Police Officers' Preferences for Enforcing COVID-19 Regulatory Violations: The Impact of Organizational Support, Psychological Conditions, and Public Compliance

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Abstract

The coronavirus has stirred a wave of studies on policing the pandemic. Nonetheless, officers' intentions to enforce COVID-related rules and regulations remain under-researched. Drawing upon survey data from 600 police officers in a major Chinese city, this study explores the associations between organizational support, behavioral and psychological conditions, and perceived public compliance and officers' willingness to intervene in rule violations. Organizational support in providing supervisory instructions, training, and PPE increased the likelihood of officers issuing tickets, whereas minimizing COVID-19 risks to officers reduced the probability of officers not taking any action against rule violations. Officers who perceive community

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residents as compliant with pandemic regulations are less likely to take no action or use more punitive sanctions of ticket/fine and detention/arrest.

Keywords
COVID-19, Chinese policing, regulatory violations, organizational support, public compliance

Introduction

Originated from Wuhan, China, in late 2019, the COVID-19 disease has rapidly spread to the entire world and caused more than six million deaths globally (World Health Organization, 2022). The worldwide pandemic has deeply impacted all segments of society, including the law enforcement communities. To achieve public health objectives, frontline police officers have shouldered challenging counter-virus measures, such as enforcing social distancing, mask-wearing, and lockdown, exposing them to an increased infection risk of the virus (Lum et al., 2020). The emergence of the coronavirus has stirred a wave of studies on policing the pandemic. Scholars have assessed the pandemic's influence on police organizational changes (Maskály et al., 2021a, 2021c), roles and power (White & Fradella, 2020), strategies and techniques (Grace, 2020; Hartmann & Hartmann, 2020; McCarthy et al., 2021), and stress (Frenkel et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021). Others have focused on public calls for service (Ashby, 2020a; Mohler et al., 2020), compliance (Murphy et al., 2020), and perceptions of police procedural justice, legitimacy, and behavior (Aborisade, 2021; Jones, 2020; Janković & Cvetković, 2020; Maskaly et al., 2021b; Nix et al., 2021; Perry & Jonathan-Zamir, 2020; Sandrin & Simpson, 2021).

This study expands the current literature on pandemic policing by examining the linkage between organizational, officer, and civilian factors and police preferences for handling people who violated COVID-19 rules and regulations. Drawing upon officer survey data from China, we evaluate officers' tendencies to take different enforcement actions against COVID-19 rule violations and test factors influencing officers' enforcement actions. We strengthen this growing vein of pandemic policing literature in several ways. First, although recent studies have touched on several aspects of policing under the pandemic, none have investigated police officers' intentions to enforce COVID-related rules and regulations. Examining officers' willingness to carry out their enforcement activities enhances our understanding of their attitudinal and behavioral tendencies toward rule violators amid the

public health crisis when the official rules may not be clear and could be constantly evolving.

Second, this study includes three groups of explanatory variables reflecting organizational support, behavioral and psychological conditions, and public compliance to predict officers' enforcement propensities. These variables consider the potential linkages between organizational, personal, and community factors and officers' intentions to enforce pandemic rules and regulations. The findings have the potential to extend the theory of police behavior to encompass the context of health emergency management that has seldom been considered in the literature.

Finally, this study analyzes the data from China, the world's first country to witness the deadly consequences of the disease and one of the strictest countries in enforcing the COVID-19 rules and regulations (Song, 2022). As one of the few remaining countries to follow a zero-COVID policy, China's success in suppressing the disease builds partly on a complicated and dense web of social control where the public security apparatus plays an essential role in securing public compliance and cooperation. Studying frontline legal authorities' willingness to enforce COVID-19 rule violations can advance our understanding of policing pandemics in an authoritarian setting where police power and public compliance are quite different from those in Western democracies.

Drawing upon survey data from 600 police officers in a major Chinese city, this study explores the associations between organizational support, behavioral and psychological conditions, and perceived public compliance and officers' willingness to intervene in rule violations by using advice or warning, ticket or fine, and detention or arrest. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first one to focus on the connections between organizational, officer, and community constructs and police officers' preferences for various interventions in responding to COVID-19 rule violations. This study provides insights for future research and has direct policy implications.

Literature Review

Police Interventions in Rule Violations During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has created noticeable challenges for the police around the world. Indeed, "the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into stark focus the extended roles and responsibilities of police that both create new opportunities yet have the potential to threaten the foundations of civil society" (Mazerolle & Ransley, 2021, p. 316). As the first responders for all sorts of emergencies, the police are mobilized to enforce various counter-virus

mandates, such as wearing facial masks, maintaining social distancing, and following lockdown orders. Such highly securitized measures often involve implementing new laws and policies that restrict fundamental individual freedoms and expand police enforcement powers (Stott et al., 2022). Complicating matters further, scholars contend that COVID-19 counter-measures have magnified existing police controlling practices toward the "usual suspects" or socially and racially disadvantaged groups, casting concerns about the legitimacy of police interventions amid the public health disaster (Boon-Kuo et al., 2020; Jahn et al., 2022).

Due to the heightened concern for officers' health safety during the early peak months of the pandemic (e.g., spring and summer of 2020), many police departments issued policies and instructions discouraging patrol officers from engaging in proactive activities, such as pedestrian and traffic stops (Lum et al., 2020). Limiting officers' engagement in proactive patrol interventions, for instance, has resulted in fewer traffic stops in many jurisdictions worldwide (Ashby, 2020b; Maskály et al., 2021c; Mohler et al., 2020). One study also reported a decline in arrests in four U.S. cities (i.e., Boston, Charleston, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco) after the stay-home-order implemented in 2020 (Jahn et al., 2022). However, we know little about how officers have enforced or intended to enforce COVID-19 regulatory violations through arrests. One would expect that using more punitive sanctions, such as arrest, against COVID-19 rule violators should be infrequent, but an Amnesty International report (2020) showed that mass and arbitrary arrests happened in some countries.

Apart from arrests, police officers have utilized other less punitive interventions to handle pandemic policy and regulation violations. In England, for example, police officers are empowered to issue £100 on-the-spot fines to violators of social distancing (Grace, 2020). As of June 2021, the England and Wales police have issued more than 115,000 fixed penalty notices (FPNs) for violations of Coronavirus restrictions related to large gatherings, face coverings, business operations, and self-isolation (National Police Chiefs' Council, 2021). In the U.S., many jurisdictions instructed officers to issue citations for all or low-level misdemeanors (Jennings & Perez, 2020), minimizing interactions between officers and the public. The enforcement of such policy nonetheless is less than consistent across jurisdictions. Considering their safety and agency policies, police officers are likely to continue exercising their discretionary decision-making power in distributing various sanctions against rule and law violators related to the pandemic.

In limited democracies where the police suffer the legitimacy problem, abusive police behavior could be worsened by implementing virus countermeasures (see Amnesty International, 2020). In Nigeria, for instance, the

police have engaged in aggressive and illegal actions toward the public, including the use of physical violence and sexual harassment and assaults against women (Aborisade, 2021). Scholars have asserted that "there are unmistakable regressions into authoritarianism in governmental efforts to contain the virus" (Thomson & Ip, 2020, p. 1). How such a worldwide trend in dealing with the pandemic is manifested in frontline police officers' minds and actions remains largely unknown. This study addresses this knowledge gap by assessing police officers' preferences for sanctions with different levels of punitiveness in authoritarian China.

Policing COVID-19 in China

Chinese police have been actively involved in the country's fight against the pandemic since the beginning. In December 2019, when the virus was largely unknown to the public, Dr. Wenliang Li sent WeChat, which is the dominant social media in China, messages to fellow medical professionals, warning them of the coronavirus. Chinese police uncovered Li's WeChat information, summoned him to a Wuhan police station, and reprimanded him for spreading the rumor (Bociurkiw, 2020, February 11). The coronavirus infected Dr. Li, and his death sparked widespread grief, outrage, and mistrust against the Chinese police and government. Although the Chinese government's obsession with widespread censorship on social media has backfired, the regime's authoritarian ruling gave it the edge in swiftly mobilizing nationwide resources to suppress outbreaks in Wuhan and implementing strict and invasive quarantine and lockdown policies throughout the country. Furthermore, against the context of a global decline of democracy in governmental efforts to control the virus (Thomson & Ip, 2020), the pandemic furnishes the authoritarian regime an opportunity to showcase its ability to maneuver the public health crisis and maintain social stability, saving the fall-off in police legitimacy and resisting the international condemnation of the governmental cover-up during the onset of the pandemic.

China's governmental control of COVID-19 relies heavily on a maximum surveillance society where advanced technologies of big data, cloud computing, facial recognition, biometrics, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality are widely used for surveillance in the name of national security. The Chinese police occupy an essential role in establishing a surveillance state through a complex web of public security organizations, comprising the regular police, the auxiliary police, the People's Armed Police, urban management personnel, and neighborhood resident committees. Equipped with extensive surveillance capability, the Chinese police could quickly take up the COVID-19 regulatory enforcement responsibilities by carrying out or assisting in

regulating mandatory masks, stay-at-home orders, in-home quarantines, attendant lockdowns, contact tracing, and health assessments. The high policing nature embedded in China's public security apparatus prepares itself well to enforce public health rules and regulations amid the pandemic at the costs of fundamental human rights and civil liberties (United Nations, 2020).

In addition to their heavy reliance on advanced surveillance technologies, the Chinese police are empowered with an awesome tool to achieve their law enforcement and order maintenance roles. Under the *Public Security Administration Punishment Law*, Chinese police officers have the administrative power to sanction minor public order violations for up to 15 days in police detention, monetary fines, or a combination of both without any judicial approval. As a result, the police deal with millions of public security offenses annually without going through the judicial process. Chinese officers thus can deliver "swift justice" to violators of COVID-19 policies in the same way that they used to handle minor offenses.

Studies stated that the Chinese police had experienced an increase in COVID-related crime, such as producing and selling fake medical devices, price gauging, and online and telephone fraud (Jiang & Xie, 2020). The official news agency, Xinhua, reported that the police had disposed of 22,000 pandemic-related criminal cases and detained 4,260 suspects by late February 2020 (Xinhua News, February 26, 2020). In the large city of Tianjin, the police reported that, by the mid-February of 2020, they had processed 20 pandemic-related criminal cases involving 34 individuals and 95 public security cases detaining 57 individuals (China Central Televison, 2020), suggesting that most of the violations were dealt with by the police following the *Public Security Administration Punishment Law.* From the virus outbreak to February 2022, China's prosecutors approved the arrest of 9,377 individuals for 7,047 pandemic-related crimes (NetEase, 2022). The pandemic has stirred more criminal justice interventions into criminal violations and minor public offenses.

Very few studies have empirically assessed Chinese policing during the pandemic. One recent study showed that Chinese police officers suffered increased stress levels during the pandemic's peak months, and such elevated stress was attributed to changes in workloads and fear of being infected by the disease (Wu et al., 2021). A second study found that traffic, disputes, and crime calls for police service reduced, but domestic violence and public security calls increased during the lockdown in a county-level city in Hubei province (Dai et al., 2021). A third study found that older, better educated, and married police officers in a city in Anhui province were at greater risk of anxiety during the pandemic (Yuan et al., 2020).

Factors Related to Police Enforcement of Rule Violations

This study focuses on three groups of variables related to officers' willingness to enforce or not enforce regulatory rules associated with COVID-19. The first group represents organizational support perceived by police officers. Organizational support reflects the extent to which an organization recognizes its members' contributions and cares about their well-being and safety (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The policing literature has shown that organizational support, particularly in the forms of fair and just supervisory treatment, is instrumental in promoting officer job satisfaction, reducing job turnover, enhancing commitment to and compliance with rules and policies, and lowering the effects of high-profile negative events on officers (e.g., Bradford et al., 2014; Nix & Wolfe, 2016; Sun et al., 2018; Tankebe, 2010).

Police departments have made necessary adjustments to protect the safety and wellbeing of frontline officers who face a high risk of exposure to the virus because policing involves frequent interactions with the public. In responding to the spreading of the coronavirus, many agencies implemented sweeping guidelines, requiring, for example, officers to reduce traffic stops and limit arrests to serious and violent offenses (Lum et al., 2020; Mohler et al., 2020). In addition, some departments offered formal training or guidance on maintaining social distance (Lum et al., 2020). Other organizational adjustments include modifying work schedules for specialized units, updating the department using video messages, and suspending or altering roll calls (Police Executive Research Forum, 2020). Another way to show organizational support is providing officers with personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, masks, shields, and goggles, important and beneficial to mitigate the risks of the virus (Simpson & Sandrin, 2022). We hypothesize that officers who perceive organizational changes as effective in minimizing their risks of exposure to the virus are more likely to feel obligated to reach department objectives, such as enforcing COVID-related rules and regulations.

The second group of predictors signals officers' behavioral and psychological adjustments to the pandemic. The outbreaks of the virus and the adoption of countermeasures have yielded a significant source of stress for police officers. Frontline officers must enforce pandemic rules and laws amid concerns about their health. Police officers may also experience personal stressors, worrying about the safety of their family members (Frenkel et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021). Heightened stress and emotional exhaustion could affect officers' willingness and ability to adequately fulfill regular and COVID-related enforcement expectations. We also hypothesize that officers who opted to maintain normalcy during the pandemic could be more willing to follow the department's policy to enforce rule violations.

Citizen compliance is essential for police effectiveness and may affect the way police respond to violations of the COVID-19 laws and regulations. Policing literature has long shown that citizens' respectful attitudes and cooperative behaviors during police encounters have a significant influence on officers' behaviors and decision-making (Reisig et al., 2004). In the context of the pandemic, a recent study found that not all Australians complied fully with the lockdown restrictions, and that compliance decreased slightly over time (Murphy et al., 2020). Perhaps, as the pandemic draws out, citizens may experience more fatigue from isolation and become more dissatisfied with perceived unnecessary or ineffective restrictions on their liberties, consequently increasing non-compliance (Grace, 2020). Although there is no research assessing Chinese levels of willingness to obey the police, laws, or regulations during the pandemic, an empirical study during the pre-COVID-19 time does show that most Chinese citizens surveyed felt obligated to obey the law irrespective of their personal feelings (Jiang et al., 2011). Such high levels of voluntary compliance could hold during the pandemic, but it is reasonable to speculate that increased levels of citizen compliance will reduce police use of more aggressive measures to enforce COVID-19 rules and regulations.

This Current Study

This study represents a first attempt to assess police officers' intentions to enforce the pandemic-related rule violations using different interventions. It extends the literature on COVID-19 policing by assessing factors related to Chinese police officers' willingness to engage in various enforcement actions against rule violators. We specifically analyze how organizational support, behavioral and psychological states, and perceptions of public compliance could be linked to officers' preferred interventions, including doing nothing, rendering advisement/verbal warning, issuing tickets/fines, or detaining/ making arrests. This study expands our understanding of police officers' intentions and considerations to intervene in COVID-19 rule and regulation violations. A study on Chinese police officers' willingness to enforce rule violations can also generate useful information on policing pandemics in an authoritarian country where police are given great sanction power against minor offenses. Based on relevant literature, we delineated the following hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis* 1: Officers who perceive stronger organizational support are less likely not to do anything (H1a) and more likely to intervene (H1b) when encountering rule breakers.

Hypothesis 2: Officers who made better behavioral and psychological adjustments (e.g., willing to sacrifice life normalcy, understand realistically that COVID is worse than flu, and stay low stress and emotional exhaustion) are less inclined to do nothing (H2a) and more inclined to act against rule violators (H2b).

Hypothesis 3: Officers who perceive stronger public support are less likely to not act (H3a). Officers who perceive stronger public support are also more likely to take less punitive actions (e.g., advice/warning) than more punitive interventions (e.g., ticket and detention) against people who violated rules and regulations (H3b).

Methodology

Research Project and Site

Data used in this study came from a large international research project, "*Police Organizational Changes during the Global COVID-19 Pandemic*." This project was launched by a team of U.S.- and U.K.-based researchers in the fall of 2020. Scholars in more than a dozen countries participate in this ongoing study, aiming to understand the nature and extent of changes in police work in response to the pandemic and the potential consequences of such changes. The project team developed an English survey instrument with roughly 110 items, which was approved by the principal investigator's institutional review board. A team of Chinese scholars is responsible for carrying out the project in China. A team member translated the original English survey into simplified Chinese, and it was then translated back into English by a second researcher and compared to the original English survey to ensure translation quality. The Chinese survey was pre-tested on a small group of Chinese officers, and minor revisions to the wording were made based on their feedback.

The research site is a large West China city, which has more than 30 administrative districts. With a force of roughly 45,000 officers, the police department provides law enforcement, order maintenance, and service functions to city residents. The agency operates more than 10 training bases throughout the city, offering various short-term training sessions to serving police officers. The city government activated its highest level of emergency response on January 24, 2020, after the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan. During the peak weeks in February 2020, the city recorded, on average, 500 to 600 confirmed COVID-19 cases. All police officers were ordered to report to duty, and vacations and holidays were suspended. The police forces intensified their patrol and crime prevention activities and were deployed to

hospitals, public transportation hubs, and places with high population density and mobility. Police officers worked closely with public health agencies and neighborhood resident committees to strictly enforce counter-epidemic measures.

Data Collection and Sample

Data collection was completed during 10 days in late January and early February of 2021 when police officers attended a half-day training course in one of the training bases. This district training base was selected as it is one of the most populated areas in the city impacted by the pandemic. Officers were informed about the opportunity of participating in a research project at the beginning of their training course. After finishing their training, paper surveys were distributed to officers who expressed willingness to partake in the project. Before handing out the surveys, researchers reiterated the project's purpose to officers and emphasized that their participation is voluntary and anonymous. It took participating officers approximately 15 min to finish the survey. Roughly 700 officers attended the training course, and 656 expressed their willingness to participate and received the survey. Among them, 600 returned the surveys, resulting in a response rate of 91.5%. This high response rate is in line with the percentages reported in recent studies on Chinese police officers using similar data collection methods (Wu et al., 2021). As shown in Table 1, most respondents were male (85%) and worked at field stations (82%), which are the lowest organizational units established at the neighborhood level throughout the country. The average length of their police experience was 13 years. Most of the sample officers lived in urban neighborhoods.

Measurement

Four dependent variables representing different enforcement actions (or inaction) were constructed based on four items where the respondents were asked: "In instances in which you encountered violations of the COVID-19 laws and regulations in your community, how often have you done the following": (1) done nothing; (2) issued advice or warning; (3) issued a ticket or fine; and (4) arrest. Response categories include never (=1), rarely (=2), sometimes (=3), often (=4), and always (=5). A preliminary analysis indicated that the variable "done nothing" is highly rightly skewed, making ordinal logistic regression less appropriate due to the violation of the parallel line assumption for ordinal logistic regression. The variable thus was recorded into a dummy variable with one (1) representing that the respondents "sometimes," "often," or

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for All Variables in Regression Analysis ($n = 600$).

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α
Dependent variables					
Done nothing	0.13	0.34	0.00	1.00	—
Advise or warning	3.57	0.98	1.00	5.00	—
Ticket or fine	1.77	0.88	1.00	5.00	—
Detention or arrest	1.74	0.88	1.00	5.00	—
Independent variables					
Organizational support					
Supervisory instructions and training	2.45	0.94	1.00	4.00	—
Equipped with personal protective equipment	3.32	1.05	1.00	5.00	—
Minimize COVID risk to officers	3.41	0.94	1.00	5.00	—
Behavioral and psychological conditions					
Maintain normalcy	7.58	3.16	3.00	15.00	.91
Believe COVID no worse than flu	2.62	1.22	1.00	5.00	—
Stress	15.59	2.92	4.00	20.00	.85
Emotional exhaustion	3.45	0.99	1.00	5.00	—
Public compliance					
Respect and confidence in police	7.19	1.65	2.00	10.00	.82
Compliance with COVID regulations	3.86	0.69	2.00	5.00	—
Control variables					
Male	0.85	0.36	0.00	1.00	—
Year of police experience	13.12	8.03	1.00	42.00	—
Supervisor	0.14	0.35	0.00	1.00	—
Field station	0.86	0.38	0.00	1.00	—

Note. SD = standard deviation; Min = minimum; Max = maximum; α = Cronbach's alpha.

"always" do nothing when encountering COVID violations, and zero (0) representing that the respondents "never" do nothing (i.e., they mostly did something). Binary logistic regression was estimated for the "done nothing" model. Ordinal logical regression was performed for the rest of the variables, "advice or warning," "ticket or fine," and "arrest," as they passed the test of parallel lines for ordinal regression analysis.

The independent variables are classified into three groups, organizational support, behavioral and psychological conditions, and public compliance. Organizational support includes three single-item variables: supervisory instructions and training, personal protective equipment, and agency effectiveness in reducing COVID risk for officers, signaling officers' perceptions of departments' efforts to help them fight against the pandemic. The respondents were asked for the variable supervisory instructions and training: "Have

you received any COVID-19 training?" (1=No, I did not receive any instructions/training from my supervisors, 2=Yes, I have received instructions on COVID-19 from my supervisor/administration; 3=Yes, I have participated in the official training on COVID-19; 4=Yes, I have received instructions and participated in the official training). Thus, a higher value suggests that officers perceived that they were more systematically instructed and trained for handling the pandemic. Officers were also asked: "Police officers in my organization have been well equipped with personal protective equipment during the peak month of the pandemic" (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree), and "How effective do you think the organizational changes made in minimizing the risk of police officers to COVID-19 have been" (1=not at all effective; 5=extremely effective).

Four officer variables were measured to signal officers' behavioral and psychological adjustments when dealing with COVID-19. The variable "retain normalcy" was an additive scale derived from three questions, asking the respondents whether they continued to engage in the following activities during the peak month of the pandemic: (1) I socialized with friends or relatives with whom I did not live; (2) I went out for a walk, run, or cycle, or otherwise spent more than a few minutes somewhere to relax; and (3) I traveled for leisure (i.e., drove somewhere to exercise). This variable signals officers' willingness to maintain normalcy, including behavior that violate COVID-19 regulations. Response categories range from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agreed (=5). The scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .91, suggesting strong internal consistency. A second officer variable reflects whether officers agree that "The coronavirus (COVID-19) is no worse than the flu" (1=strongly disagree; 4=strongly agree). The third and fourth officer variables represent officers' psychological states during the pandemic. The variable "stress" is an additive scale of four items, inquiring the respondents "Compared to about a year ago, please think about how you have felt during the peak month of the pandemic in your jurisdiction": (1) I am concern for my personal health and wellbeing; (2) I am concerned for the health and wellbeing of my loved ones; (3) I feel stressed; and (4) I feel anxious (1=much less than before; 5=much more than before). The scale has a high Cronbach's alpha of .85. "Emotional exhaustion" was constructed based on a single question: "I feel emotionally drained from my work" (1=much less than before; 5=much more than before).

Two variables indicate officers' perceived public compliance during the pandemic. "Public respect and confidence" are the sum of two items where the respondents were asked during the peak month of the pandemic whether "public respect for the police" and "public confidence in the police" have become much worse (coded as 1) or much better (coded as 5).

Table 2. Percentage Distributions of Police Actions against Rule Violators.

Response categories	In instances in which you encountered violations of the COVID-19 laws and regulations in your community, how often have you done the following:			
	Done nothing	Advise/ warning	Ticket/fine	Detention/ arrest
Never (1)	66.8%	4.8%	49.0%	51.8%
Rarely (2)	20.2	7.5	29.2	26.2
Sometimes (3)	11.2	27.3	18.5	19.2
Often (4)	1.7	46.7	2.8	2.3
Always (5)	0.2	13.7	0.5	0.5
Mean (*SD*)	1.48 (0.77)	3.57 (0.98)	1.77 (0.88)	1.74 (0.88)

"Public compliance with COVID-19 regulations" came from a sole item: "Most people in the community that I serve adhere to the local rules and laws that were put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic" (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Control variables include officers' gender, year of police experience, supervisor status, and work unit. Officer gender, supervisor status, and work unit were coded as dummy variables, with one representing male, supervisor, and working in a field station. Officers' length of police experience was measured in years. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for all variables used in the data analysis.

Results

Percentage Distributions

Table 2 shows the percentage distributions for police actions against rule violations across five frequency levels, ranging from never to always. In the first category of "done nothing," most respondents (87%) reported that they "never" or "rarely" did nothing to those who violated COVID-19 regulations. Roughly 13% of the respondents said that they "sometimes," "often," or "always" did nothing when they encountered people who violated COVID-related regulations. Beyond "done nothing," police officers were more likely to apply less punitive intervention (i.e., advice and warning) when encountering rule violators than more punitive interventions (e.g., fine and detention). More than 60% of the respondents stated that they "often" or "always" advised or warned people violating the COVID-19 regulations. The

percentage drops sharply for the two other actions, with fewer than 4% of the respondents "often" or "always" using ticket/fine and detention to handle people who broke the regulations. About half of the respondents stated that they would "never" issue a ticket/fine to or detain rule violators.

Multivariate Regression

Table 3 demonstrates the regression results for four models of violation enforcement. Starting with the inaction (done nothing) model, four variables achieve statistical significance. Consistent with our hypothesis (H1a), officers who more positively rated the agency's effort to minimize COVID-19 risk to officers are less likely to do nothing when encountering violations of COVID-19 laws or regulations. Consistent with our expectation (H2a), officers who prefer to maintain life normalcy are more inclined not to act against rule violators, but those who believe that coronavirus is no worse than the flu are also more likely not to act, which is consistent with our hypothesis. Finally, officers who perceive residents as compliant with COVID-19 regulations are less likely to take the course of doing nothing when they witness regulatory violations, which is consistent with the hypothesis (H3a).

Switching to the "advice or warning" model, four variables are predictive of officers' decisions to issue advice or warning to rule violators. In line with our expectation (H2b), officers who viewed COVID-19 as no worse than the flu are less likely to advise or warn people who violated the pandemic regulations. Contradictory to our hypothesis (H2b), officers who suffered emotional exhaustion are more inclined to give advice or warning to rule violators. Officers who believe that most people comply with the COVID-19 rules are more likely to render advice or warning to rule violators, which is consistent with our hypothesis (H3b). The control variable of the work unit also matters. Officers who work out of a field station are more likely to advise or warn people who violate the rules or regulations.

Five variables significantly predict officers' tendency to issue a ticket or fine. Consistent with our hypothesis (H1b), officers who perceived to receive both supervisory instructions and training on the pandemic and reported having personal protective equipment are more inclined to issue a ticket or fine to people who violated the COVID-19 regulations. Our second hypothesis (H2b) is partially supported as officers who could keep a normal lifestyle are more likely to ticket or fine those who broke the pandemic rules, but officers who felt emotionally drained were also more likely to engage in ticketing or fining rule violators.

Finally, the "detention/arrest" model is less successful, with only one variable predictive of officers' propensities of making an arrest. Consistent with

Table 3. Summary of Regression Results of Violation Enforcement.

Variables	Done nothing			Advice/warning		Ticket/fine		Detention/arrest	
	β	SE	OR	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Independent variables									
Organizational support									
Supervisory instructions and training	.24	0.14	1.28	0.03	0.08	0.17*	0.09	0.09	0.00
Personal protective equipment	.18	0.17	1.19	0.02	0.09	0.21*	0.09	0.08	0.09
Minimize COVID risk to officers	−.31*	0.16	0.73	0.08	0.09	0.06	0.10	0.16	0.10
Behavioral and psychological conditions									
Maintain normalcy	.11*	0.05	1.12	−0.02	0.03	0.08*	0.03	0.04	0.03
COVID no worse than flu	.36**	0.14	1.44	−0.19*	0.08	−0.08	0.08	−0.01	0.08
Stress	−.03	0.05	0.97	0.03	0.03	−0.05	0.03	−0.03	0.03
Emotional exhaustion	.01	0.14	1.01	0.16*	0.08	−0.18*	0.08	−0.12	0.08
Public compliance									
Respect and confidence in police	.08	0.08	1.08	0.01	0.05	0.07	0.05	0.05	0.05
Compliance with COVID regulations	−1.31***	0.24	0.27	0.48***	0.13	−0.39**	0.14	−0.26*	0.14
Control variables									
Male	.44	0.35	0.64	−0.11	0.22	0.20	0.23	0.30	0.23
Year of police experience	.02	0.02	1.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Supervisor	−.73	0.47	0.48	0.34	0.23	0.02	0.23	0.11	0.23
Field station	.78	0.44	2.19	0.49*	0.20	0.05	0.22	0.13	0.21

$*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$ $***p < .001.$

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our hypothesis (H3b), officers who perceive most local people as compliant with the COVID-19 regulations are less likely to make arrests of rule violators.

Discussion

This study investigates Chinese police officers' intentions to intervene (or not) when they encounter people who violate COVID-19 laws and regulations. The policing literature has long documented an array of tactic options utilized by patrol officers to handle problematic situations (Bayley, 1986). Our study further revealed the Chinese police's willingness to employ enforcement actions to process violators of COVIID rules and regulations. Among the intervention options available to police officers, verbal advisement and warning remain the preferred approach for Chinese officers to handle rule and law violations. This tendency, albeit not limited to China but typical of other countries with Confucians' worldview, reflects the social and penal values of maintaining harmonious social relationships and addressing wrongdoing through education and rehabilitation deeply embedded in contemporary China (Bakken, 2007). Compared to advising or warning the violators, a much smaller portion of Chinese officers endorsed the more punitive interventions of tickets/fines and detention. An even smaller percentage of respondents chose the "doing nothing" option however, suggesting that staying hands-off is not a preferred counter-virus response by the agency and government. A recent study on the Chinese police's response to domestic violence found that more than a quarter of the respondents agreed with the "no action" option in resolving conflicts (Sun et al., 2022). It seems that Chinese police officers are more willing to act against COVID violators than domestic violence offenders, signaling the greater difficulties of policing domestic violence than other offenses in China and the U.S. (Sherman, 2018; Sun et al., 2022). Future studies can garner more information, maybe through in-depth interviews with frontline officers, to gauge their considerations when deciding what actions to take during encounters with rule and law violators.

The multivariate regression analysis demonstrated that several predictors in all three categories of predictors predict officers' violation enforcement. Our findings reveal that organizational support in the forms of providing supervisory instructions, training, and PPE increased the likelihood of officers issuing tickets and fines, whereas minimizing COVID-19 risks to officers reduced the probability of officers not taking any actions against rule or law violations. These findings echo the results from recent studies, showing that organizational justice can generate beneficial outcomes for police

agencies (e.g., Bradford et al., 2014; Nix & Wolfe, 2016; Sun et al., 2018; Tankebe, 2010). Unlike organizational support, the relationships between officers' behavioral and psychological characteristics and their preferences for rule violation enforcement are inconsistent. Some connections support the hypotheses, whereas others contradict the expectations. For instance, as expected, retaining normalcy in daily activities is associated with a higher tendency to do nothing for violations. However, we also found that such normalcy promoted officers' willingness to issue tickets and fines. As we also speculated, officers who maintain normal life do not mind that many people are not following certain measures, such as stay-at-home orders and keeping social distance. Officers' perceptions of the seriousness of the virus also matter, with those who view COVID as no worse than flu more likely not to act against violators and less likely to deliver verbal advisement and warning. Finally, officers with greater emotional exhaustion are more inclined to give verbal advisement and warning but less likely to hand out tickets and fines, possibly because the latter intervention requires greater effort and time.

The only variable that is a significant predictor of all four types of officer interventions is officers' views of the public adherence to local COVID rules and laws. As speculated, officers who perceive community residents as compliant with pandemic regulations are less likely to take no action or use more punitive sanctions of ticket/fine and detention/arrest. In addition, perceived public compliance is associated with greater preferences for verbal advisement and warning. It seems that Chinese officers distinguish less punitive intervention of verbal advisement and warning from more punitive sanctions of tickets and detention by actively engaging in the former even though public compliance is high, whereas avoiding using the latter when public compliance is received. Our findings point to the need to further consider underlying rationales when assessing the *no action* versus *action* and the *less punitive* versus *more punitive* divisions in officers' preferred responses to rule violations.

A few limitations associated with the study should be discussed. First, we draw information from a convenience sample of police officers from a single Chinese city. The generalizability of our findings thus is limited. Future studies should consider utilizing more representative samples from multiple jurisdictions to assess factors related to officers' intervention preferences. Second, our dependent variables measure officers' self-reported intentions to handle rule breakers. It is unknown whether they would respond to rule violations with the same tendency as they answered. Although U.S. scholars have employed systematic social observation to document officers' field practices and interactions with citizens, such an approach is not viable in China. Other than officer surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups could be useful methods to study officers' preferences for dealing with rule violations.

Policy Implications

Our findings yield implications for policymakers and police administrators. Firstline officers must understand the department's expectations and priorities of violation enforcement. Therefore, the fundamental issue for topic management is implementing clear policies and instructions on violation enforcement and communicating them regularly to rank and file. Our findings suggest that organizational support could be instrumental in promoting officers' engagement in conducting sanctions. For example, if the police department wants to curb certain violations (e.g., not wearing a facial mask) by using citations and fines, providing supervisory instructions, proper training, and personal protective equipment could enhance officers' willingness to take the intervention. Reducing their emotional exhaustion is a second area that can potentially stir officers' ticketing behavior. Police managers should show their care and support to frontline officers, encouraging them to vent about work, create healthy life routines, take time off work, seek professional consultation, and establish a good work-family balance. Finally, given the heavy inclination toward verbally advising and warning rule violators, in-service training sessions geared toward department COVID-19 regulations and effective intervention skills should be provided to frontline officers to equip them with up-to-date knowledge and capabilities for dissolving rule violations.

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