places such as China. Long dominated by a patriarchal sexual regime, Chinese women and men were taught that women have few sexual desires of their own, that male's interests should predominate, and that marital sex is synonymous with reproduction (Pan, 1993; Ruan, 1991). Despite greater equality for women in the public sphere over the last half-century, until recently repression of many forms of sexual expression was common (Renaud, Byers, & Pan, 1997). More recently, with economic reform, foreign contact, and a more open media, sexual norms have liberalized and there is more emphasis on sexual satisfaction for women (Bullough & Ruan, 1994; Evans 1995; Higgins, Zheng, Liu, & Sun, 2002; Zhang, 1999). Thus, precisely what one should expect in China is unclear. With data from a survey that is representative of the urban adult population age 20-64, this study provides the first national estimates of unwanted sexual activities among married women in urban China as well as the precursors and consequences of unwanted sex.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Our analysis is of unwanted marital sex – specifically sex that is short of marital rape based on physical force (Basile, 1999). One way to characterize the phenomenon is that of “... situations in which a person freely consents to sexual activity with a partner without experiencing a concomitant desire for the initiated sexual activity. In a sense, they feign sexual desire or interest (O’Sullivan and Allgeier, 1998, p. 234).” The reasons women “go along” vary. In one U.S. national study, with 20% of women reporting unwanted marital sex, reasons for consenting included: it was her “duty”, he begged and pleaded, he spent money on her, he bullied and humiliated her (Basile, 2002). In a random sample of San Francisco women, 26% reported ever having unwanted sex with their husband (Russell, 1982). In a largely urban study of women aged 25-49 in Thailand, 16% reported unwanted sex last year (Im-em et al., 2004).

### *Risk Factors*

In the existing literature, unwanted sex is associated with multiple factors, which we group into five categories: relationship quality, attitudes and expectations, bargaining power, sexual experiences, and lifestyle and stress (Koss, 1985; Mandoki & Burkhart, 1991).

*Relationship quality.* A large literature suggests that in sexual behavior relationship quality matters greatly to women (Basson, 2001; Kaplan, 1974; Masters, Johnson, & Kolodny, 1995). Both daily intimacy and intimate genital touching and foreplay during sex increase the likelihood of women enjoying sex (Basson, 2001). In a Chinese study, when women reported one minute of foreplay or less only 40% rated their sexual satisfaction as good or very good. In contrast, when women reported more than 20 minutes of foreplay, 73% rated their sexual satisfaction as good or very good (Liu, Ng, Zhou, & Haelerle, 1997). Feminist scholars argue that in patriarchal society, men have been mis-socialized -- they have been trained to control and dominate and not to be concerned about women’s needs, to express intimacy or even to know what a woman needs to be sexually satisfied (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; DeMaris, 1997; Hochschild, 1989; Schwartz, 2000; Schwartz & Rutter, 1998). In Thailand, women are more likely to report unwanted sex when hit by their partner (Im-em et al., 2004). Thai women also engage in unwanted sex because they fear that their husband will turn to commercial sex workers and other sexual partners (Im-em et al., 2004; Knodel et. al., 1999).

*Attitudes / Expectations.* There are two contradictory hypotheses about the connection between women's sex-role attitudes and sexual victimization (Ageton, 1988). Social control theory suggests that traditional socialization puts women at greater risk because of passivity and the tendency to give in to male demands. However, nontraditional women may be at higher risk for victimization because of nonconformity and violation of traditional values. Empirical evidence is mixed. Whereas some studies find that victims of sexual assault are more likely to hold nontraditional sex role attitudes compared to women who are not assaulted (Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987), others observe that college women subscribing to traditional sex-role attitudes are more likely to report sexual coercion than women who have nontraditional attitudes (Murnen & Byrne, 1991), and still others find no relationship between submitting to unwanted sex and measures of hyperfemininity and hypermasculinity (Koss, 1985; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Kalof (2000) speculates that a connection might exist between attitudes and perceptions of aggressive behavior, which could lead to the same coercive experience being reported differently by women who hold dissimilar views. From the literature on raising women's consciousness we would expect nontraditional women to be more discriminating about how they are treated and to expect more out of a relationship, which in turn, might make them more critical of her current sexual relationship.

*Bargaining power.* Using personal resources to bargain over contested issues in a domestic partnership is one strategy a woman may use to gain sexual empowerment. Earning an independent income from her husband over which she has control can lead to increased decision making authority in the household (Wolff, Blanc, & Gage, 2000). Does this autonomy spill over into the bedroom so that women contributing income to the household gain a stronger voice in negotiating sexual activity with their husbands? China provides an important context to test the relative resources model because, in contrast to many market societies, urban Chinese women are more likely to approximate men in their levels of education, occupation, and income (Tang & Parish, 2000). While it may be the case that resource control increases a woman's decision-making power in her intimate relationships, it also has the potential to challenge traditional meanings attached to male superiority in earnings that could elicit a backlash from male partners. Women empowered by having control over the income they earn may face

other adverse consequences ranging from fear of violence, withdrawal of economic support, or infidelity as they try to negotiate sexual activity in their relationships (Fox, Benson, DeMaris, & Van Wyk, 2002; Rivers et al., 1998). This can be further exacerbated by growing prostitution, which provides men with access to other sexual outlets. Under these conditions, women can less often use sex as a tool to control men or, fearing exposure to sexually transmitted infections that men bring back from prostitutions, women can less often resist their husband's advances lest he turn to prostitutes (Im-em et al., 2004; Knodel et al., 1999).

*Sexual experience.* Previous research has established linkages between both childhood and adulthood sexual experiences and women's subsequent sexual coercion. Childhood sexual abuse victims are also at increased risk of sexual revictimization (Merrill et al., 1999; Messman-Moore & Long, 2000) - - childhood sexual abuse may result in a greater use of alcohol, greater sexual activity, and less conservative sexual attitudes in adulthood, all of which may place the victim at greater risk for subsequent assault (Koss & Dinero, 1989; Mandoki & Burkhart, 1991). Previous studies of college students show that more sexually experienced women were at higher risk of sexual coercion because dating frequency and number of sexual partners increased woman's risk of exposure to sexually aggressive men (Koss, 1985; Koss & Dinero, 1989; Lottes & Weinberg, 1997).

*Life style / Stress.* Sexual aggression occurs more often on dates involving drinking (Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Abbey, Ross, McDuffie, & McCauslan, 1996; Testa, Vanzile-Tamsen, & Livingston, 2004). As women age, they experience a drop in their sexual response concomitant with decreasing levels of estrogens and declining health (Trudel, Turgeon, & Piché, 2000). Interest in sex may also decline for women with physical and psychological well being problems (Everaerd, Laan, Both, & van der Velde, 2000). Young children in the home impose a major burden on family life (Liu et al., 1997; Pimentel, 2000). Fear of pregnancy is one of the major reasons for Chinese women not taking the initiative in sex (Liu et al., 1997) and this fear may be exacerbated in Chinese urban areas, where violation of the one-child policy can occasion administrative penalties. Lack of community control may encourage men's sexual aggression against women (Shields & Shields, 1983).

### *Consequences*

Most research regarding the effects of unwanted sex has focused on forced sex or rape. Women who have been raped or battered experience a wide range of effects that may manifest in symptoms of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and sexual dysfunction (Campbell, 2002; Gidycz & Koss, 1991; Mandoki & Burkhart, 1991). More recently, some studies found that psychological abuse without physical violence (e.g., verbal abuse and abuse of power and control) is also strongly associated with negative physical and psychological well-being outcomes (Coker et al., 2002; Smith, Thornton, DeVellis, Earp, & Coker, 2002). Little research has specifically examined the consequences of submission to unwanted sex without use of force for married women. One study of college students found that despite reports of some positive outcomes associated with their consent to unwanted sex, including promoting of intimacy in the relationship, the most frequently reported negative outcome was emotional discomfort, such as feeling uncomfortable about engaging in “meaningless sex” or feeling disappointed in oneself (O’Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Whether such discomfort develops into anxiety or depression in the long run is not clear.

### METHOD

Data come from the China Health and Family Life Survey (CHFLS) carried out in 1999 and 2000. With the exclusion of Tibet and Hong Kong, the sample is nationally representative of the adult population of China aged 20-64. This sample was drawn probabilistically in four steps following standard procedures for complex samples. Sampling began with 14 strata picked to over-represent regions with a high prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). With selection according to population size and an over-sample from the high STD strata, we sampled 48 primary sampling units, 60 neighborhoods, and 5,000 individuals aged 20-64. Among these, 3,821 completed the interview, providing a final response rate of 76%.

Interviews were conducted in a neighborhood facility away from the respondent’s home. Oral and computer-entered consent was obtained prior to the hour-long interview, which began with the interviewer in control of the computerized interview and continued with the laptop computer controlled entirely by the respondent. The methods were approved by institutional review boards at the University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill. and Renmin University, Beijing, China. Details about sample design and the final

questionnaire used in this study are available at <http://www.src.uchicago.edu/prc> and also see Parish et al. (2003). The sample for this particular analysis includes 1,538 urban women, for whom we have a larger sample size and more stable estimates. The urban respondents are further limited to 1,283 women who were currently married and of those, to the 1,181 women who were sexually active. Further limiting the data to those with data on our key analytical variables, the final sample includes 1,166 respondents.

### *Measures*

*Unwanted sexual activities.* There are three questions on unwanted sexual activities: (a) “Some people do not want to have sex themselves, but they do it to satisfy their partner. In the past 12 months, how often did this situation occur to you?” The responses were “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” or “often”; (b) “Some people insist that their partner does certain things or adopt certain styles in sex that their partner does not like. In the past 12 months, did your partner often ask you to do things that you did not like to do during sexual intercourse?” The responses were “never,” “sometimes” or “often”; and (c) “Up till now, has it occurred that you were unwilling but still had to concede to have sex with someone (including between husband and wife)?” The responses were “yes” or “no.” Those who answered “yes” were further asked how old the respondent was when the last time she had sex against her will, and the relationship between her and the perpetrator. We used the three questions to create a summary index of unwanted sexual activities. We first recoded responses to each question to 0 and 1, and then summing the three recoded items -- for the first question, “never” was coded 0 and the other three categories were coded 1; for the second question, “never” was coded 0 and “sometimes” and “often” were coded 1; and for the third question, those who answered “yes” to the lead question and indicated those unwanted sex occurred with their spouse in the last two years were coded 1, and the rest 0. The summary index ranges from 0 to 3.

*Psychological distress.* Borrowing from standard psychological well-being measures already translated and validated in China, the psychological distress scale used in this study is a factor score of four items, each asking about conditions over the last three months: (a) “In the past three months, did you sleep well or poorly at night?” (b) “. . . did you often feel depressed or bored?” (c) “. . . did you feel fatigued for reasons unknown to you?” and (d) “. . . have you felt more irritable than usual?” The three-

step answers to the first item ranged from 1 (usually slept well) to 3 (always slept poorly) and the answers to the remaining three items ranged from 1 (never) to 3 (often). Factor analysis showed the four items loaded on one factor. The factor scores were rescaled to range from 1 to 3.

*Relationship quality.* We examine several aspects of the marital relationship. Respondents are coded as having experienced domestic violence if they answered “yes” to either of the questions: (a) “For whatever reason, has your partner ever hit you?” and (b) “For whatever reason, have you ever hit your partner?” Husband’s extramarital sex is based on the question: “Throughout the sexual relationship with your current partner, has your partner ever had sex with other people (even if it happened just once)?” The three-step response scale ranges from 0 (definitely not) to 2 (yes, definitely). Daily intimacy is derived from the question: “In the past 12 months, other than during sex, how often did you and your partner have intimate contact (including kissing, embracing, and caressing)?” The four-step response scale ranges from 1 (often) to 4 (never). Foreplay is based on the question: “Some people hug, kiss and caress their partner a lot before they have sexual intercourse. How did your partner do in this respect?” The three-step response scale ranges from 1 (enough) to 3 (none). Genital caressing of wife absent is coded 1 if respondents answered “never” to the question, “In the past 12 months, did your partner often caress your genitals during sexual intercourse?” and 0 if the answer was “often” or “sometimes.” The extent to which the husband knows his wife’s sexual needs is indicated with the question: “In the past 12 months, did your partner know how to please and satisfy you during sexual intercourse?” The four-step response scale ranges from 1 (knew all) to 4 (knew none).

*Attitudes / Expectations.* Wife’s own education is in years. We created a permissive sex values scale from four items: (a) “Some say that one can have sex just for pleasure with someone whom he or she is not in love with. Do you agree?” (b) “Some say that it is OK to have sex with someone other than your spouse after marriage. Do you agree?” (c) “Nowadays in our society, some married people have sex with those other than their spouse. Do you think that each such case should be treated individually or that these people should all be punished?” And (d) “Nowadays in our society, some couples have sex when they are dating, and they eventually get married. Is this a moral issue?” The scale is the average of standardized responses to the four items with reliability coefficient of 0.61. Adjusted to range from 1 to 4,

higher values on this scale indicate more permissive sex values. Traditional sex attitude is derived from the question: “Some people feel dirty about their partner’s genital, secretion, semen, menstrual blood, etc. Have you ever felt dirty of these things?” The three-step response ranges from 1 (never) to 3 (often).

*Bargaining power.* There are five items in this category. Wife’s share of joint earnings is recoded into three categories: 0-25%, 25-70% and 70-100%. Parental material background is based on the question: “When you got married (or began to live together) with your partner, whose family had relatively better material conditions?” The three responses are: partner’s family, my family, and both about the same. Age gap is the husband’s age minus the wife’s age, with extreme values truncated to a range of -4 to 11 years. We calculated the percentage of men who had paid money for sex and the percentage of men who had used sexual materials in each local community to indirectly indicate men’s sexual behavior and permissive local environment.

*Sexual experience.* Respondents are considered having experienced childhood sexual contact if their answer was “yes” to the question “Did someone have sexual contact with you before you turned age 14? ‘Sexual contact’ here includes vaginal intercourse (sleeping with someone or making love), caressing as well as other ways of stimulating genitals / female breasts.” Respondents’ self-reported number of sexual partners in their lifetime is also included, with extreme values truncated to range from 1 to 5.

*Lifestyle / Stress.* Alcohol consumption is measured by how often the respondent drank in the past year, multiplied by how often she drank too much. These values were log transformed to correct for skewness and then the log values were rescaled to range from 0 to 3; higher values indicate more alcohol consumption. We also include variables indicating whether any children aged 0 to 6 were living in the household, whether in the past year, it occurred to the respondent that she did not want to have sex because she did not want to become pregnant, and whether there were other adults in the household. We divided respondent’s age by ten so each unit represents ten years. The number of genito-urinary symptoms is the sum of affirmative answers to four questions asking respondents in the last 12 months whether they had ever had (a) a burning pain while urinating; (b) any genital lesion, blister, or sore; (c) a discharge of unusual color or odor from vagina; and (d) warts in the genital area (genital surface, lower parts).

*Correlates of psychological well-being.* Because our major concern is the effect of unwanted sex on psychological well-being, we include other correlates of psychological well-being only as control variables. In addition to age, education, childhood sexual contact and alcohol consumptions which were described before, we also include self-rated physical health, couple's joint earnings, perceived daily care, desire to lose weight, body mass index, self-rated attractiveness and stressful living condition. Respondents were asked to rate their physical health on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Couple's joint earnings are log transformed. Perceived daily care is based on the question: "Is your partner sufficiently considerate and affectionate to you in daily life?" The four-point responses range from 1 (none) to 4 (sufficient). Respondents were asked whether they wanted to lose weight regardless of whether they could do it or not. We compare those who answered "no" (coded 0) to those who answered "somewhat" or "very much" (coded 1). Body mass index is calculated by dividing weight in kilograms by height in meters squared. Self-rated attractiveness is based on the question, "In your opinion, are you attractive in the eyes of the opposite sex?" The four-step responses range from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much). Stressful living condition is indicated by the question: "How seriously do your living conditions affect your sex life?" The three-step answers range from 1 (no interference) to 3 (a lot).

#### *Statistical procedures*

All analyses are adjusted for sample design, paying attention to sampling strata, primary sampling units and sampling weight. We run three sets of models: The first set regresses the unwanted sex index on age and each additional correlate in turn. The second set regresses unwanted sex on all correlates in a single equation. Psychological distress is included as a predictor in the regression of unwanted sex, but the potential endogenous effect of psychological distress on unwanted sex is not specified in this model. The first two sets of models are estimated with the Ordinary Least Squares regression using *Stata 8.2*. The third set adds the feedback effect of unwanted sex on psychological distress and is estimated with weighted least squares using *Mplus 3.1* -- a structural equation modeling program (Muthén & Muthén, 2004).

## RESULTS

### *Patterns of Unwanted Sex*

About a fifth of urban Chinese women reported that their partner sometimes insisted they do certain things or adopt certain styles in sex that they did not like during the past year (Table 1). A similar fifth were unwilling but still had to concede to have sex with their spouse in the past two years. Sex performed just to satisfy her husband was common – the percentages were 28% never, 26% rarely, 40% sometimes, and 6% often. With unwanted sex ever experienced coded as 1, the total of these three possible behaviors produced a mean index of 1.16.

“Table 1 about here”

### *Correlates of Unwanted Sex*

*Relationship quality.* With only a few exceptions, measures of marital quality (and sexual intimacy) are related to unwanted sex in predictable ways (Table 2). Examined singly (with only age controlled) in column one, all the relationship quality items are statistically significant. These items are highly related, with the result that in later columns some of them lose statistical significance. Nevertheless, the general pattern is clear. The only surprise here and in the following columns is that absence of genital caressing does not exacerbate reports of unwanted sex. It has just the opposite effect.

With all items in the equation at the same time (models II & III), reports of insufficient intimacy and foreplay during sex and complaints that the husband does not understand her sexual needs increase reports of unwanted sex. In the multivariate models (II and III), we use a composite measure of intimacy that is the average of the standardized values of insufficient foreplay and absence of daily intimacy, rescaled to range from 1 to 4. Most of the effects that are sustained in the final model (Model III) are considerable. Recall that the unwanted sex index ranges from 0 to 3. Complete absence of daily intimacy and foreplay (in comparison to ample intimacy and foreplay) increases unwanted sexual activities by 0.39 points ( $3 \times 0.13$ ). The husband’s complete ignorance about his wife’s sexual needs increases unwanted sexual activities by 0.27 points ( $3 \times 0.09$ ).

“Table 2 about here”

*Attitudes / Expectations.* Several measures of sexual attitudes are related to unwanted sex, both singly in model I and in combination with other measures (Table 2). The most robust influences are education and belief that sex is dirty, with both statistically significant across all models. The final model (Model III) implies that an additional five years of education increases unwanted acts by 0.20 points ( $5 \times 0.04$ ). Similarly, women with the most extreme beliefs about sex being dirty are 0.32 points ( $2 \times 0.16$ ) more likely to report unwanted sex.

*Bargaining power.* With only a few exceptions, the findings fail to sustain the hypothesis that women with more bargaining power can avoid unwanted sex. Consistent with the bargaining hypothesis, in one or more equations reports of unwanted sex are more common when the wife makes no more than 25% of the couple's joint income and when her husband's family was economically better off than hers. But at the same time, when her income share was above 70% and when hers was the better family background, unwanted sex also increased – when the simple version of the bargaining hypothesis suggests that it should have decreased. Other inconsistent patterns include those for the age gap between husband and wife and both male paid sex and male pornography use in the locality. All three have either fail to influence or diminish unwanted sex.

*Sexual experiences.* Though not robust, the consequences of both childhood sexual contact and multiple sexual partners are in the expected direction. Two features of the data may dampen both of these influences. Only 29 women reported childhood sexual contact, making it difficult to find a statistically significant pattern for this situation. To some extent, number of sexual partners is related to several items in the multivariate equations – hitting, husband's extramarital sex, and permissive sex values. When all are entered into the equation at the same time, the influence of the number of sexual partners is dampened.

*Lifestyle / Stress.* Several other items enter the analysis largely as controls for “noise” in the underlying relationships. Psychological distress is a strong correlate of unwanted sexual activities – in the final model when the effects of other variables and a feedback effect of unwanted sexual activities on psychological distress are taken into account, women with the highest level of psychological distress is 0.80 higher in unwanted sexual activities than women with the lowest level of psychological distress

(moving from 1 to 3 in psychological distress scale) (Table 2). Alcohol consumption is also positively associated with unwanted sexual activities. Even though its direct effect becomes only marginally significant when its indirect effect through psychological distress is also considered in Model III, the size of its direct effect remain substantial – women who consume the largest amount of alcohol is 0.33 more in unwanted sexual activities than women who do not use alcohol ( $3 \times 0.11$ ). Other risk factors in this group also matter, although the size of their effect varies depending on which variables are included in the equation. In the final model (Model III), unwanted sexual activities increase with an additional genitourinary symptom by 0.09, with presence of a small child by 0.22, with absence of other adults in the household by 0.14. Although the effect of age is negative in bivariate analysis, it turns positive when other variables are controlled – each ten-year increase in age is associated with 0.06 more unwanted sexual activities. Fear of pregnancy is marginally significant only in the model with age alone controlled (Model I) -- fear of pregnancy increases unwanted sexual activities by 0.23.

#### *Consequences of Unwanted Sex*

Unwanted sexual activities have a significant effect on psychological distress in all three models. The effect is strongest when all other covariates are controlled for and a feedback effect of psychological distress on unwanted sexual activities is also taken into account (Table 3). In this situation, an additional unwanted sex activity increases psychological distress by nearly 0.24 on a scale that runs from 1 to 3 (Model III). Other variables are included mainly as controls and the results for these variables are generally consistent with existing literature. Although the effect sizes vary depending on which variables are included in the model, the general pattern is that psychological distress is positively correlated with alcohol consumption, desire to lose weight, stressful living conditions, and childhood sexual contact. It is negatively correlated with physical health, education, family income, daily care, body mass index and physical attractiveness. Alcohol consumption and childhood sexual contact are significant or marginally significant in the first two models -- though their direct effect on psychological distress becomes insignificant once their indirect effect through unwanted sex is taken into account (Model III). In the final model, psychological distress first increases with age and then begins to decrease once age reaches 40 years.

“Table 3 about here”

## DISCUSSION

This paper identifies factors that trigger married urban Chinese women’s reports of submission to the sexual advances of their husband. Our analyses focused on three indicators of unwanted sexual activity: women reporting that they acceded to having sex with their spouse even when they did not want to, women reporting that they participated in sexual acts that they did not enjoy, and women reporting that they agreed to have sex only to satisfy their husband’s needs. Many of our predictions about the risk factors for women’s submission to unwanted sexual activities were confirmed. Relationship quality, attitudes and expectations, women’s bargaining power, sexual experiences, lifestyle and stress all matter. Moreover, our results are consistent with the argument that unwanted sexual activities have a strong negative effect on psychological well-being.

In urban China during the previous year, 21% of married women report unwanted sex with their spouse. In addition, 22% report unwanted sex acts and 46% report that they sometimes or often agreed to have sex just to satisfy their husband. The prevalence of 21% for unwanted sex during the previous year is broadly similar to reports from U.S. and Thai studies (Basile, 2002; Im-em et al., 2004).

Among the five sets of risk factors, relationship quality is one of the strongest and most robust influences. Consistent with a whole host of popular marriage manuals about “what women want,” we found that the major things they want are daily intimacy, commitment, and in addition, attention to foreplay and their specific sexual needs. The only exception to these general patterns is that, while we hypothesized that specific sexual practices would increase women’s interest in sex and thus decrease their unwanted sexual activities, the data show just the opposite -- certain sexual practices, such as husband’s caressing his wife’s genitals, increased the wife’s report of unwanted sexual activities. We suspect two things may be occurring here: firstly, with the increase in the availability of pornography, husbands may attempt the same scripts and behavior depicted onscreen. Their wives may interpret these actions as too rough, too abrupt, or inconsistent with their traditional sexual scripts for love making. Secondly, it may be the case that women view genital caressing as sexual acts that go beyond what is wanted and thus they evaluate it as part of the larger experience of unwanted sex.

Values and expectations also matter, although they are not always in the most straightforward ways. It is hardly surprising that married women who believe sex is dirty report higher rates because women with such beliefs are more likely to perceive their marital sexual activities as undesirable and unsatisfactory. However, women at the opposite end of the spectrum -- those who approve of premarital sex and extramarital sex, and those who believe sex is for personal pleasure -- are also more likely to report unwanted sex. In addition, better-educated women report more unwanted sexual activities. These findings provide support for the argument that nontraditional women may be at higher risk for victimization because of nonconformity and violation of traditional values (Ageton, 1988; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). It is also possible that better educated women and women with more permissive sexual attitudes have higher expectations about what they should be getting out of sex and are therefore more prone to be disappointed about their actual experiences.

Our data provide a slight bit of support to the bargaining hypothesis suggesting that a woman earning an independent income could use this “bargaining chip” to negotiate for sexual activity agreeable to her (Wolff et al., 2000). We found that a woman reports less unwanted sex if her share of family income is not below but instead approximates her husband’s income. She also reports less unwanted sex when she is at least equally as well off as her husband’s parents. This is consistent with a feminist emphasis on how more equal resources allow a woman to pursue her own needs (Schwartz, 1994). However, when a woman earns much more than her husband, a situation for a small number of Chinese women, she reports more unwanted sex. This is consistent with other studies showing that women are more likely to be hit if their earnings begin to exceed their husband’s (Fox et al., 2002). Thus the data support the argument that resource control increases a woman’s decision-making power in her marriage, but it also has the potential to challenge traditional meanings attached to male superiority in earnings that could elicit a backlash from male partners (Rivers et al., 1998).

The result for age gap is not consistent with our prediction. If a significantly older husband means a greater gap in resources, we would expect a woman to submit to more unwanted sex when her husband is older than her. Surprisingly, the Chinese data show just the opposite. A comparatively older husband produces not more but fewer reports of unwanted sex. To interpret this finding, we need to note that in

general older women report less unwanted sex (last line of table 2). Or conversely, it may be that younger men may be the ones who are more likely to insist on sex that the wife does not really want. Thus, the age gap is just capturing the absolute age of the husband – with the older husband making fewer unwelcome demands. Another surprise for bargaining is that contrary to our expectation, women in communities with considerable prostitutions do not report more unwanted sex. Instead, there is some indication that they report fewer unwanted sexual activities. Is it possible that prostitution acts as a relief valve, siphoning off men who would otherwise make unwelcome demands on their wife?

Our data are partially consistent with the literature suggesting that childhood sexual abuse and the number of sexual partners are significant antecedents of submission to unwanted sex (Koss, 1985; Merrill et al., 1999; Messman-Moore & Long, 2000). The effects of childhood sexual contact and the number of sexual partners seem stronger in the models without taking into account other risk factors. It is likely that past sexual experiences trigger other sexual attitudes and behavior in later life, which in turn affect women's submission to unwanted sex (Koss & Dinero, 1989; Mandoki & Burkhart, 1991).

Previous research has repeatedly shown that women who have been raped or battered are more likely to experience psychological distress (Campbell, 2002; Gidycz & Koss, 1991; Mandoki & Burkhart, 1991). Consistent with this research, our study finds a strong negative effect of unwanted sex on women's psychological well-being, which persists even after the potential feedback effect from psychological well-being to unwanted sex is taken into account. More importantly, our data demonstrate that unwanted sex is detrimental to psychological well-being, even when it is broadly defined as including both unwanted sex by force and unwanted sex without use of force.

Our study has several limitations. We have insufficient details about forced activity to differentiate types of unwanted sex in marriage (Basile, 1999, 2002; Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985). Also, we have insufficient information on the attitudes and behavior of the husband, factors that some scholars argue are ultimately responsible for women's sexual coercion (Hall, Sue, Narang, & Lilly, 2000; Malamuth, 2003; Mandoki & Burkhart, 1991). Although we included men's prostitution and pornography consumption at the community level to capture men's behavior, they are not true measures of the specific husband's attitudes toward women. Moreover, as in all studies based on cross-sectional data, we cannot

rule out strong feedback effects – e.g., hitting could be as much the cause as the result of unwanted sex. The structural equation model attempted to deal with this issue, but only for the two dependent variables. Finally, as in all research that uses only people who are currently sexually active, our results could suffer from selection bias – i.e., the people who experienced the most sexual problems may have simply quit having sex and therefore no longer be available for observation. In separate, unreported analyses we attempted to deal with this issue using Heckman selection models. These produced results largely similar to those reported here. Nevertheless, that analysis was less thoroughgoing than what is reported here and problems could still remain. Future research addressing these issues will further advance our understanding of women’s sexual coercion.

In sum, in urban China, the proportion of married women experiencing unwanted sex within their marriage parallels patterns in other societies, and unwanted sex has severe consequences for psychological well-being. A wide array of elements is important for women’s reports of unwanted sex. Few of these are new, one might argue. Many are the stuff of garden-variety sex advice manuals – e.g., a husband should be more caring of his wife in daily life, take more time in foreplay and attend to her specific sexual needs. Nevertheless, heretofore, much of this advice was based on unsystematic, anecdotal evidence. What we have for the first time here is document that these old verities are indeed important in a general population – and that the “old truths” cut across cultural boundaries.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	Unweighted <i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Weighted <i>M</i>	Range
Unwanted sex measures				
Unwanted sex <sup>a</sup>	.21		.21	0-1
Unwanted act <sup>a</sup>	.23		.22	0-1
Sex to satisfy partner				
Never <sup>a</sup>	.26		.28	0-1
Rarely <sup>a</sup>	.28		.26	0-1
Sometimes <sup>a</sup>	.40		.40	0-1
Often <sup>a</sup>	.06		.06	0-1
Unwanted sexual activity index	1.17	(.88)	1.16	0-3
Psychological distress				
Psychological distress index	1.47	(.42)	1.48	1-3
Relationship quality				
Any hitting <sup>a</sup>	.26		.28	0-1
Husband's extramarital sex	.24	(.49)	.25	0-2
Daily intimacy absent	2.24	(.94)	2.30	1-4
Foreplay insufficient	1.56	(.67)	1.61	1-3
Husband doesn't know wife's need	1.88	(.70)	1.94	1-4
Genital caressing of wife absent <sup>a</sup>	.16		.19	0-1
Attitudes / Expectations				
Education (years)	9.25	(3.29)	9.02	0-16
Permissive sex attitudes	1.96	(.56)	1.88	1-4
Thinks sex is dirty	1.63	(.65)	1.63	1-3
Bargaining				
Wife's share of joint earnings				
0-25% <sup>a</sup>	.20		.25	0-1
25-70% <sup>a</sup>	.75		.70	0-1
70-100% <sup>a</sup>	.05		.04	0-1
Parents' economic background				
Husband's better <sup>a</sup>	.21		.20	0-1
About equal <sup>a</sup>	.40		.43	0-1
Wife's better <sup>a</sup>	.39		.37	0-1
Age gap (husband - wife) (yrs)	2.46	(2.69)	2.11	-4-11
Paid sex of men in locality (10%)	.88	(.58)	.98	0-2.6
Pornography of men in locality (10%)	4.98	(1.28)	4.49	3-7.3
Sexual experience				
Childhood sexual contact <sup>a</sup>	.02		.03	0-1
No. of sexual partners in lifetime	1.21	(.60)	1.21	1-5
Lifestyle / Stress				
Alcohol consumption	.32	(.50)	.33	0-3
Genito-urinary symptoms	.37	(.69)	.43	0-4
Child age 0-6 <sup>a</sup>	.22		.23	0-1
Fear of pregnancy <sup>a</sup>	.12		.12	0-1
Other adults not in household <sup>a</sup>	.62		.61	0-1
Age/10 (10 yrs)	4.00	(.96)	3.98	2-6.4
Psychological distress correlates				
Physical health	3.66	(.90)	3.71	1-5
Joint earnings (log)	7.20	(.87)	7.07	0-11
Perceived care in relationship	3.54	(.64)	3.52	1-4
Desire to lose weight <sup>a</sup>	.29		.30	0-1
Body mass index	22.63	(3.12)	22.92	16-33
Attractiveness (self-rated)	2.37	(.56)	2.35	1-4
Living conditions hinder sex life	1.44	(.61)	1.37	1-3

Note: *N* = 1,166 currently married, sexually active urban women.

<sup>a</sup> Dummy variables, with 1 signifying the presence of the characteristic and 0, the absence.

Table 2. Relationship Quality, Attitudes and Expectations, Bargaining, Sexual Experience, Lifestyle, Stress and Unwanted Sex

Variable	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
Relationship quality						
Any hitting	.41 **	3.31	.15	1.72	.12	1.19
Husband's extramarital sex	.27 ***	3.53	.06	1.12	.07	1.66
Intimacy and foreplay insufficient			.14 *	2.50	.13 **	2.67
Daily intimacy absent	.10 *	2.21				
Foreplay insufficient	.12 **	3.20				
Husband doesn't know wife's need	.10 *	2.72	.11 ***	4.82	.09 ***	4.82
Genital caressing of wife absent	-.45 ***	-6.85	-.47 ***	-4.89	-.38 ***	-5.76
Attitudes / Expectations						
Education (years)	.04 ***	3.95	.03 ***	4.43	.04 ***	4.51
Permissive sex attitudes	.25 **	3.07	.12	1.53	.11	1.76
Thinks sex is dirty	.27 ***	4.83	.17 ***	4.66	.16 ***	3.68
Bargaining						
Wife's share of joint earnings						
0-25%	.02	.33	.10	1.66	.09 *	2.10
25-70% (reference)	--	--	--	--	--	--
70-100%	.30	1.54	.12	.85	.24 *	1.96
Parents' economic background						
Husband's better	.22 **	3.12	.15	1.68	.18 ***	4.04
About equal (reference)	--	--	--	--	--	--
Wife's better	.05	.64	.01	.25	.02	.47
Age gap (husband - wife) (years)	-.03 ***	-3.70	-.02 **	-2.96	-.02 **	-2.82
Paid sex of men in locality (10%)	-.16 *	-2.17	-.09 *	-2.28	-.04	-.84
Pornography of men in locality (10%)	-.07	-1.77				
Sexual experience						
Childhood sexual contact	.45	1.42	.17	1.63	.08	.76
No. of sexual partners in lifetime	.17 **	3.08	.09	1.59	.04	1.13
Lifestyle / Stress						
Psychological distress	.43 ***	4.70	.23 *	2.53	.40 *	2.22
Alcohol consumption	.32 **	3.27	.13 *	2.32	.11	1.85
Genito-urinary symptoms	.10 *	2.55	.02	.28	.09 ***	3.55
Child age 0-6	.15	1.24	.25 ***	4.03	.22 ***	3.41
Fear of pregnancy	.23	1.88	.12	1.17	.05	.75
Other adults not in household	.18	1.63	.13	1.51	.14 *	2.11
Age/10 (10 years)	-.49	-1.83	.08 *	2.19	.06 *	2.17

Note: Regression coefficients, weighted and adjusted for sample design.  $N = 1,166$  currently married, sexually active urban women. Model I shows result from 25 separate regressions, each including only age and a single correlate. Model II is from a single multivariate regression equation, absent any attention to the potential feedback effect of unwanted sex on psychological distress. Model III is from a simultaneous equations model that includes the possible endogenous relationship of psychological distress and unwanted sex.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed test).

*Table 3. Unwanted Sex and Other Socio-demographic Correlates of Psychological Distress*

Variable	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>Unwanted sex</i>						
Unwanted sex index	.10***	5.20	.06**	2.79	.24***	8.31
<i>Other correlates</i>						
Physical health	-.19***	-8.67	-.17***	-6.10	-.15***	-6.94
Alcohol consumption	.10**	3.23	.06**	2.72	.02	.77
Education (years)	-.002	-.35	-.01**	-2.94	-.02***	-3.46
Joint earnings (log)	-.06**	-3.00	-.03	-1.95	-.03*	-2.08
Perceived care in daily life	-.13**	-2.58	-.05	-1.33	-.02	-.63
Desire to lose weight	.10***	6.67	.15***	7.74	.14***	10.01
Body mass index	-.01	-1.52	-.02**	-2.83	-.02**	-3.00
Attractiveness (1-4)	-.06**	-3.12	-.02	-1.07	-.03*	-2.02
Living conditions hinder sex life	.13***	4.66	.06**	3.02	.05**	2.80
Childhood sexual contact	.26	1.70	.20	1.81	.14	1.30
Age/10 (10 yrs)	.38	1.87	.30	1.60	.25	1.78
Age/10 squared	-.05	-1.82	-.04	-1.59	-.03	-1.72

*Note:* Regression equations, weighted and adjusted for sample design.  $N = 1,166$  currently married, sexually active urban women. Model I based on 11 separate regressions, each controlling only for age in addition to the variable of interest. Model II based on a single multivariate regression, absent attention to possible feedback effects of psychological distress on unwanted sex. Model III based on a simultaneous equations model that incorporates the possible endogenous relationship of psychological distress and unwanted sex.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed test).