

Original

## Insecure attachment style and child maltreatment: relations to aggression in men convicted of intimate partner violence

Iria de la Osa Subtil<sup>a,b,c</sup>, Pedro Vicente Mateo Fernández<sup>c</sup>, Andrés Arias Astray<sup>a\*</sup><sup>a</sup>GrupoLab. Grupo de Investigación Factores Psicosociales e Intervención Social. Instituto de Tecnología del Conocimiento. Universidad Complutense de Madrid.<sup>b</sup>ContrlAltSup. Tecnología y Servicios. S.L.<sup>c</sup>Programa de doctorado en Psicología. Facultad de Psicología. Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 30 September 2022

Accepted 5 December 2022

Available online 23 December 2022

## Keywords:

Attachment

Intergenerational transmission of violence

Male batterers

Intimate partner violence

Aggression

## A B S T R A C T

Child abuse is not only a serious violation of children's rights and well-being, but also the worst example of how to relate and bond with others. Violence against an intimate partner during adulthood may have as background the emotional experiences and early learning associated with parents as the most significant developmental figures. The study of men who have been convicted of crimes of domestic violence against women may shed light on how childhood experiences impact aggressive adult behavior. Accordingly, this research explores the relationships between attachment style, childhood parental abuse experiences and aggression in adult life in a sample of men convicted of intimate partner violence (N=265). This was carried out using the Spanish version of the Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire and the Melero and Cantero Adult Attachment Questionnaire. After the cleaning and analysis of the data by means of k-means cluster analysis, ANOVA and multiple hierarchical linear regression, it becomes clear that the fact of having been a victim of childhood abuse among this type of men, although it constitutes a risk factor for violent behavior in adult life, does not determine it. Something similar could be said about the different attachment styles, with secure types functioning as a protective factor and insecure types being associated to a greater extent and with different forms of violence.

### Estilo de apego inseguro y maltrato infantil: su relación con la agresión en hombres condenados por violencia contra sus parejas

## R E S U M E N

El maltrato infantil no es sólo una grave violación de los derechos y el bienestar de niños y niñas, sino también el peor ejemplo de cómo relacionarse y establecer vínculos con los demás. La violencia contra pareja durante la edad adulta puede tener como trasfondo experiencias emocionales y aprendizajes tempranos asociados con los padres como figuras más significativas del desarrollo. El estudio de los hombres que han sido condenados por delitos de violencia contra las mujeres puede arrojar luz sobre cómo las experiencias de la infancia influyen en el comportamiento agresivo de los adultos. En consecuencia, esta investigación explora las relaciones entre el estilo de apego, las experiencias de maltrato en la infancia por parte de las y los progenitores y la agresividad en la vida adulta en una muestra de hombres condenados por violencia contra su pareja (N=265). Tras la depuración y análisis de los datos mediante análisis de conglomerados, ANOVA y regresión jerárquica lineal múltiple, se pone de manifiesto que el hecho de haber sido víctima de maltrato en la infancia entre este tipo de hombres, aunque constituye un factor de riesgo para la conducta violenta en la vida adulta, no la determina. Algo similar podría decirse de los diferentes estilos de apego, funcionando los seguros como factor protector y los inseguros en mayor medida y con diferentes formas de violencia.

## Palabras clave:

Apego

Transmisión intergeneracional de la violencia

Hombres maltratadores

Violencia de pareja

Agresión

\* Corresponding author

E-mail address: [astray@ucm.es](mailto:astray@ucm.es) (A. Arias Astray).

The phenomenon of intimate partner violence (IPV) is highly complex. From an ecological perspective which integrates individual, relational, community and structural variables (Heise, 1998), the study of batterers is key to its understanding. Male batterers are not a homogeneous group (Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994), so different typologies have been proposed. These have considered, among others, individual variables of the affective domain (Dutton, 2006, 2007; Holtzworth-Munroe & Meehan, 2004; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2000).

Attachment theory (Bowlby 1973, 1986) maintains, on the one hand, that humans are biologically prepared to approach others in search of protection and security. On the other hand, it defines the attachment system as an organized set of relatively stable behaviors whose function is to maintain proximity to the caregiver. It is a system that maintains a balance between proximity and exploratory behaviors, depending on the existing dangers in the environment and the ease of access to the attachment figure.

In adulthood, depending on early bonding experiences and throughout the life cycle, a series of cognitive-emotional schemas about oneself and others operate. These schemas function as internal operating models, interfere in the perception of social interactions and, therefore, in relationships with others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bretherton, 1985; Feeney & Noller, 1996; Melero & Cantero, 2008).

Operational models correspond to behavioral patterns that combine anxiety and avoidance dimensions. These, in turn, can show positive and negative polarity. Thus, four categories of attachment are established: secure, preoccupied, dismissing and fearful (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). People with a secure attachment have a positive model of themselves and others (low anxiety and low avoidance) and are comfortable both in solitude and in establishing intimate relationships. Those who develop a preoccupied attachment style (high anxiety and low avoidance) maintain a negative self-image and a positive image of others, with great concern for their relationships and a constant need for approval and a fear of abandonment. They depend on others to maintain a positive self-concept and try to achieve it through control. The dismissing style (high avoidance and low anxiety) characterizes those people who have a positive self-image and a negative image of others. They tend to avoid and deny the need for intimacy and to take their self-sufficiency to an extreme. Finally, people with fearful attachment (high anxiety and avoidance) maintain a negative model of both themselves and others, on whom they are highly dependent. At the same time, they are reserved about intimacy for fear of rejection.

There appears to be a relationship between insecure attachment and the use of general violence, while secure attachment is related to a decrease in violence (Ogilvie et al. 2014), as well as to the use of prosocial behavior (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). In addition, insecure attachment has been linked to increased likelihood of intimate partner aggression (Oka et al., 2014).

Lawson and Brossart (2009) found that anxious attachment styles (which would include preoccupied and fearful) are good predictors of psychological and mild physical aggression. Meanwhile, avoidant styles (dismissing and fearful) are good predictors of violence, both mild and severe, as well as sexual coercion (Babcock et al., 2000; Barbaro & Shackelford, 2019; Péloquin et al., 2011).

Among people with high attachment anxiety, fearful attachment aggressors would be those who have received more abuse and rejection in past attachments and would show a greater propensity to respond by assaulting their partner when experiencing abandonment when they are not available (Dutton, 1995; Dutton et al., 1994). Fearful attachment has also been related to Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart's (1994) borderline typology.

At present, the scientific literature offers inconsistent results on the relationship between avoidant attachment style and aggression. Following the classification of batterers by Waltz et al. (2000), the types generally considered violent were characterized by showing avoidant attachment, antisocial and narcissistic traits, and instrumental use of violence. Genest and Mathieu (2014), in a study with intimate partner aggressors, found that avoidant styles are the ones that contribute most to the manifestation of anger. For their part, Mauricio and López (2009) found that avoidant individuals were those who best fit the typology of severe violence. However, other studies have not found significant associations between an avoidant style and aggression (Barbaro et al., 2019; Péloquin et al., 2011; Velotti et al., 2020).

It would seem that batterers with avoidant traits do not need to control their partners (Sonkin et al. 2019). This would be consistent with the so-called demand-withdrawn phenomenon (Christensen & Heavey 1990; Dumas et al., 2008). This refers to the pairing between a man with avoidant attachment and a woman with anxious attachment (Bond & Bond, 2004). The person with anxious attachment is more committed to the relationship and hyperactivates the attachment system to avoid abandonment. On the other hand, the person with avoidant attachment disengages in order to maintain distance when perceiving that their partner is not available. Thus, avoidant persons, due to their need for distance, may feel pressured by their partner when they are asked to remain committed to the relationship.

Despite its relative stability, attachment style is amenable to be modified. A change in attachment style could improve interactions in intimate relationships (Lawson et al., 2006; Olufowote et al., 2020). Regarding the second issue that concerns us, linked to the intergenerational transmission of violence, it is evident that relationships with significant figures in childhood have a significant impact throughout the life cycle (Thornberry et al., 2003). Thus, it is argued that children who have grown up in violent homes are more likely to develop an aggressive interpersonal style in their adult relationships (Franklin & Kercher, 2012).

These assumptions can be based on social learning theories, understanding that children learn by modeling from their parents (Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981). It is also possible to sustain these ideas by appealing to attachment theory, understanding that an insecure relationship of minors with their parents puts them at risk of developing anxious, fearful or avoidant bonds in their romantic relationships in the future, which would be at the heart of their violent relationship patterns (Egeland et al., 1988; González-Méndez et al., 2017). At this point, it is worth alluding to the evolutionary-contextual model of Capaldi and Gorman-Smith (2003), since, in addition to integrating individual variables (development, temperament, learning history, etc.) with others of an environmental nature, it stresses the importance of parental behavior (coercive parenting or lack of supervision) in relation to future behavior. Individual idiosyncrasies in interaction with other contextual experiences could favor or inhibit the intergenerational transmission of the use of intimate partner violence in adulthood (Tea et al., 2021).

The complexity of the interplay between environmental, relational and individual risk and protective factors may account for the inconsistencies observed in the current literature on the relationship between attachment type and violence in adult intimate partner relationships and on the intergenerational transmission of violence. While some papers find that suffering or witnessing abuse in childhood has a slight relationship with perpetration of violence in adulthood when it comes to men (Hughes & Cossar, 2016; Smith et al., 2015; Tea et al., 2021), others only find this relationship exists for women (Knight et al., 2016; Shakoob et al., 2020), or a stronger relationship in women than in men (Cui et al., 2010; Toplul-Dermatas

& Hatipoğlu-Sümer, 2021). Neepl et al. (2019) indicate that the transmission of violence may not only contribute to perpetuating coercive parenting but remains over time, causing aggression also in the partner both in late adolescence and adulthood.

Considering the above, this paper studies a group of men who have been convicted of a gender violence offense with the aim of finding out whether different attachment styles (secure and insecure - preoccupied, rejecting and fearful) and having been abused by the father and/or mother are adequate predictors of aggression in adult life.

Insecure attachment styles and parental abuse are expected to be significant predictors of aggression. In particular, high anxiety attachment styles (fearful and preoccupied).

## Method

### Participants and procedure

This study involved 265 men who were in the first session of an intervention program for men convicted of gender-based violence in the Region of Madrid, Spain. They were in a situation of probation or an alternative measure to prison. From the initial total number of cases, those who did not respond adequately to the psychometric tests were excluded. Thus, the final valid number of participants totaled 176. Their ages ranged from 20 to 80 years ( $M=39.34$ ,  $SD=10.88$ ). 69.4% were Spanish and the remaining 30.6% were foreigners (8% Europeans, 1.3% Asians, 5.9% Africans and 13.9% Latin Americans). The project obtained a favorable report from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology of the Complutense University of Madrid and authorization from the General Secretariat of Penitentiary Institutions. The sampling was by convenience. It was the psychologists and those responsible for the Social Insertion Centers who allowed access to survey the participants in their first session of the programs. The participants were verbally informed of the characteristics of the research and were also provided with an information sheet and an informed consent form to sign regarding their participation. They then answered the questionnaires individually. The participants did not receive any compensation for participating in the study.

### Instruments

The information was collected through a questionnaire that included a section on sociodemographic data created for this purpose, a series of questions on whether the participant had suffered physical and psychological abuse by his father and/or mother, and the psychometric tests mentioned below:

From the sum of the dichotomous items ("Yes/No") measuring child maltreatment two variables were created indicating whether respondents had been victims of physical or psychological violence by the father or mother.

*Aggression Questionnaire* (AQ, Buss & Perry, 1992, Spanish version by Andreu et al., 2002)

This is composed of 29 items related to aggressive behavior and feelings. They are answered on a Likert-type scale with five response options, ranging from completely false for me to completely true for me). For this study, it presents good overall reliability measured by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ( $\alpha=0.88$ ), as well as good or sufficient reliability for each of the four subscales of which it consists of: physical aggressiveness ( $\alpha=0.86$ ); verbal aggressiveness ( $\alpha=0.68$ ), anger ( $\alpha=0.77$ ) and hostility ( $\alpha=0.72$ ).

Internal consistency indices for this sample were  $\omega=0.852$  for physical aggressiveness,  $\omega=0.736$  for verbal aggressiveness,  $\omega=0.814$  for irascibility and  $\omega=0.765$  for hostility.

*Adult Attachment Questionnaire* (CAA, Melero & Cantero, 2008)

This instrument consists of 40 items integrated in four scales: Scale 1: low self-esteem, need for approval and fear of rejection; Scale 2: hostile conflict resolution, resentment and possessiveness; Scale 3: expression of feelings and comfort with relationships; Scale 4: emotional self-sufficiency and discomfort with intimacy. The instrument uses a 6-point Likert scale, with 1 being completely agree and 6 being completely disagree. Depending on how these scales are combined, subjects can be classified into two clusters (secure or insecure) or four clusters (worried, distant, fearful-hostile or secure). Its internal consistency ranges from 0.68 to 0.86. In the present sample, the consistency indices are  $\omega=0.843$  for Scale 1,  $\omega=0.843$  for Scale 2,  $\omega=0.778$  for Scale 3 and  $\omega=0.637$  for Scale 4.

### Design

The research design was cross-sectional since the variables of interest were only evaluated during the first treatment session.

### Data analysis

The Jamovi (2.0.0.0) and R (RStudio, 4.2.0) programs were used to perform the analyses. In order to facilitate their interpretation, the variable age was centered. The internal consistency indices of the scales used were obtained and some descriptive analyses were performed. To obtain the four attachment styles of the CAA questionnaire, the pre-screening sample ( $N=265$ ) was used and a k-means cluster analysis was performed with an initial value of four clusters, with scale standardization, MacQueen algorithm and 25 random initial values. In order to find out which group represented which affective style, an analysis of variance was performed to find out if there were differences between the groups and to determine the mean and standard deviation of each cluster with the four scales of the questionnaire. Descriptive analyses of the quantitative and categorical variables were then performed.

Next, with the sample already screened ( $N=176$ ), a hierarchical multiple linear regression was used to determine the influence of variables related to adult bonding, age and having suffered psychological and physical abuse by a parent on the use of aggression. The G\*Power program was used to determine the expected power and effect size with a total sample size and a confidence level of 0.95. First, taking into account the principle of parsimony, the variables were included step by step from the null model to the final model chosen, controlling for the age variable. Parameters were estimated and forecasts were obtained using the least squares method. Secondly, the quality of the models was assessed with the corrected coefficient of determination corresponding to each one, and finally, the assumptions of linearity, independence, normality, homoscedasticity and non-collinearity were checked.

### Results

The k-means cluster analysis divided the subjects ( $N=265$ ) into four groups based on their responses on the four subscales. The

**Table 1.**

Mean differences between the scales of the questionnaire and the four attachment styles according to the Melero and Cantero (2008) scale.

Scales	Attachment styles (N=265)								Significance
	Fearful		Worried		Dismissing		Secure		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Scale 1: Low self-esteem, need for approval and fear of rejection	45.5	8.69	17.7	3.78	33.2	7.52	22.6	6.53	F (156.6)***
Scale 2: Hostile conflict resolution, rancor and possessiveness	36.0	7.92	13.0	3.8	25.0	5.83	17.9	5.06	F (120)***
Scale 3: Expression of feelings and comfort with relationships	40.5	5.86	21.2	7.41	35.1	5.36	44.7	5.8	F (89)***
Scale 4: emotional self-sufficiency and discomfort with intimacy	21.1	5.39	10.6	2.86	19.0	4.04	11.9	3.41	F (95.8)***

Note. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

k-means was chosen because it is valid when  $n > 200$  and is used when the final groups are clear. In addition, it was the one used by Melero and Cantero in their validation. The ANOVAs performed (see Table 1) show that the four groups are different. The Welch statistic was used because it is the recommended statistic when homoscedasticity cannot be assumed (Vargha & Delaney, 1998). Combining the means of each group and the scales present in Melero and Cantero (2008), the affective styles corresponding to each of the clusters were obtained.

**Table 2.**

Descriptive data of the participants' variables

Variable	Participants (N=176)			
	%	M	SD	Range
Aggression		37.6	22.9	1-104
Age(N=172)		39.3	10.9	20-80
Fearful-hostile attachment	17.6%			
Preoccupied attachment	8%			
Dismissed attachment	36.9%			
Secure attachment	37.5%			
Father abuse	19.4%			
Mother abuse	9.6%			

After screening participants (N=176), four significantly different adult attachment styles were observed: fearful-hostile attachment (17.6%), preoccupied (8%), secure (37.5%) and distant (36.9%).

Table 2 presents the descriptive data of the sociodemographic variables, providing the sample size, mean and standard deviation for quantitative variables and the percentage in the case of categorical variables. The participants vary widely in age (M=39, Range=20-80). High variability was also observed in the responses in aggression (M=37.6, Range=1-104). Regarding attachment styles, secure and distant attachment styles predominate in the sample, with a low prevalence of preoccupied attachment. The results suggest that rather low percentages of the sample had suffered physical and

psychological abuse by the father (19.4%) and the mother (9.6%).

To perform the hierarchical linear regression, the least squares method was used and the goodness of fit was evaluated with the adjusted coefficient of determination (0.222). The resulting formula for the final model is as follows:

$$\text{Predictor (aggression)} = 28.523 - .454(\text{age}) + 20.435 (\text{attachment1-4}) + 1.150 (\text{attachment2-4}) + 7.687 (\text{attachment3-4}) + 10.121(\text{fatherabuse}) - 4.453(\text{motherabuse}) + \epsilon$$

Model 1 improved the fit with respect to the null model ( $\Delta R^2=0.119$ ). Only the age variable was included in this model in order to control for it (see Table 2 for the results of both models). The same was true for model 2 versus model 1 ( $\Delta R^2=0.07$ ). The adjusted coefficient of determination of model 2 indicates that the variables age, attachment style and father and mother abuse share 22.26% of the variance of the variable aggression exercised in the couple.

In the final model ( $\eta^2_p=0.250$ ), the variables age ( $\beta=-0.214$ ,  $p=0.001$ ,  $\eta^2_p=0.057$ ), physical and/or psychological abuse by the father ( $\beta=0.29$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $\eta^2_p=0.083$ ) and attachment style ( $\eta^2_p=0.117$ ) were significant. It should be stressed that having been abused by the mother ( $\beta=-0.07$ ,  $p=0.29$ ) was not a significant variable in this model.

The attachment variable was constituted as a dummy variable comparing all attachment styles with secure attachment. The predictions indicate that, holding all other variables constant, aggression increases by up to 20.43 points on average (or 17.62% on the aggression scale) when abusers have fearful-hostile attachment compared with secure attachment and increases by 7.68 points on average (or 6.62% according to the aggression scale scores) when men show distant attachment.

In addition, the likelihood of committing aggression increases 10.12 points on average (or 8.72%) when men have been abused by their father. Finally, age is inversely related to aggression, since it decreases on average by 0.45 points (or 0.38%) for each year that age increases.

**Table 3.**

Hierarchical multiple linear regression

	Null Model				Model 1				Model 2			
	B	SE B	IC	IC	B	SE B	IC	IC	B	SE B	IC	IC
Age												
	-0.522	.158	[-.393, -.099]		-0.476	.149	[-.363, -.085]		-0.454	.144	[-.348, -.079]	
Attachment 1-4					21.726	4.643	[.543, 1.336]		20.435	4.486	.8843***	[.501, 1.267]
Attachment 2-4					-0.288	6.250	[-.546, .521]		1.150	6.025	0.049	[-.465, .564]
Attachment 3-4					9.389	3.759	[.406, .727]		7.687	3.655	0.3326*	[.020, .644]
father's abuse									10.121	2.620	0.294***	[.143, .444]
mother's abuse									-4.453	4.227	-0.079	[-.228, .069]
Intercept	37.726***	1.713			30.393***	2.647			28.523***	2.601		
R <sup>2</sup> adjusted			0.063				0.179				0.222	
$\Delta R^2$							0.119				.070	

Note. Attachment (fearful-hostile = 1, preoccupied = 2, dismissed = 3, secure = 4)  
\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001



## Discussion

The aim of this study was to determine whether different styles of insecure attachment (fearful, preoccupied and dismissed) versus secure, and having been abused by a parent (father and/or mother), predict aggression in men who have already been convicted of an offense of gender violence.

The proposed model can provide information on variables associated with men's violence toward their partner. Although aggression was measured using self-reported psychometric tests, the measure of perpetration is objective insofar as the participants are men who have been convicted of an offense of intimate partner violence. In addition, this work provides information on attachment styles and how parental experiences of abuse are related to aggression in this population group. Consistent with findings in the current literature, insecure attachment styles, specifically preoccupied and fearful, and having been abused by both parents, were expected to be significant predictors of aggression.

The results support the study hypotheses, albeit partially. First, 62.5% of the abusers were primarily insecurely attached compared with 37.5% who were secure. This is in line with studies indicating that batterers are essentially insecure while showing that a significant percentage of batterers have a secure attachment (Barria, 2015; Pimentel & Santelices, 2017).

Attachment style significantly predicts aggression. Specifically, aggression increases on average by 17.62% in fearful versus secure aggressors and by 6.62% in avoidant versus secure aggressors. High anxiety attachment styles (fearful and preoccupied) were expected to have more weight on aggression. However, the preoccupied attachment style was not significant. Only 8% of the participants showed preoccupied attachment, so the statistical power may have been affected by the sample size.

As has been found in other research, among attachment styles with high anxiety, this work shows that only fearful attachment style is a significant predictor of aggression (Babcock et al., 2000; Barbaro & Shackelford, 2019; Péloquin et al., 2011; Velotti et al., 2020). Fearful attachment style has been related to controlling intimate partner behavior in maltreating men (Mahalik et al., 2005). These results are consistent with the idea that people with an anxious attachment, in this case fearful, become hyperactive and develop controlling behavior toward their partner when faced with a threat of abandonment in order to avoid possible abandonment and reduce distress (Allison et al., 2008).

On the other hand, the relationship between avoidant attachment and aggression shows certain inconsistencies in the literature. These could be explained by the type of measure used. Thus, the studies in which no relationship has been found are those that evaluated aggression with self-reported instruments in the general population (Velotti et al., 2020). The research that does find a relationship was conducted with people already convicted of a violent crime (Lawson & Brossart, 2009, 2013; Lawson & Malnar, 2011). This suggests two things. First, that avoidant offenders express anger indirectly, which is more complicated to ascertain even though it is still violent (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). The second, that avoidant style is related to aggression in interaction with other variables and, in this context, has been linked to more severe aggression (Lawson & Brossart, 2009, 2013; Lawson & Malnar, 2011). This may be indicative of the fact that in studies conducted with the general population they do not represent cases of severe aggression, since these types of subjects are likely to be deprived of their liberty, or else do not intend to participate voluntarily in these studies (Boira et al., 2014).

Attachment style constitutes a relevant but not sufficient variable to explain men's aggression in couples. The data from this

research seem to indicate that it is more coherent to understand intimate partner violence within the framework of a constellation of individual, relational and contextual variables with complex interactions among them.

The data from this research show that having suffered psychological or physical abuse by the father is a significant predictor of aggression. Specifically, having suffered this type of child abuse increases aggression scores in abusers by an average of 8.72%. Of the total sample of abusers, 19.4% reported having suffered psychological or physical aggression from their father and 9.6% from their mother. These data are in line with Bandura's (1973) social learning model to explain the intergenerational transmission of violence. This model appreciates that children imitate the violent relationship patterns of their parents as an appropriate model, stating that men model behavior from their fathers and women from their mothers.

However, 71% of perpetrators did not report being abused by their parents. These results are consistent with research that has associated childhood abuse experiences with partner perpetration in adulthood (Brassard et al., 2020) by 56% to 63% (Roberts et al., 2010). They are also in line with research indicating that having been abused in childhood is a risk factor, but not a causal factor for the use of violence in adult relationships (Cascardi & Jouriles, 2018; Roberts et al., 2010). The fact that most of the aggressors in the sample were not abused highlights that intergenerational transmission of violence is a further risk factor for gender-based violence but certainly not a determinant or necessary factor, as there would be other relevant variables involved in aggression (Capaldi & Gorman-Smith, 2003). Consequently, the social learning hypothesis may be somewhat limited in explaining this phenomenon. In addition, given that the sample of abusers who have been abused by their mothers was small, statistical power may be affecting the results.

Having suffered abuse in childhood may be a model experience for future relationships, and may also influence the style of attachment generated with parents, which in turn may affect current attachments and the individual's relationships in general. Exposure to abuse in childhood is considered a complex traumatic experience that is related to risk situations in bio-psycho-social areas and may extend into adult stages of life (Evans et al., 2021). Taking the ecological model as a frame of reference (Heise, 1998), and in line with other studies that affirm that the relationship between abuse experiences and subsequent IPV varies widely depending on other factors (Evans et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2010; Wagner, Jones, & Cumbers, 2019), it could be thought that other types of confounding variables could be interacting in the results found which, in interaction with the attachment style and the abuse of the father, lead to the aggression. Understanding these last two variables as risk factors for perpetration, there must be others that act as protective factors. Specifically, the results presented here would point to the secure attachment style acting as a protective factor, preventing aggression or making it less severe (Lawson & David, 2018). This would be the reason why attachment-based therapy programs have been developed to work with batterers (Sonkin & Dutton, 2003). This is why it would be interesting in future research to develop a complex model that takes into account risk and protective factors considering experiences in childhood and their path to current attachments.

The inverse relationship found between age and aggression could be related, on the one hand, to the different patterns of education received in the different generations and, on the other hand, to a tendency to normalize violence in younger generations (Ng-Mak et al. 2002) and to express themselves more sincerely about these issues.

"In terms of intervention, it would be advisable to start working immediately with abused children, trying to minimise the risk

factors associated with the abuse itself, but, above all, paying special attention to the protective factors. This would contribute to minimising the intergenerational transmission of violence. It would be a way of protecting both the children themselves and their partners in adult life, given the risk associated with gender-based victimisation”.

Logically, this research is not without its limitations. First, although participants reported whether they had been abused by a parent, the concept of “abuse” is very general. The term “abuse” can include a spectrum of experiences ranging from coercive parenting practices to severe physical aggression. Moreover, as Dardis et al. (2017) indicated, men, in contrast to women, perceive aggression as less severe and their attitudes are more favorable when it comes to accepting the use of aggression. In addition, and in the first place, this itself may have influenced the self-reported responses collected through the aggression questionnaire. Secondly, retrospective information may lead to misclassification or misremembering because of its much lower reliability than that obtained by direct observation or other means (Nader, 2003; Schacter, 2001). Thirdly, the sample size was very small for both the preoccupied offenders and for those who reported maternal abuse. The problem is that a small sample size brings little statistical power to the analyses. In addition, in the cluster analysis, the preoccupied group did not score as highly as expected on Scale 1. Finally, many other variables that may confound the results have not been controlled, among others, social desirability has not been controlled and it should be taken into account that the participants are in the first session of a judicially-imposed psychological program.

In conclusion, with the aforementioned limitations, it would seem that having suffered abuse in childhood would be a risk factor, rather than a causal factor, for the exercise of violence against the partner in adult relationships on the part of men convicted in a binding ruling for gender-based violence. On the other hand, attachment style would constitute a relevant but not determinant variable in explaining why this type of man is or is not violent toward his partner. Anxious attachment styles would be associated in principle and to a greater extent with violent behavior. Fearful men clearly seek to control their partners. Avoidant ones do not seek control, they seem to explode after accumulating what ends up being unbearable tension with reactions of extreme violence. Although it is impossible to change the past, we can change the perception of it, as well as the way in which we have learned to relate to others. This is why work on bonding in adulthood may open a door to the effective treatment of male batterers and the prevention of gender-based violence against women in intimate partner relationships. It is therefore necessary to continue research on the variables that are associated with violent behavior toward their partners in adult men.

### Grand numbers and ethical standards

This work has been funded by the call for industrial doctorates 2020 of the Community of Madrid (IND2020/SOC-17490). Conflict of interest: none. There was no participation of the financing entity in the development of this research.

### References

- Allison, C. J., Bartholomew, K., Mayseless, O., & Dutton, D. G. (2008). Love as a battlefield: Attachment and relationship dynamics in couples identified for male partner violence. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29(1), 125–150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X07306980>
- Andreu, J.; Peña, M. y Graña, J. (2002) Adaptación psicométrica de la versión española del Cuestionario de Agresión. *Psicothema*, Vol. 14, n 2, pp. 476-482. <http://hdl.handle.net/11162/5049>
- Babcock, J. C., Jacobson, N. S., Gottman, J. M., & Yerington, T. P. (2000). Attachment, emotional regulation, and the function of marital violence: Differences between secure, preoccupied, and dismissing violent and nonviolent husbands. *Journal of Family Violence*, 15(4), 391–409. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007558330501>
- Bandura, A. (1973). Social learning theory of aggression. In J. F. Knutson (Ed.), *The control of aggression: Implications from basic research* (pp. 201–250). Aldine.
- Barbaro, N., & Shackelford, T. K. (2019). Environmental unpredictability
- Barbaro, N., Boutwell, B. B., & Shackelford, T. K. (2019). Associations between attachment anxiety and intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization: Consideration of genetic covariation. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 147, 332–343. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.05.008>
- Barría Muñoz, J. (2015). Adult attachment style and beliefs in relation to masculinity and femininity in men inflicting violence to their partners. *Revista Austral de Ciencias Sociales*, 2015(29), 107–123. <https://doi.org/10.4206/rev.austral.cienc.soc.2015.n29-06>
- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 226–244. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-3514.61.2.226>
- Boira, S., Carbajosa, P., & Lila, M. (2014). Principales retos en el tratamiento grupal de los hombres condenados por un delito de violencia de género. *Clínica Contemporánea*, 5, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.5093/cc2014a1>
- Bond, S. B., & Bond, M. (2004). Attachment Styles and Violence Within Couples. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 192(12), 857–863. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.nmd.0000146879.33957.ec>
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss: separation, anxiety and anger*. Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1986). *Vínculos afectivos: formación, desarrollo y pérdida*. Morata
- Brassard, A., Darveau, V., Péloquin, K., Lussier, Y., & Shaver, P. R. (2014). Research on male victims of abuse: Childhood sexual abuse and intimate partner violence in a clinical sample of men: The mediating roles of adult attachment and anger management. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*, 23(7), 683–704. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2014.933464>
- Bretherton, I. (1985). Attachment theory: Retrospect and prospect. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 50(1–2), 3–35. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3333824>
- Buss, A., & Perry, M. (1992) The aggression Questionnaire. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 63, N 3, 452–459).
- Capaldi, D. M., & Gorman-Smith, D. (2003). The development of aggression in young male/female couples. In P. Florsheim (Ed.), *Adolescent romantic relations and sexual behavior: Theory, research, and practical implications* (pp. 243–278). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Cascardi, M., & Jouriles, E. N. (2018). *Mechanisms underlying the association of exposure to family of origin violence and adolescent dating violence*. In D. A. Wolfe & J. R. Temple (Eds.), *Adolescent dating violence: Theory, research, and prevention* (p. 159–188). Elsevier Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-811797-2.00007-4>
- Christensen, A., & Heavey, C. L. (1990). Gender and Social Structure in the Demand/Withdraw Pattern of Marital Conflict. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.1.73>
- Cui, M., Durtschi, J. A., Donnellan, M. B., Lorenz, F. O., & Conger, R. D. (2010). Intergenerational transmission of relationship aggression: A prospective longitudinal study. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24, 688–697. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021675>
- Dardis, C. M., Edwards, K. M., Kelley, E. L., & Gidycz, C. A. (2017). Perceptions of Dating Violence and Associated Correlates: A Study of College Young Adults. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(21), 3245–3271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515597439>
- Doumas, D. M., Pearson, C. L., Elgin, J. E., & McKinley, L. L. (2008). Adult attachment as a risk factor for intimate partner violence: The «mispairing» of partners’ attachment styles. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23(5), 616–634. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260507313526>
- Dutton, D. G. (1995). *The domestic assault of women: Psychological and criminal justice perspectives* (Rev. & exp. ed.). University of British Columbia Press.
- Dutton, D. G., Saunders, K., Starzomski, A., & Bartholomew, K. (1994). Intimacy Anger and Insecure Attachment as Precursors of Abuse in Intimate Relationships. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 24(15), 1367–1386. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1994.tb01554.x>
- Dutton, D. G. (2006). *Rethinking domestic violence*. UBC Press.
- Dutton, D. G. (2007). *The abusive personality. Violence and control in intimate relationships* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Guilford Press.
- Egeland, B., Jacobvitz, D., & Sroufe, L. A. (1988). Breaking the cycle of abuse. *Child Development*, 59(4), 1080–1088. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1130274>

- Evans, K. E., Lee, H., Russell, K. N., Holmes, M. R., Berg, K. A., Bender, A. E., & Prince, D. M. (2021). Adolescent dating violence among youth exposed to intimate partner violence: A systematic review. *Journal of Family Violence*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-021-00289-y>
- Feeney, J., & Noller, P. (2001). Apego Adulto. Desclée de Brouwer.
- Franklin, C. A., & Kercher, G. A. (2012). The intergenerational transmission of intimate partner violence: Differentiating correlates in a random community sample. *Journal of Family Violence*, 27(3), 187–199. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-012-9419-3>
- Genest, A.-A., & Mathieu, C. (2014). Intimate partner violence: The role of attachment on men's anger. *Partner Abuse*, 5(4), 375–387. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/1946-6560.5.4.375>
- González-Méndez, R., Yanes, J. M., & Ramírez-Santana, G. (2017). Witnessing partner violence: Exploring the role of partner preferences on dating violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(8), 1235–1248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515588533>
- Heise, L. L. (1998). Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework. *Violence Against Women*, 4(3), 262–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801298004003002>
- Holtzworth-Munroe, A., & Meehan, J. C. (2004). Typologies of men who are maritally violent: Scientific and clinical implications. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 19, 1369–1389. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260504269693>
- Holtzworth-Munroe, A., & Stuart, G.L. (1994). Typologies of male batterers: Three subtypes and the differences among them. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116, 476–497. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0033-2909.116.3.476>
- Holtzworth-Munroe, A., Meehan, J.C., Herron, K., Rehman, U., & Stuart, G.L. (2000). Testing the Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart (1994) batterer typology. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 68, 1000–1019. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.68.6.1000>
- Hughes, M., & Cossar, J. (2016). The relationship between maternal childhood emotional abuse/neglect and parenting outcomes: A systematic review. *Child Abuse Review*, 25, 31–45. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2393>
- Knight, K. E., Menard, S., Simmons, S. B., & Bouffard, L. A. (2016). Life course and intergenerational continuity of intimate partner aggression and physical injury: A 20-year study. *Violence and Victims*, 31, 381–401. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-14-00188>
- Lawson, D. M., Barnes, A. D., Madkins, J. P., & Francios-Lamonte, B. M. (2006). Changes in male partner abuser attachment styles in group treatment. *Psychotherapy*, 43(2), 232–237. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-3204.43.2.232>
- Lawson, D. M., & Brossart, D. F. (2009). Attachment, interpersonal problems, and treatment outcome in group therapy for intimate partner violence. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 10(4), 288–301. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017043>
- Lawson, D.M., & David M. (2018). Attachment, Interpersonal Problems, and Family of Origin Functioning: Differences Between Partner Violent and Nonpartner Violent Men. *Psychology of men & masculinity*, 9(2), 90–105. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1524-9220.9.2.90>
- Lawson, D.M., & Brossart, D. F. (2013). Interpersonal problems and personality features as mediators between attachment and intimate partner violence. *Violence and Victims*, 28(3), 414–428. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-12-00031>
- Lawson, D.M., & Malnar, S. G. (2011). Interpersonal Problems as a Mediator between Attachment and Intimate Partner Violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 26(6), 421–430. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-011-9376-2>
- Luz Magdalena, S. B. (2005). Transmisión intergeneracional de la violencia intrafamiliar: evidencia para las familias colombianas. *Revista de desarrollo y sociedad*, (56), 285–337. <https://doi.org/10.13043/dys.56.8>
- Mahalik, J. R., Aldarondo, E., Gilbert-Gokhale, S., & Shore, E. (2005). The role of insecure attachment and gender role stress in predicting controlling behaviors in men who batter. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 20(5), 617–631. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260504269688>
- Mauricio, A. M., & Lopez, F. G. (2009). A Latent Classification of Male Batterers. *Violence and victims*, 24(4), 419–438. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.24.4.419>
- Melero, R., & Cantero, M. J. (2008). Los estilos afectivos en la población española: un cuestionario de evaluación del apego adulto. *Clínica y Salud*, 19, 83–100. [http://scielo.isciii.es/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1130-52742008000100004&nrm=iso](http://scielo.isciii.es/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1130-52742008000100004&nrm=iso)
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2011). An attachment perspective on interpersonal and intergroup conflict. In J. P. Forgas, A. W. Kruglanski & K. D. Williams (Eds.), *The Sydney Symposium of Social Psychology: Vol. 13. The psychology of social conflict and aggression* (p. 19–35). Psychology Press.
- Nader, K. (2003). Neuroscience: re-recording human memories. *Nature*, 425(6958), 571–572. <https://doi.org/10.1038/425571a>
- Neppel T. K. Lohman B. J. Senia J. M. Kavanaugh S. A. & Cui M (2019). Intergenerational continuity of psychological violence: Intimate partner relationships and harsh parenting. *Psychology of Violence* 9(3) 298–307. <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000129>
- Ng-Mak, D. S., Stueve, A., Salzinger, S., & Feldman, R. (2002). Normalization of violence among inner-city youth: A formulation for research. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 72(1), 92–101. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.72.1.92>
- Ogilvie, C. A., Newman, E., Todd, L., & Peck, D. (2014). Attachment and violent offending: A meta-analysis. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 19, 322–339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2014.04.007>
- Oka, M., Sandberg, J. G., Bradford, A. B., & Brown, A. (2014). Insecure attachment behavior and partner violence: Incorporating couple perceptions of insecure attachment and relational aggression. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 40(4), 412–429. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12079>
- Olufowote, R. A. D., Fife, S. T., Schleid, C., & Whiting, J. B. (2020). How can I become more secure? A grounded theory of earning secure attachment. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 46(3), 489–506. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12409>
- Péloquin, K., Lafontaine, M.-F., & Brassard, A. (2011). A dyadic approach to the study of romantic attachment, dyadic empathy, and psychological partner aggression. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 28(7), 915–942. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407510397988>
- Pimentel, V., & Santelices, M. P. (2017). Apego adulto y mentalización en hombres que han ejercido violencia hacia su pareja. *Psykhe: Revista de la Escuela de Psicología*, 26(2), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.7764/psykhe.26.2.915>
- Roberts, A. L., Gilman, S. E., Fitzmaurice, G., Decker, M. R., & Koenen, K. C. (2010). Witness of intimate partner violence in childhood and perpetration of intimate partner violence in adulthood. *Epidemiology*, 21(6), 809–818. <https://doi.org/10.1097/EDE.0b013e3181f39f03>
- Rosenbaum, A., & O'Leary, K. D. (1981). Marital violence: Characteristics of abusive couples. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 49(1), 63–71. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.49.1.63>
- Schacter, D. L. (2021). *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*. Updated edition. Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Shakoor, S., Theobald, D., & Farrington, D. P. (2022). Intergenerational Continuity of Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration: An Investigation of Possible Mechanisms. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(7–8), NP5208–NP5227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520959629>
- Smith-Marek, E. N., Cafferky, B., Dharmidharka, P., Mallory, A. B., Dominguez, M., High, J., Stith, S. M., & Mendez, M. (2015). Effects of childhood experiences of family violence on adult partner violence: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 7(4), 498–519. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12113>
- Sonkin, D. J., & Dutton, D. (2003). Treating assaultive men from an attachment perspective. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*, 7(1–2), 105–133. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J146v07n01\\_06](https://doi.org/10.1300/J146v07n01_06)
- Sonkin, D., Ferreira, R. J., Hamel, J., Buttell, F., & Frias, M. T. (2019). Associations Between Attachment Insecurities and Psychological Violence in a Sample of Court-Mandated Batterers. *Violence and Victims*, 34(6), 910–929. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-17-00086>
- Teva, I., Hidalgo-Ruzzante, N., Pérez-García, M., & Bueso-Izquierdo, N. (2021). Characteristics of Childhood Family Violence Experiences in Spanish Batterers. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 36(23–24), 11212–11235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519898436>
- Thornberry, T. P., Freeman-Gallant, A., Lizotte, A. J., Krohn, M. D., & Smith, C. A. (2003). Linked lives: The intergenerational transmission of antisocial behavior. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 31(2), 171–184. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1022574208366>
- Toplu-Demirtaş, E., & Hatipoğlu-Sümer, Z. (2021). Aggression begets aggression: Psychological dating aggression perpetration in young adults from the perspective of intergenerational transmission of violence. *Current Psychology: A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on Diverse Psychological Issues*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02461-5>
- Vargha, A., & Delaney, H.D. (1998). The Kruskal-Wallis Test and Stochastic Homogeneity. *Journal of Educational Statistics*, 23, 170–192.
- Velotti, P., Rogier, G., Beomonte Zobel, S., Chirumbolo, A., & Zavattini, G. C. (2020). The Relation of Anxiety and Avoidance Dimensions of Attachment to Intimate Partner Violence: A Meta-Analysis About Perpetrators. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020933864>
- Waltz, J., Babcock, J. C., Jacobson, N. S., & Gottman, J. M. (2000). Testing a typology of batterers. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 68(4), 658–669. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.68.4.658>
- Wagner, J., Jones, S., Tsaroucha, A., & Cumbers, H. (2019). Intergenerational transmission of domestic violence: practitioners' perceptions and experiences of working with adult victims and perpetrators in the UK. *Child abuse review*, 28(1), 39–51. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2541>