How Do Chinese Public Service Professional Trainees Attribute Responsibility to Victims and Perpetrators of Violence Against Women?

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Two-hundred-and-twenty-five Chinese human service professional trainees (80 police trainees, 45 medical students, and 100 nursing students) participated in a study on responsibility attribution to violence against women (VAW). Results showed that compared to medical students and police trainees, nursing students had broader definitions of VAW, endorsed more liberal attitudes toward women, and perceived VAW as more prevalent and having more negative effects on the victims and society. Compared to police trainees, medical and nursing students assigned greater responsibility to VAW perpetrators. However, there was no group difference in the attribution of responsibility to VAW victims. Among the predictor variables for a low level of responsibility attribution to the victims, liberal attitude toward women was the only significant predictor. For a low level of responsibility attribution to the perpetrators, the most salient predictors were being police trainees and perceiving VAW as having little negative effects on the victims. Limitations and implications of the study will also be discussed.

KEY WORDS: responsibility attribution; Chinese human service professional trainees; violence against women.

Violence against women (VAW) is a pervasive experience of women across countries, and includes homicide, battery and assault, sexual harassment, rape, child and elder abuse, incest, and wife battering (Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Koss, 1990). Recently, increasing attention has been given to secondary victimization experiences of VAW victims when they seek assistance from a variety of public service agencies such as police stations, hospitals, mental health clinics, and rape crisis centers. Secondary victimization occurs when personnel working in these agencies treat VAW victims with insensitivity, as in blaming, disbelieving, inducing shame and embarrassment during physical examination or collection of forensic evidences, and delaying or refusing to make appropriate referral for further services. Researchers have found that secondary victimization exerts detrimental effects on the recovery of the victims, and it is often related to public service professionals’ attribution of responsibility to VAW situations (Campbell, 1998; Campbell, Wasco, Ahrens, Sefl, & Barnes, 2001; Koss, 2000; Ullman, 1996). Thus, it is important to attend to factors associated with responsibility attribution in designing VAW-related education and intervention programs for these professionals as well as for their trainees to avert secondary victimization experiences of the victims. In this study, we aimed to explore how responsibility is attributed to VAW victims and perpetrators by public service professional trainees who are most likely to come into contact with VAW situations; these include police trainees as well as medical and nursing students.