

# USING TELEVISION DRAMA AS ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION TO TACKLE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN CHINA

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## Abstract

*Don't Respond to Strangers*<sup>1</sup> (*DRTS*) is the first and to date the only television drama in China that was intentionally produced to raise public consciousness about the insidious nature of domestic violence, to contribute to its elimination, and to protect and uphold the rights of women. Under the overarching framework of entertainment-education, we utilised the protection motivation theory to carry out a systematic three-part mixed-methods evaluation of *DRTS*. Study 1 was a qualitative content analysis of how domestic violence was portrayed in all 23 episodes of *DRTS*, identifying themes and scenes that could influence viewers' threat and coping appraisal of domestic violence. In Study 2, a quantitative content analysis of 1,848 viewer posts spread over an eight-year period was carried out on *DRTS'* online forum, ascertaining how they reflected the viewers' threat and coping appraisal about domestic violence. Study 3 was an on-line survey with Chinese nationals ( $N=326$ ) that tested how their threat and coping appraisal with respect to domestic violence influenced the relationships between programme exposure and three behavioural intention outcomes—i.e., victim coping, bystander intervention, and policy support. Our triangulated results suggested that, overall, *DRTS* was highly effective in using fear appeals to get the public's attention on domestic violence, spur public discussions on the topic, and foster a favorable policy climate—one that culminated in 2015 in the passage of anti-domestic violence legislation.

**Keywords:** domestic violence, China, television, entertainment-education, protection motivation theory

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## Introduction

In March 2018, when Feng Yuanzheng addressed the 13th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference—an influential national forum in Beijing of Chinese lawmakers and political advisors, he said: "My name is Feng Yuanzheng. I'm an actor from Beijing People's Art Theatre" (Chinadaily.com.cn, 2018). When an official noted, "We all know you. You don't have to introduce yourself," Feng continued: "Well, then I'd better introduce myself again....many people still call me An Jiahe" (Chinadaily.com.cn, 2018).

Some 17 years previously, in 2001, Feng Yuanzheng had played the character of An Jiahe in the hit Chinese television drama series "*Bu Yao He Mo Sheng Ren Shuo Hua*" ("Don't Respond to Strangers," hereafter *DRTS*), gaining notoriety as the best-known villain in the history of Chinese television. In *DRTS*, An Jiahe is a surgeon who mercilessly and repeatedly beats his wife. So realistic and repulsive was An Jiahe's fictional aura, his stock photo is still used—in 2019—on Chinese television to report domestic violence cases. So powerful and nail-biting was *DRTS'* melodramatic content, audience members and the

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<sup>1</sup> In Mandarin, *DRTS* was "*Bu Yao He Mo Sheng Ren Shuo Hua* (不要和陌生人说话)" where "Bu Yao" is "Don't," "Mo Sheng Ren" is "Strangers," and "Shuo Hua" is "Talk" or "Respond."

Chinese media were feverishly hooked to its storyline. By spurring conversations and elevating public consciousness about domestic violence—through repeat showings and web-streaming, *DRTS* became the driving catalyst for the passing of the 2015 Anti-Domestic Violence Law in China (Hunt, 2015; Women of China, 2015).



Photo 1: A domestic violence scene from *Don't Respond to Strangers*

In China and elsewhere, the statistics on domestic violence are staggering. *Domestic violence* refers to the behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual, and/or psychological harm (World Health Organisation, 2016). Globally, one in three women have experienced domestic violence, and this disdainful practice cuts across races, ethnicities, classes, and nationalities (Caetano, Schafer, & Cunradi, 2017; Qin & Yan, 2017; World Health Organisation, 2016). In China, nearly 40% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence (Chen, 2013; Wang, 2014). Domestic violence is especially insidious as it occurs inside a home—a space that is normatively construed as safe and secure. The behind-the-closed-door nature of domestic violence makes it highly taboo, exacerbating the vulnerability of women to speak out against it and/or ask for help. Traumatised women want help but cannot ask for it, and hence the cycle of violence not just continues—it escalates in severity over time.

Innovative narrative-based approaches—such as the entertainment-education (EE) strategy—are especially well-suited to address complex social problems, especially those that are taboo (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004; Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Wang & Singhal, 2009). Over the past five decades, EE has effectively addressed many intractable issues, including domestic violence, through highly engaging television and radio drama serials (Usdin et al., 2001). *DRTS* is the first and to date the only television drama serial in China that confronted domestic violence as a major storyline. It represents an EE programme because the producers intentionally employed fear appeals to portray domestic violence in all its cruelty and brazenness. Their purpose: to focus public attention on domestic violence, portray its insidious nature, raise social consciousness, spur public discussions and dialogue, and stimulate policy action (Zhang, 2001). This purpose was, in part, achieved through the portrayal of An Jiahe, a highly abusive, violent, and villainous wife-beater—a character indelibly etched in the psyche of Chinese audiences (Yang, 2017). Further, *DRTS* addressed domestic violence from beyond the perspective of just the perpetrator or the victim; it incorporated the perspective of bystander characters, biting dilemmas and possible solutions, and associated consequences of implementing (or not implementing) them. And given the television drama both inspired and agitated the mainstream Chinese media to push for legal reforms against domestic violence, a systematic investigation of *DRTS*—of the kind we report in this article, is much warranted.

In the present article, under the overarching framework of how EE programmes influence audiences, our three-part mixed-methods research investigation of *DRTS* was guided by the protection motivation theory. Study 1 represented a qualitative content analysis of how domestic violence was portrayed in *DRTS* episodes, allowing us to identify themes and scenes that could influence viewers' threat and coping appraisal of domestic violence. Study 2 was a quantitative content analysis of 1,848 viewer posts (spread over an 8-year period) on *DRTS*' on-line forum, analysing how the posts reflected the users' threat and coping appraisal about domestic violence. Study 3 employed an on-line survey with 326 Chinese nationals to investigate how their threat and coping appraisal with respect to domestic violence influenced the relationships between programme exposure and three behavioural intention outcomes—i.e., victim coping, bystander intervention, and policy support. We conclude by triangulating the findings of this three-pronged research, raising implications for the applicability of protection motivation theory for future EE initiatives, and stating the limitations of our work.

## **Entertainment-Education, Domestic Violence, and Protection Motivation Theory**

For over half a century, EE has been used to increase audience's knowledge, foster favorable attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behaviours around the world (Singhal, et al., 2004; Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Compared with traditional persuasion approaches, EE leverages the power of storytelling on mass media to reach audience at scale (Singhal & Rogers, 1999), engaging them through gripping characters and storylines (Brown, 2015; Wang & Singhal, 2016), reducing psychological resistance and counter-arguing (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), modeling solutions and stimulating conversations (Bandura, 2004), and enabling supportive infrastructure and community mobilisation (Singhal, Sharma, Papa, & Witte, 2004). Dramatic serials, whether on television or radio, represent the most popular EE format as the long-running story allows the producers to portray the complexity of an intractable issue in-depth, and connect the on-air intervention with ground-based social mobilisation, service delivery, and policy advocacy (Singhal, et al. 2004).

While domestic violence has been the focus of many melodramatic television series—for instance, *Sexto Sentido* (“Sixth Sense”) in Nicaragua (Lacayo, Obregón, & Singhal, 2008) and *Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon* (I, a woman, can achieve anything) in India (Wang & Singhal, 2018)—the best-known global example is *Soul City*, an EE drama (both on television and radio) in South Africa (Singhal, Usdin, Scheepers, Goldstein, & Japhet, 2003; Usdin, Singhal, Shongwe, Goldstein, & Shabalala, 2004). In 1999, *Soul City* portrayed domestic violence as a major storyline and modeled a new collective behaviour on how neighbours might intervene in a spousal abuse situation (Usdin et al., 2004). The prevailing cultural norm in South Africa was for neighbours, even if they wished to help a victim, not to intervene. Wife (or partner) abuse was seen as a private matter, carried out in a private space. In the *Soul City* series, neighbours collectively decided to break the ongoing cycle of spousal abuse, gathering around the abuser's home and banged pots and pans, censuring the abuser's actions (Usdin et al., 2004). Within days of this episode being broadcast, pot banging to stop partner abuse was reported in several communities in South Africa. Interestingly, the newly-learned behaviour was reinvented by certain audience members. Patrons of a local pub in Thembisa Township collectively banged bottles in the bar when a man physically abused his girlfriend (*Soul City*, 2000). Some 16.2 million South Africans, including 80% of the target population, were reached by this *Soul City* initiative; some 180,000 calls were made to the domestic violence helpline; and the serial helped in the speedy implementation of the South African Domestic Violence Act that was passed in 1998 (*Soul City Institute*, 2001).

While *Soul City* was designed and evaluated primarily through the lens of Bandura's (2004) social cognitive/social learning theory whereby new individual and collective behaviours were intentionally modeled on the television and radio serials—e.g., calling a helpline or banging pots and pans, the Chinese television drama *DRTS* purposely employed fear appeals in its message design strategy through An Jiahe's repulsive and abusive wife-beating character. For this reason, our investigation of *DRTS* centers

on Rogers (1975, 1983) protection motivation theory. Building on the previous work by Janis (1967) and Leventhal (1970), protection motivation theory started out as a way of understanding the various components and processes of fear appeals, maturing later into a theory of persuasion that focused on the effects of fear appeals through two mediating cognitive processes: threat and coping appraisal (Rogers, 1983). *Threat appraisal* includes three key factors in the assessment of an individual's maladaptive response to a threat: (1) *perceived severity* or the seriousness of the threat; (2) *perceived vulnerability* or one's probability of being affected by the threat; and (3) *perceived reward* or the benefits associated with a maladaptive response (Rogers, 1983). *Coping appraisal* includes three key factors in the assessment of an individual's adaptive response to a threat: (1) *response efficacy* or one's belief in the effectiveness of the recommended adaptive behaviour; *self-efficacy* or the belief in one's own ability to enact the recommended adaptive behaviour; and (3) *response cost* or the barriers to carrying out the recommended adaptive behaviour (Rogers, 1983).

When applied to our investigation of *DRTS*, the propositions of protection motivation theory would suggest that: from a *threat appraisal* perspective, when audience members feel higher perceived severity of domestic violence, higher perceived vulnerability of one being at risk of domestic violence, and lower perceived reward from tolerating domestic violence; and from a *coping appraisal* perspective, audience members feel higher response efficacy, higher self-efficacy, and lower perceived response cost; then individuals are more likely to reduce their maladaptive response, increase their adaptive response, and display heightened intentions to better cope with domestic violence as a victim, to intervene as a bystander, and to support policies against domestic violence as a citizen.

Although the protection motivation theory has been widely applied for disease prevention and health promotion (to address smoking, alcohol consumption, and high-risk sex), and usually in highly controlled laboratory settings (see Table 1 in Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, 1997), its direct testing with domestic violence has been highly delimited. The one exception was Waldrop and Resick's (2004) study which singled out the importance of perceived severity (one factor) in the coping strategy of a domestic violence victim. In the present investigation of *DRTS*, we included all the six factors that make up an audience member's threat and coping appraisal.

## Three-Pronged Mixed-Methods Investigation of *DRTS*

Utilising the protection motivation theory, we describe our systematic three-part mixed-methods research study of *DRTS*. While *DRTS* was a watershed programme on Chinese television, there exists no systematic investigation of the programme to date. This article connects the *DRTS* dots backward and forward through this study.<sup>2</sup>

### Study 1: A Qualitative Content Analysis of *DRTS* Television Drama Serial

*DRTS* comprised 23 episodes, each about 45 minutes. It premiered on a major Chinese cable channel in 2001. The main character Mei Xiangnan is a school teacher who endured severe physical and psychological abuse by her husband An Jiahe, a well-respected surgeon. Mei silently tolerated the domestic abuse out of fear that she would be ostracised if she made public what was a private family affair. Instead of ebbing, the cycle of violence kept escalating. Mei made attempts to seek help from family and friends, call a helpline, and even filed for a divorce, but ended up returning home to her husband hoping against hope that he would reform himself. The turning point in this story comes when An Jiahe saw Mei talking to a stranger. Enraged by jealousy, he slapped her hard and pushed her off the

<sup>2</sup> To understand the importance of *DRTS*, some historical context may be useful. Television broadcasting was introduced in China in 1958 (Zhang, 2006) during the Mao era, and evolved from being a propaganda instrument of the Communist Party to a commercially-oriented mass medium (Ren & Singh, 2000). During the decade of the 1980s, the number of television sets increased from 5 million to 160 million (32 times) in China (Nie, 1991). After decades of development and reforms, by the time *DRTS* came along in 2001, China boasted the largest television system in the world, with 1.1 billion regular viewers and 317 million television sets (Zhao & Guo, 2005; de Burgh, 2001).

stairs causing a miscarriage (hence the title *Don't Respond to Strangers*) (Photo 2). Mei finally realised that An would never change and makes up her mind to escape. However, as a face-saving device, An murdered two witnesses and committed suicide, avoiding an arrest and a trial. Only after his death, Mei moved from being a victim to becoming an activist—one who stands up and advocates for other victims of domestic violence.



Photo 2: Poster of *Don't Respond to Strangers*

As noted previously, the producers of *DRTS* publicly stated that their goal was to use fear appeals to help raise awareness about domestic violence in China (Zhang, 2001).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we proposed the following **research question 1**:

*What content in DRTS might influence viewers' threat and coping appraisal?*

For Study 1, a coding scheme based on all six key factors in the protection motivation theory was used to identify relevant content themes and specific scenes in each episode. The primary coder analysed all 23 episodes. The second coder analysed five randomly selected episodes (21.7%). The average percent agreement between the two coders was 90.4%.

Table 1 summarises the major themes and cut scenes in *DRTS* that could potentially affect the viewers' threat and coping appraisal that we identified. The portrayed severity of domestic violence stood out with extensive scenes showing Mei's immense physical, mental, and emotional suffering. Many were crude and could easily evoke fear among the viewers. Strategies such as talking to a close friend, calling the helpline, and seeking legal assistance were shown, although it was essentially the abuser's suicide that ended the victim's suffering.

<sup>3</sup> While *DRTS* was the first Chinese melodramatic serial purposely focusing on domestic violence, other highly popular Chinese serial dramas had dealt with a wide variety of social topics, including *Ke Wang* ("Aspirations") that focused on the aspirations of ordinary Chinese people during the time of the Cultural Revolution and the reform period of the early 1980s (Wang & Singhal, 1992) and *Baxing* ("Ordinary People"), an explicitly EE melodramatic serial broadcast on CCTV in 1999 and dealing with small family size and gender equality (Singhal, Ren, & Zhang, 2004).

Our results of Study 1 were consistent with the producers' statement about their intentional use of fear appeals to depict domestic violence. They adopted horror movie shooting techniques like jump scare, gore, and gloomy background music to portray the issue and evoke fear (Qu, 2002). These efforts and content themes validated our framing of *DRTS* as an EE programme and provided important contextual information for Study 2.

**Table 1: Coding Scheme and Results of Don't Respond to Strangers Entertainment Content**

Factors	Definition	Theme	Episode	Duration
Perceived severity	Estimates of seriousness of a threat	Portrayals of physical abusing and victim suffering, including verbal aggression, pushing, shoving, slapping on face; victim depression, miscarriage and severe injuries	Episode 04 Episode 05 Episode 06 Episode 10 Episode 18	06:43-10:52 24:07-32:45 25:24-32:20 06:41-14:00 37:30-39:09
Perceived vulnerability	Estimates of the chances for getting detrimental outcomes	Portrayals of a well-reputed abuser thus break the stereotype of low-educated abuser.	Episode 01 Episode 05 Episode 06 Episode 18	14:53-16:02 29:00-32:00 23:00-23:17 39:09-41:00
Perceived reward	Advantages of maladaptive behaviour	Maintain peace in marriage; make family look better from outside; prevent severer abuse.	Episode 05 Episode 10 Episode 16 Episode 18 Episode 20	37:15-41:10 15:55-26:56 34:30- 36:40 23:59-27:13 07:57-12:25
Response efficacy	An individual's belief of the effectiveness of recommended adaptive behaviour	Communicate with the abuser; ask help from friends and family members, call hotline; escape	Episode 06 Episode 07 Episode 10 Episode 12	40:00-44:00 33:00-35:30 16:35-19:59 09:29-13:00
Self-efficacy	An individual's belief in his/her own ability to execute recommended adaptive behaviour successfully	Change in the wife's perceived capability to fight against violence.	Episode 10 Episode 11 Episode 21 Episode 22	28:37-36:15 22:10-22:58 10:30-13:30 27:50-28:00
Response cost	Cost for carrying out the recommended adaptive behaviour	Lack of legal protection; privacy concern; lack of community supportiveness.	Episode 05 Episode 10 Episode 16 Episode 18	34:50-35:30 26:56-27:47 34:08-44:02 23:59-27:13

## Study 2: A Quantitative Content Analysis of *DRTS* Online Viewer Comments

EE research suggests that television drama can evoke deep emotions and spur public discussions (Singhal, et al., 2004; Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Popular entertainment programmes are often made available online to expand audience reach and engagement. Social media can provide an online forum for viewers to respond (Chung, 2015). The digital version of *DRTS* became available online in the late 2000s. To understand how the *DRTS* viewers responded to the domestic violence storyline and the fear appeals, we proposed the following **research question 2**:

*How did DRTS online comments reflect the viewers' threat and coping appraisal?*

For Study 2, we used Python to acquire all the Chinese comments about *DRTS* on Douban.com, one of the most popular online forums in China. It allows users to post comments about television shows, films, books, and music videos. On the *DRTS* forum, 33,042 registered Douban users indicated that they watched the drama serial. We collected 3,278 viewer comments from January 2008 to April 2016 and excluded entries that were invalid (i.e., spam) and irrelevant to our research focus (i.e., comments about programme rating and performance), leaving 1,848 comments for our content analysis. Using each comment as the unit of analysis, we tallied the frequency of posts relevant to all six key factors in protection motivation theory and flagged keywords and sample comments. The primary coder analysed all 1,848 comments and the second coder analysed a randomly selected sample of 400 comments (21.6%).

The Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  was 0.74, indicating a modest degree of inter coder reliability (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007).

Table 2 shows the discussions relevant to all six factors in the protection motivation theory, although some appeared more frequently than others: 90.1% of all comments focused on viewers' perceived severity of domestic violence in China and their feeling of fear when watching *DRTS*; 7.0% expressed that watching *DRTS* did result in higher perceived vulnerability, including the long-lasting fear of marriage; only eight posts mentioned the perceived reward of tolerating domestic violence; in addition, 6.8% addressed response efficacy, including 4.0% about the low efficacy of portrayed solutions; 7.1% indicated their self-efficacy, including 3.7% reporting that watching *DRTS* actually resulted in lower self-efficacy and 3.4% reported improved self-efficacy; and only 19 posts mentioned response cost.

**Table 2: Content Analysis of Don't Respond to Strangers Viewer Online Comments**

Factor	Definition	Count	Keywords	Sample Post
Perceived severity	Estimates of seriousness of a threat.	1663	Terrible, scare, severe	It is from this drama serial that I started to notice the severity of domestic violence.
Perceived vulnerability	Estimates of the chances for getting detrimental outcomes	137	Common phenomenon, afraid of marriage	An Jiahe exists in every man's mind.
Perceived reward	Advantages of maladaptive behavior	7	Dignity, reputation, family	Don't believe he will change.
Response efficacy	The belief of effectiveness of recommended behaviour	127	Report, police, legal system, escape, divorce	Reporting domestic violence to the police is entirely useless.
Self-efficacy	Belief in one's own ability to execute recommended courses of action successfully	131	Be strong and independent, courage, determined	We should have the courage to say goodbye to tolerance.
Response cost	Costs for carrying out the recommended behaviour	25	Legal system, social norms	This drama serial reminds us that our legislation just acquiesces this crime to exist.

Study 2 suggests that *DRTS* was indeed a highly influential conversation starter about domestic violence in China. In particular, in the *DRTS* online forum, the users' perceived severity was overwhelming and the expressions of fear were dominant. In this sense, the producers' fear appeal strategy was successful. These voluntary, unfiltered, and public viewer comments provided authentic evidence of how *DRTS* helped to raise awareness of domestic violence among the Chinese nationals and how individual viewers resonated with the drama serial and connected to their personal knowledge and experiences. However, these viewers were typical passionate fans of *DRTS*. Therefore, we conducted Study 3 to examine how different levels of *DRTS* programme exposure were associated with individuals' threat and coping appraisal as well as their behavioural intentions against domestic violence.

### Study 3: A Survey of Chinese Nationals with Different *DRTS* Exposure

EE programmes have varied impacts in different cultures on different issues (Wray et al., 2004). If *DRTS* was effective in meeting its purpose, we would expect that *DRTS*' programme exposure will be positively associated with perceived severity, perceived vulnerability, response efficacy, and self-efficacy, and negatively associated with perceived reward and response cost. Most of the findings from Study 2 were consistent with these hypotheses. However, some might have a stronger indication than others and not all of these relationships were reflected. For example, viewers reported mixed results about self-efficacy. Therefore, to further explore the relationship between *DRTS* programme exposure and Chinese nationals' threat and coping appraisal of domestic violence, we proposed the following **research question 3**:

*What are the relationships between DRTS programme exposure and Chinese nationals' threat and coping appraisal of domestic violence in terms of their (a) perceived severity, (b) perceived vulnerability, (c) perceived reward, (d) response efficacy, (e) self-efficacy; and (f) response cost?*

Previous studies have identified abuse severity as a significant predictor of the victims' coping strategies (Waldrop & Resick, 2004) and the bystanders' intervention decisions (Chabot, Tracy, Manning & Poisson, 2009). However, few studies have tested all six factors from the protection motivation theory in predicting these outcomes. Furthermore, 14 years after *DRTS*'s initial broadcast, China passed its first national law against domestic violence (Hunt, 2015). The new law took a significant step forward from existing legislation by legally defining domestic violence as physical and psychological abuse of family members and non-kin cohabitants. Therefore, we examined the relationships between the Chinese nationals' threat and coping appraisal and three behavioural intentions: their intention to cope with domestic violence if they were a victim, their intention to intervene in domestic violence if they were a bystander, and their intention to support the new national law against domestic violence in China. Hence, we asked **research question 4**:

*What are the relationships between Chinese nationals' (a) perceived severity, (b) perceived vulnerability, (c) perceived reward, (d) response efficacy, (e) self-efficacy, and (f) response cost and their intentions of victim coping, bystander intervention, and policy support?*

For Study 3, survey participants were recruited from Douban.com. Of the 544 Chinese nationals who accessed the survey, 326 adult participants completed all of the key questions and were included in the final analysis. Their age ranged from 18 to 60 years ( $M = 28.91$ ,  $SD = 7.94$ ); 58.2% were female; 41.5% were single; 23.6% were in a relationship; 34.2% were married, and 0.7% were divorced; 25.7% reported a monthly income of less than 3,000 RMB (or 435 USD), 43.7% between 3,000 and 8,000 RMB (or 435-1,200 USD), and 30.6% over 8,000 RMB (or 1,200 USD). Many reported having personal connections to domestic violence: 40.2% knew people who were abusers and 41.1% knew people who were victims. Our sample had slightly more women and young people compared with the Chinese census data but no significant difference compared with the Internet users in China (Statista, 2017).

The questionnaire was translated from English to Chinese and pilot tested. With IRB approval, our final data collection took place through a Qualtrics online survey in October and November, 2016. Potential participants could access the survey via a hyperlink in the research announcement on Douban.com, then give their consent and complete the questions. All participants were offered an incentive of 5 RMB.

Because no previously established scales for protection motivation theory directly addressed domestic violence, for Study 3 we adopted an iterative process to develop our own measures (De Vellis, 2003). Participants were asked, "Have you ever heard of *Don't Respond to Strangers*?" If so, "How many episodes have you watched?" and "How many times have you watched?" A composite variable was created to measure *DRTS* programme exposure (1 = *never heard of DRTS*; 2 = *have heard of DRTS but not watched*; 3 = *watched several episodes once*; and 4 = *watched all episodes at least once*). As shown in Table 3, a 100-point scale (0 = *strongly disagree*; 100 = *strongly agree*) was used to measure all six key factors in the protection motivation theory (i.e., perceived severity, perceived vulnerability, perceived reward, response efficacy, self-efficacy, and response cost) and three behavioural intentions (i.e., victim coping, bystander intervention, and policy support). The items on victim coping and bystander intervention were directly matched with the programme content that was analysed in Study 1. The items on policy support were derived from the new law against domestic violence in China. All measures were pilot tested.

We used SPSS 24.0 for descriptive statistics and correlational analysis and Mplus 7.3 for structural equation modeling following a two-step procedure. We first specified and refined a measurement model and then tested a parsimonious path model to assess the overall goodness-of-fit (Kline, 2005). We tested the hypotheses through three justified path models based on the protection motivation theory, each with a different behavioural intention as the dependent variable. At the global level, we conducted overall goodness-of-fit tests and assessed the following statistics: a nonsignificant  $\chi^2$ , the  $\chi^2/df$  ratio less than 5, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) less than .05, comparative fit index (CFI) above .90, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) above .90, and standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) less than .08. At the local level, standardised regression coefficients for the hypothesised relationships were assessed based on statistical significance at the .05 alpha level.

**Table 3: Measurement Items, Factor Loadings, Scale Reliabilities, and Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Mean(SD)
Key Factors in Protection Motivation Theory				
Perceived severity	Domestic violence victims will get injured. Domestic violence victims will suffer from psychological problems. Domestic violence victims will die from such violence.	.85 .86 .64	.78	85.33 (18.32)
Perceived vulnerability	Only married women are susceptible to domestic violence.* Only uneducated husbands are likely to be abusive. Anyone could be subjected to domestic violence.*	.35 .94 .19		67.86 (28.32)
Perceived reward	Tolerating domestic violence help brings peace into family; Compromise with domestic violence help prevents severer violence; Tolerating domestic violence could help ensure financial income; Families look better from outside if domestic violence is not reported.	.86 .86 .87 .69	.89	26.09 (26.42)
Response efficacy	If I were a domestic violence victim, I think it will be helpful to :  Talk to a trusted one. Seek help from a domestic violence programme. Seek legal assistance. Be an activist.		.86	73.25 (23.55)
Self-efficacy	If I were a domestic violence victim, I will have the courage to:  Talk to a trusted one. Seek help from a domestic violence programme. Seek legal assistance. Be an activist.		.90	65.17 (23.61)
Response cost	Lack of knowledge about their rights keeps abused women from seeking help. Domestic violence is viewed as a private issue in China. Asking for help outside the family is perceived as a loss of face for the family. Lack of community supportiveness keep victims from reporting domestic violence.	.64 .45 .46 .72	.71	67.40 (21.12)
Behavioral Intention Outcomes				
Victim coping	If I were a domestic violence victim, I would like to:  Tolerate the violence.* Communicate with the abuser.* Report to domestic violence programme. Communicate with family or friends. Seek legal assistance.	.05 .29 .86 .67 .86	.83	67.86 (28.32)
Bystander intervention	If I were a bystander of domestic violence, I would like to:  Communicate with the abuser. Communicate with the victim. Report to domestic violence programme. Communicate with family or friends. Seek legal assistance.	.60 .75 .78 .83 .78	.80	
Policy support	Psychological abuse should be prohibited. Unmarried couples who cohabit should also be protected by National Law against Domestic violence. Close relatives could file a complaint on behalf of victims who may not be able to do so on their own.	.81 .84 .85	.78	85.85 (18.21)

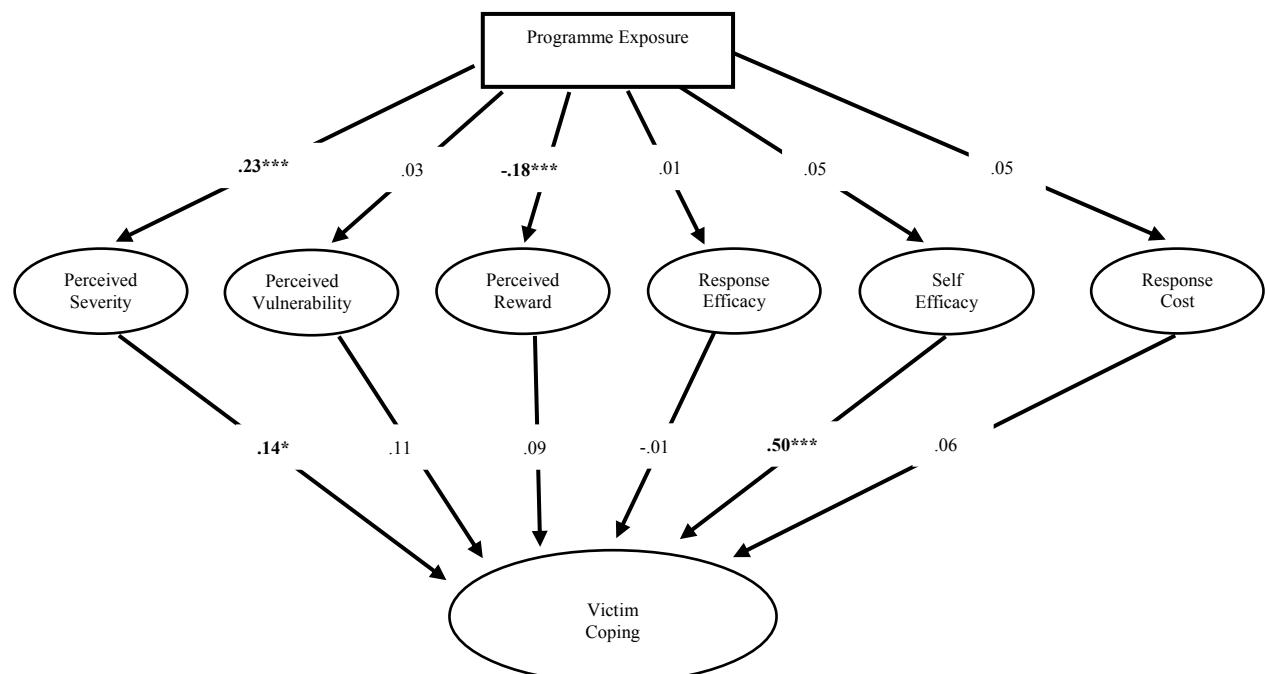
Note: \* Item was excluded from the final path analysis due to the low factor loading.

Table 4 shows the bivariate correlation matrix. Our final measurement model had a good fit ( $\chi^2 = 215.56$ ,  $df = 135$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.6$ , RMSEA = .043, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, SRMR = .06). Our path models also had a good fit (Figure 1-3). At the local level, only significant results are reported here due to limited space. Results of path model 1 showed that the relationship between programme exposure and perceived severity was positive ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ ); the relationship between programme exposure and perceived reward was negative ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ); the relationship between perceived severity and victim coping was positive ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ); and the relationship between self-efficacy and victim coping was positive ( $\beta = .50$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Figure 1). Our path model explained 37.1% of the variance in victim coping intention.

**Table 4: Zero-Order Bivariate Correlations among Key Variables**

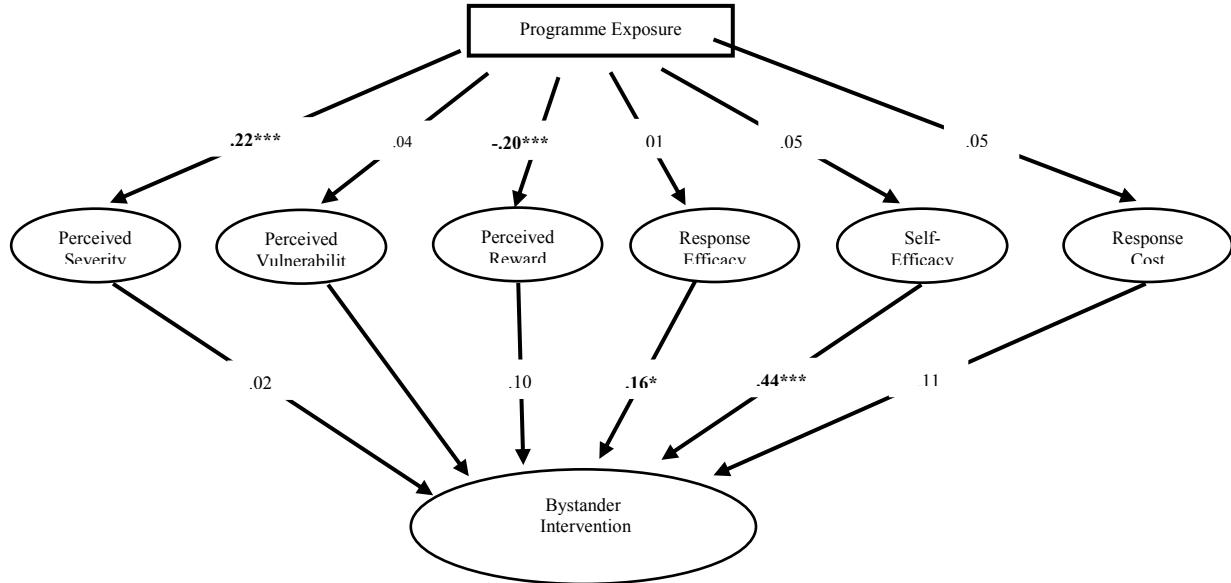
Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Programme exposure	--										
Perceived severity	.23***										
Perceived vulnerability	.06	.18***	--								
Perceived reward	-.21***	-.25***	-.35***	--							
Response efficacy	.03	.36***	-.13**	.04	--						
Self-efficacy	.04	.39***	-.08	-.11	.52***	--					
Response cost	.05	.34***	-.06	.19***	.34***	.36***	--				
Tolerance level	-.07	-.18**	-.24**	.58**	-.01	-.15	.03	--			
Victim coping	.09	.31***	.03	-.01	.52***	.55***	.25***	.47***	--		
Bystander Intervention	.30	.27***	-.15	.01	.41***	.47***	.30***	.01	.68***	--	
Policy support	.15**	.52***	.03	-.12	.26***	.36***	.27***	-.14	-.02	.47***	--

Results of path model 2 showed that the relationship between programme exposure and perceived severity was positive ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ ); the relationship between programme exposure and perceived reward was negative ( $\beta = -.20$ ,  $p < .01$ ); the relationship between response efficacy and bystander intervention was positive ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .05$ ); and the relationship between self-efficacy and bystander intervention was positive ( $\beta = .44$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Figure 2). Our path model explained 12.5% of the variance in bystander intervene intention.

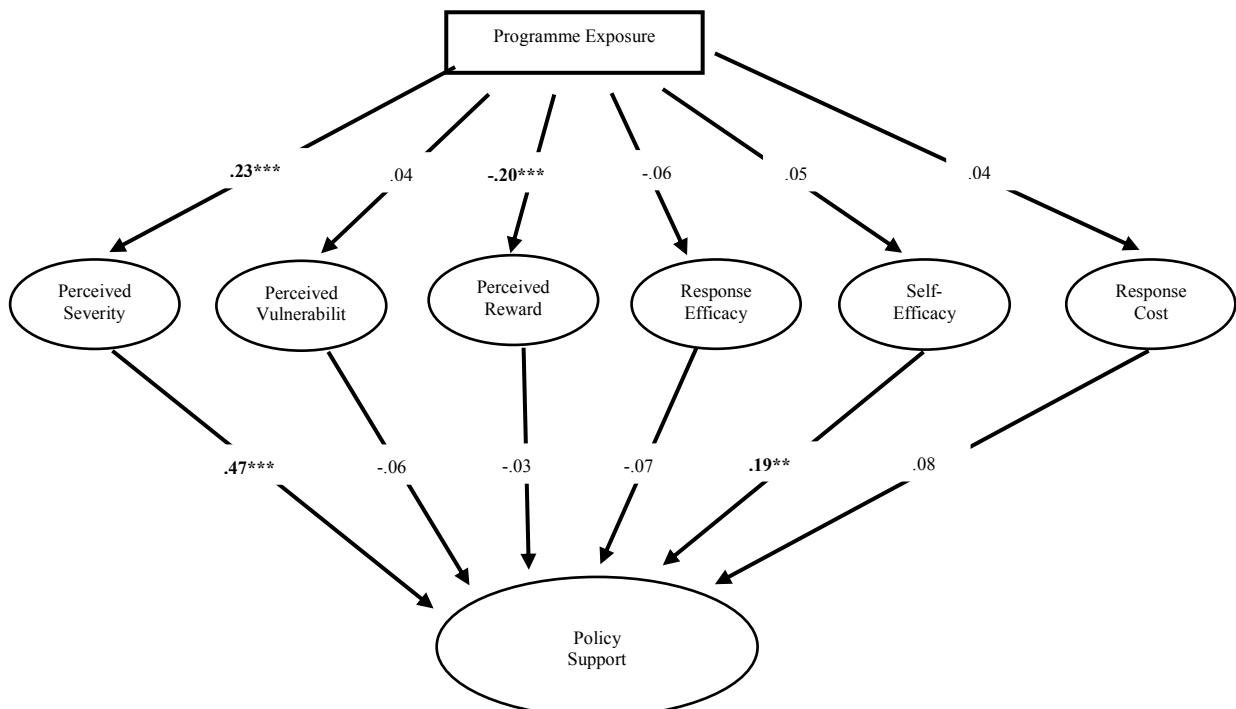


**Figure 1: Path Model 1 on How Key Factors of Protection Motivation Theory Influence the Relationship between DRTS Programme Exposure and Chinese Nationals' Intention to Cope with Domestic Violence as a Victim.  $\chi^2 = 15.89$ ,  $df = 7$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.27$ , RMSEA = .042, CFI = .973, TLI = .925, SRMR = .048 ; \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001**

Results of path model 3 showed that the relationship between programme exposure and perceived severity was positive ( $\beta = .23, p < .01$ ); the relationship between programme exposure and perceived reward was negative ( $\beta = -.20, p < .01$ ); the relationship between perceived severity and policy support was positive ( $\beta = .47, p < .01$ ); and the relationship between self-efficacy and policy support was positive ( $\beta = .19, p < .05$ ; Figure 3). Our path model explained 32.2% of the variance in policy support intention.



**Figure 2: Path Model 2 on How Key Factors of Protection Motivation Theory Influence the Relationship between DRTS Programme Exposure and Chinese Nationals' Intention to Intervene Domestic Violence Situations as a Bystander.**  $\chi^2 = 19.16, df = 7, \chi^2/df = 2.74$ , RMSEA = .053, CFI = .969, TLI = .927, SRMR = .046 ; \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001



**Figure 3: Path Model 3 on How Key Factors of Protection Motivation Theory Influence the Relationship between DRTS Programme Exposure and Chinese Nationals' Intention to Support Government Policies against Domestic Violence.**  $\chi^2 = 16.43, df = 7, \chi^2/df = 2.35$ , RMSEA = .044, CFI = .974, TLI = .925, SRMR = .048; \*p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

Overall, our survey results from Study 3 showed a good model fit in terms of how the appraisal mechanisms in the protection motivation theory mediated the relationships between *DRTS* programme exposure and behavioural intentions against domestic violence among the Chinese nationals. Certain factors played more important roles than others. It was consistent that *DRTS* programme exposure was positively associated with perceived severity and negatively associated with perceived reward. Self-efficacy was positively associated with all three behavioural intentions while perceived severity was positively associated with victim coping and policy support intentions and response efficacy was positively associated with bystander intervention intention.

## Triangulated Conclusions and Discussion

This research contributes to the interventional literature on domestic violence in at least *four* ways. First, our study provides the empirical evidence about the efficacy of the EE strategy in engaging and educating people about domestic violence. Second, *DRTS* represents a unique media, public, and policy phenomenon in the most populous country in the world.<sup>4</sup> While most studies on domestic violence have been carried out in highly - controlled laboratory conditions in English speaking countries (Hastings, Stead, & Webb, 2004; Witte & Allen, 2000), *DRTS* was specifically designed to utilise fear appeals to tackle domestic violence in the real world. Third, our research investigation was based on a strong theoretical foundation, a practice that is uncommon in studies on domestic violence. We employed the protection motivation theory in all its richness, incorporating all the six key factors of the threat and coping appraisal in all three studies. Fourth, we adopted a three-pronged mixed methods approach to systematically examine *DRTS*, and triangulated our findings from a diverse set of investigations that were carried out over time, allowing for connecting of insights both backward and forward.

Study 1 found that all six key factors were indeed reflected in *DRTS* deeming the protection motivation theory as being apt as our theoretical foundation. The severity of domestic violence dominated the narrative as a result of the producers' strategic use of fear appeals. Study 2 found that the viewers had a strong response to *DRTS*; their perceived severity of domestic violence in China was particularly overwhelming. Study 3 found that different levels of *DRTS* programme exposure were associated with the Chinese nationals' threat and coping appraisal and their behavioural intentions, with perceived severity, perceived reward, response efficacy, and self-efficacy being the most significant factors in the path models. Perceived severity consistently stood out in our empirical findings about the programme content, audience response, and the relationships between programme exposure and educational outcomes. Taken together, *DRTS* succeeded at using fear appeals to gauge public attention toward the taboo issue of domestic violence in China. It provided an excellent case of using the entertainment-education strategy to raise awareness, stimulate discussions, and promote positive change.

This project has limitations that may inform future research. First, fear is a negative emotion that can cause distress as some of the viewers indicated in their online comments. Producers should be mindful about the ethical concerns with using fear appeals (Hastings, et al., 2004). Even though fear appeals were chosen with justifiable reasons for *DRTS*, other tactics that evoke positive emotions such as warmth, love, empathy, and hope may also be beneficial and effective (Hastings, et al., 2004). In fact, as Bandura (2004) pointed out, a distinctive advantage of entertainment-education drama serials over typical soap operas is the role modeling that enables and empowers the audience to take actions in real life such as shown in the success of *Soul City*. More effective behavioural solutions need to be modeled in programmes like *DRTS* in order to increase response efficacy and self-efficacy while reducing barriers such as perceived reward and perceived cost.

<sup>4</sup> The popularity of *DRTS* paved the way for various other television and film productions in China on domestic violence. Close on *DRTS*' heels was the 2003 television series, *Women, Silent No More*, which addressed the highly taboo topic of sexual assault and violence. Akin to *DRTS*, the series follows the lives of a group of women who initially are silent over unwanted, predatory sexual behaviour, but eventually gain agency and use the law to protect themselves. Notable commercial films addressing domestic and sexual violence included *Egg and Stone* (2012) and *Chilling Cicada* (2014) and *The Secret Tree* (2014). All of these contributed in stimulating the public and policy discourse on domestic violence.

Second, the protection motivation theory focuses only on cognitive processes. The power of EE lies in its ability to evoke deep human emotions (Murphy, Frank, Moran, Patnoe-Woodley, 2011). Although we identified scenes that might induce fear and included self-reported fear in online viewer comments, future research may expand the affective aspect of the audience experience by integrating the key factors in the protection motivation theory and Witte's (1998) extended parallel process model that directly includes fear.

Third, the conceptual path model in Study 3 may be the first application of the protection motivation theory on the issue of domestic violence. We developed measures that specifically matched what was portrayed in *DRTS*. Most of our measurement scales were proved to be reliable except for perceived vulnerability. We provided preliminary evidence on the association between programme exposure and threat and coping appraisal. Future research may improve the measurement and replicate the tests on programme exposure with a different entertainment-education programme. It may also be fruitful to identify specific triggers in the programme and develop tailored experimental stimuli to help establish causal claims.

Last but not least, considering *DRTS* was premiered in 2001, the self-reported programme exposure in Study 3 may be somewhat problematic. Also, our investigation is constrained by convenient sampling in the recruitment of survey participants on the Internet. As most of the *DRTS* viewers watched the show on television, a more representative national sample beyond avid Internet users would have made a stronger case for inferential analysis.

That said, overall, *DRTS* was highly effective in using fear appeals to get the public's attention on domestic violence, spur public conversations on this taboo topic, and foster a favorable policy climate for the eventual passage of anti-domestic violence legislation.

Social change scholars and practitioners should never underestimate the power of narrative engagement and persuasion.

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