

I Am Not in Your Shoes: Low Perspective Taking Mediating the Relation Among Attachment Insecurities and Physical Intimate Partner Violence in Chilean University Students

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Abstract

Guided by the attachment theory, this study tested the degree to which perspective taking mediates the effects of romantic attachment on the use of physical intimate partner violence (IPV) toward the partner. Participants consisted of 608 Chilean university students involved in a romantic relationship, among whom 44.2% of women and 34.7% of men reported inflicting at least one act of violence toward their partner during the previous year. Results from a structural equation model showed that the association between avoidance of intimacy and physical IPV is mediated by perspective taking for both men and women. However, perspective taking mediated the link between attachment anxiety and physical IPV in women only. Our

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findings underline the importance of the individual's sense of attachment security in relation to their ability to empathize with their partners, as well as prevent the perpetration of physical IPV against them.

Keywords

romantic attachment, perspective taking, physical intimate partner violence

Despite global efforts to eradicate violence among romantic relationships, physical intimate partner violence (IPV) remains an unfortunate reality for numerous couples and families. The people of Chile are no exception to this cold truth, and must face this unsettling social reality (Ceballo, Ramirez, Castillo, Caballero, & Lozoff, 2004; Guzmán, Espinoza, Tay, Leiva, & Adaos, 2014; Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, 2013; Vizcarra & Póo, 2011). In Chile, it is estimated that approximately one woman is killed by an intimate partner every week (Donoso, 2007). Young men and women, in particular, are most at risk of IPV (O'Leary, Tintle, & Bromet, 2014). Results from the International Dating Violence study, which sample was comprised of 16,000 university students recruited from 21 countries, revealed a median annual rate of 26% for physical IPV caused by a romantic partner (Chan, Straus, Brownridge, Tiwari, & Leung, 2008). Despite the prevalence of IPV in romantic relationships, it has received little attention in Chile and other Latin-American countries in comparison with other countries (Lehrer, Lehrer, & Koss, 2013). Moreover, the development of prevention and treatment programs for young adults has yet received little priority in Chile (Lehrer et al., 2013).

The high prevalence and detrimental consequences of IPV justify empirical efforts aimed at understanding its correlates and risk factors in young men and women. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1973, 1980) is now a well-established framework for the study of IPV (Bartholomew & Allison, 2006; Dutton & White, 2012). The use of this theory is particularly interesting as it is not gender specific and, therefore, accounts for both male and female violence (Bartholomew & Allison, 2006). The current study investigated associations among attachment insecurities and the use of physical IPV in a sample of Chilean college students currently involved in a couple relationship, and more specifically, the role of dyadic perspective taking was examined as a possible mediator of these associations.

Adult Attachment and IPV

In attachment theory, violence toward the partner is understood as a dysfunctional response to perceived attachment threats that result from unmet

attachment needs in the romantic relationship (Bartholomew & Allison, 2006). Attachment theory stipulates that children develop a sense of self-worth and positive expectations of others (i.e., secure attachment) based on repeated positive and caring interactions with their primary caregivers. These early internal representations of the self and others are consolidated over time and generalized to other relationships in adulthood, the romantic partner in particular (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). Securely attached adults believe they are worthy of love, deserving of respect, and are comfortable depending on trustworthy others for assistance and emotional support during situations perceived as threatening. These individuals generally tend to report more satisfying relationships with their partners, which may be due to their propensity to facilitate a higher degree of intimacy, trust, and respect within their relationships (for a review, see Feeney, 2008). When confronted with relational conflict, these individuals display more adaptive behaviors, which include respectful communication, empathic listening, and the ability to compromise to reach a solution (for a review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

As a result of repeated childhood experiences of incoherent, inconstant, or negligent care received from their caregivers, adults who have developed an insecure attachment perceive themselves and/or others negatively (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Nowadays, attachment insecurity in adulthood is typically measured through two dimensions of attachment: anxiety over abandonment and avoidance of intimacy (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Attachment anxiety reflects a negative model of self and translates into chronic feelings of unworthiness, relational anxiety, and fear of rejection. Avoidance of intimacy reflects a negative model of others and translates into interpersonal distrust and severe discomfort with intimacy (Collins & Allard, 2001). Both attachment anxiety and avoidance have been related to heightened relationship dissatisfaction (for a review, see Feeney, 2008). During conflictual situations, individuals with attachment insecurity also express less empathy, have more difficulty compromising, present more problematic communication patterns, and are more likely to engage in behaviors that fuel hostility rather than to use strategies that defuse tension (e.g., Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005; Fournier, Brassard, & Shaver, 2011; Marchand, 2004; Péloquin, Lafontaine, & Brassard, 2011). Conflicts are thus more likely to escalate into overt verbal aggression and physical IPV. Individuals with attachment insecurity are known to use more aggressive behaviors toward their partner than individuals with a secure attachment (Buck, Leenaars, Emmelkamp, & van Marle, 2012; Wilson, Gardner, Brosi, Topham, & Busby, 2013). Accumulating empirical evidence also supports associations between both types of attachment insecurities and the use of IPV (Doumas, Pearson, Elgin, & McKinley, 2008; Fournier et al., 2011; Lawson & Brossart, 2013; Péloquin et al., 2011; for a review, also see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Although both types of attachment insecurities appear to be related to aggressive behavior toward the partner, IPV would serve a different coping function with respect to attachment avoidance and anxiety. On one hand, individuals with high attachment anxiety crave affection and complete closeness with their partners. Hence, by fear of being abandoned, they are hyper-vigilant to any signs, real or imagined, of emotional distance or rejection from their partner. When they perceive their relationship to be threatened, these individuals resort to a number of *hyper-activating* strategies (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), which may go as far as using physical IPV during conflicts as a desperate means to regain proximity with their partner, force their attention, protect the relationship, and restore a sense of security (Allison, Bartholomew, Mayselless, & Dutton, 2007; Bartholomew & Allison, 2006; Mayselless, 1991).

On the other hand, individuals with high attachment avoidance are uncomfortable showing vulnerability and often feel distressed, if not threatened, when their partner seeks more closeness and interdependence. As such, when they perceive their autonomy, independence, and sense of personal strength to be endangered, they resort to a number of *deactivating* strategies to minimize or deny their attachment needs and vulnerability, as well as to re-establish relational distance with their partner (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Although these individuals are less likely to use overt aggressive behaviors (they often tend to resort to passive-aggressive gestures; Mayselless, 1991), physical IPV may be used to restore distance with the partner, especially when they are involved in a chronic demand-withdraw dynamic with their partner, or when the partner also uses IPV (Allison et al., 2007; Bartholomew & Allison, 2006).

The Mediating Role of Perspective Taking

Although the association between attachment insecurities and physical IPV is now well-documented (Gosselin, Lafontaine, & Bélanger, 2005; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), the mechanisms responsible for this association have not been thoroughly studied. A possible mediator of this association might be poor perspective taking toward the partner. Perspective taking is a cognitive component of empathy defined as one's ability to understand the other's point of view, or cognitively put oneself in the other's place (Hogan, 1969).

Theoretically, attachment security allows a person to attend to a distressed partner (Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005). When the attachment system is triggered (i.e., attachment insecurities are activated), individuals often first turn to others for comfort in an attempt to restore their own sense of security, which prevents them from being fully attentive and

responsive to others' distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005a). Attachment insecurities (whether temporarily or chronically activated) tend to interfere with the person's ability to recognize distress signals in their partner, empathize with their experience, and, ultimately, offer them support (i.e., optimal caregiving behaviors; Collins, Guichard, Ford, & Feeney, 2006). Consequently, individuals with high attachment insecurity would be more likely to use IPV because, due to their difficulty to consider their partner's perspective, they fail to empathize with them. Therefore, they are not as sensitive to the distress their actions may cause to others (Marshall & Marshall, 2011; Péloquin et al., 2011), including their partner.

A number of studies show that both attachment insecurities are related to lower empathy toward others in general (Britton & Fuendeling, 2005; Wei, Liao, Ku, & Shaffer, 2011), as well as toward the partner (Péloquin et al., 2011). Inversely, attachment security, whether assessed through self-reports or experimentally enhanced, is related to increased compassion toward others (Mikulincer et al., 2005). Studies also support the link between low empathy and IPV in adolescents and college men (Christopher, Owens, & Stecker, 2006; McCloskey & Lichter, 2003), as well as psychological aggression in both men and women involved in long-term relationships (Péloquin et al., 2011). For instance, Péloquin and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that women's low perspective taking toward their partner mediated the association between their own attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) and psychological aggression in a community sample of couples. Whether dyadic perspective taking plays a similar role with respect to physical IPV is, however, unknown.

The Present Study

The current study investigated whether low perspective taking toward the partner is a mediating factor of the association among romantic attachment insecurities and the use of physical IPV in young male and female Chilean university students involved in a dating relationship. This study builds on findings by Péloquin et al. (2011) by focusing specifically on physical IPV instead of psychological aggression. Moreover, to this date, much fewer studies have tested comprehensive theoretical models to explain the incidence and underlying mechanisms of IPV in culturally diverse samples. Conducting such an investigation in Chile is deemed relevant and important considering physical IPV is a prevalent phenomenon among dating Chilean couples (Guzmán, Espinoza, et al., 2014; Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, 2013; Vizcarra & Póo, 2011).

We hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1: Attachment insecurities (high anxiety over abandonment and high avoidance of intimacy) would be related to lower perspective taking toward the partner.

Hypothesis 2: Attachment insecurities and low perspective taking would be related to the use of physical IPV perpetuated toward the partner in the past year.

Hypothesis 3: The association among attachment insecurities and intimate violence would be mediated by low perspective taking.

In other words, Chilean university students involved in a romantic relationship with high attachment insecurity (i.e., high avoidance or high anxiety) would generally report less perspective taking toward their partner, which, in turn, would be associated with a more frequent use of physical IPV. Although predictors of IPV have generally been reported to be similar in men and women (Bartholomew & Allison, 2006; Ehrensaft, 2009), some studies have reported gender differences in their analysis of IPV (e.g., Henderson, Bartholomew, Trinke, & Kwong, 2005; Lawson & Brossart, 2013; Roberts & Noller, 1998). Furthermore, Péloquin and colleagues (2011) found that although perspective taking toward the partner was indeed related to both attachment insecurities and psychological aggression in men and women, it was only a significant mediator in women. As such, gender differences will also be assessed.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample of the present study was drawn from a larger sample of 1,017 participants, 405 of whom were not in a romantic relationship and were therefore excluded for the purpose of this study. One participant was removed from the sample because he failed to complete the questionnaires beyond a few questions. Three additional participants were also excluded because they omitted to specify their gender. The final sample included 608 Chilean university students involved in a romantic relationship (369 women, 239 men). To be eligible, participants were required to be at least 18 years of age and currently involved in a romantic relationship. For women, the average age was 21.41 years ($SD = 2.26$), and the average duration of the current romantic relationship was 2.47 years ($SD = 2.02$). For men, the average age was 21.52 years ($SD = 2.15$), and the average duration of the current romantic relationship was 2.04 years ($SD = 1.69$). The majority of the participants were not cohabiting with their partner (85.0%) and did not have children

(85.9%). Regarding the participants' religions, they were either Catholic (53.3%), had no religion (25.3%), Evangelical (8.4%), Agnostic (5.9%), or Other (6.2%).

Participants were recruited through class visits in different departments of a Chilean university. Following informed consent, participants who volunteered for the study completed questionnaires individually during class. No compensation was offered for their participation. The university Ethical Committee approved this study.

Measures

Demographic information. Information regarding the participants' age, sex, relationship status, length of relationship, and religion was gathered.

Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR). The ECR (Brennan et al., 1998, validated for use in a Chilean population by Spencer, Guzmán, Fresno, & Ramos, 2013) is a 36-item measure of romantic attachment, including two scales: anxiety over abandonment and avoidance of intimacy. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Higher scores are indicative of more attachment anxiety and avoidance. The two-dimensional factor structure of the ECR has been observed in the Chilean version (Spencer et al., 2013). The ECR has been used across the world because of its high test-retest reliability, high internal consistency, and good convergent validity (e.g., Alonso-Arbiol, Balluerka, & Shaver, 2007; Brennan et al., 1998; Lafontaine & Lussier, 2003; Mallinckrodt & Wang, 2004; Nakao & Kato, 2004; Spencer et al., 2013). Alpha coefficients for the current sample were .84 for anxiety and .85 for avoidance.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples (IRIC). The Chilean version of the IRIC (Péloquin & Lafontaine, 2010, validated for use in a Chilean population by Guzmán, Péloquin, Lafontaine, Trabucco, & Urzúa, 2014) was used to assess perspective taking toward the romantic partner. Sample items include "When I'm upset at my partner, I usually try to 'put myself in his or her shoes' for a while" and "I try to look at my partner's side of a disagreement before I make a decision." Five items are evaluated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (where 0 = *does not describe me well* and 4 = *describes me very well*) and are summed to obtain the scale score. Higher scores indicate greater perspective taking. The IRIC demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency and adequate convergent, concurrent, and predictive validity in various samples of couples (Péloquin & Lafontaine, 2010). The alpha coefficient for perspective taking in the current sample was .81.

Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2). The CTS2 (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996, translated into Spanish by Ramirez, 2001) is a widely used measure of intimate partner violence and assesses the extent to which specific behaviors, including negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, and sexual coercion, have been used in the previous 12 months and over one's lifetime. It also includes a scale measuring physical injury. Using a 8-point scale, participants indicate the extent to which they used each behavior against their partners and have sustained each behavior from their partners. The response categories are none, once, twice, 3-5 times, 6-10 times, 11-20 times, 21 or more times, and not in the past year, but it did happen before. These categories are coded as approximate midpoints of 0, 1, 2, 4, 8, 15, and 25, respectively. The response category "not in the past year, but it did happen before" is scored 0 to obtain the annual prevalence of male and female physically violent behaviors. The current study included only data on perpetrated physical IPV. Total scores range from 0 to 300; higher scores are indicative of more frequent violence. The physical IPV scale initially demonstrated good internal consistency (Straus et al., 1996). The alpha coefficient for the current sample was .79, which is consistent with coefficients generally reported in the literature (Straus, 2007).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Data were first inspected for missing values. Because none of the items had more than 5% missing values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), missing data were estimated and replaced using Expectation Maximization (EM) to optimize the sample size and statistical power.

Preliminary data showed that both males and females reported using physically violent behaviors toward their partners. In fact, 44.2% of women and 34.7% of men reported using at least one act of physical IPV during the previous year. Among these individuals, men reported using violent behavior on an average of 10.66 occasions ($SD = 21.78$) in the past year while women reported using violent behavior on an average of 9.57 occasions ($SD = 14.10$).

Means and standard deviations for the main variables are presented in Table 1, along with the results of an ANOVA exploring differences between men and women. Results revealed that men generally reported more perspective taking than women. No other gender difference was found. Correlations among main variables for men and women are presented in Table 2. Results demonstrated that attachment insecurities were related to more physical IPV in both men and women. Anxiety over abandonment was associated with

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Romantic Attachment, Perspective Taking, and Physical Violence.

Variable	Men (n = 239)		Women (n = 369)		F Ratio From ANOVA
	M	SD	M	SD	
Anxiety over abandonment	3.67	0.92	3.72	0.99	$F(1, 606) = 0.31$
Avoidance of intimacy	2.56	0.89	2.54	0.90	$F(1, 606) = 0.05$
Perspective taking	13.10	4.57	11.90	4.60	$F(1, 606) = 9.85^{**}$
Physical violence	3.70	13.76	4.23	10.49	$F(1, 606) = 0.28$

**p < .01.

Table 2. Correlations Among Attachment Insecurities, Perspective Taking, and the Use of Physical Violence for Men (Below the Diagonal) and Women (Above the Diagonal).

	1	2	3	4
1. Anxiety over abandonment	—	.13*	-.19***	.12*
2. Avoidance of intimacy	-.10	—	-.30***	.12*
3. Perspective taking	-.07	-.34***	—	-.15***
4. Physical violence	.14*	.15*	-.16*	—

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

more avoidance of intimacy and less perspective taking for women, but not for men. However, in both men and women, avoidance of intimacy was correlated with less perspective taking. In addition, perspective taking was associated with less physical IPV in both men and women. Potential covariates including age, gender, religion, and cohabitation (i.e., if the participant lives with his or her partner) were examined, although none were included in further analyses due to non-significant association with the outcome variable of having used physical IPV.

Mediation Analyses

Structural equation modeling was conducted using the maximum-likelihood method available in AMOS (Arbuckle, 2011) to examine direct and indirect effects necessary to establish the presence of a mediation process (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). To create stable indicators for each latent variable, items

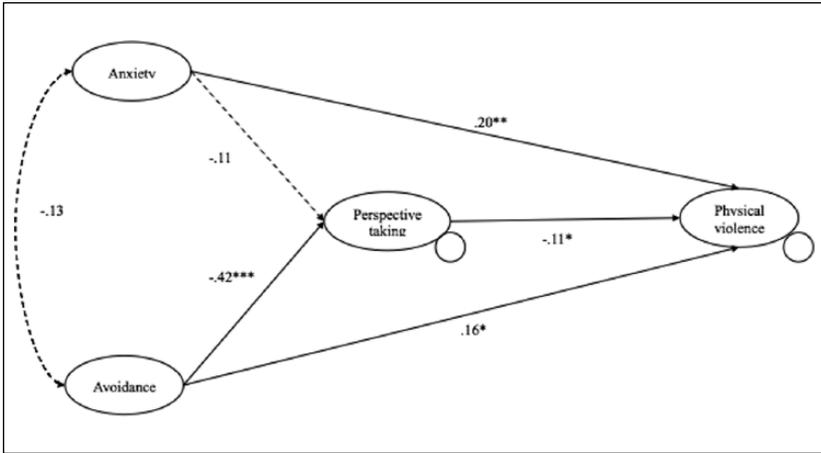


Figure 1. Standardized coefficients for the mediating role of perspective taking in the association between attachment insecurities and physical violence in men.

Note. Dashed lines represent non-significant associations.

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

from the romantic attachment scales and physical IPV scale, respectively, were randomly divided into one of three parcels and subsequently averaged (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). As the perspective taking scale consisted of only five items, all five indicators were used. The fit of the overall model, including both men and women, was deemed satisfactory, $\chi^2(71) = 134.20, p < .001$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .038, 90% confidence interval (CI) = [.028, .048], comparative fit index (CFI) = .98.

A significant chi-square difference, $\chi^2(16) = 27.44, p < .05$, was found between a constrained measurement model (i.e., all factor loadings of the indicators and path coefficients were constrained to be equivalent for women and men) and an unconstrained model (i.e., freely estimated measurement model), indicating variance across gender. As variance across gender was found, the model was generated for men (see Figure 1) and women (see Figure 2) separately. The fit of the model for women was deemed satisfactory, $\chi^2(71) = 122.82, p < .001$, RMSEA = .045, 90% CI = [.031, .058], CFI = .97, as well as the fit of the model for men, $\chi^2(71) = 108.81, p = .003$, RMSEA = .047, 90% CI = [.028, .064], CFI = .97.

In men, both attachment anxiety and avoidance significantly predicted the use of physical IPV. Avoidance of intimacy was also related to lower

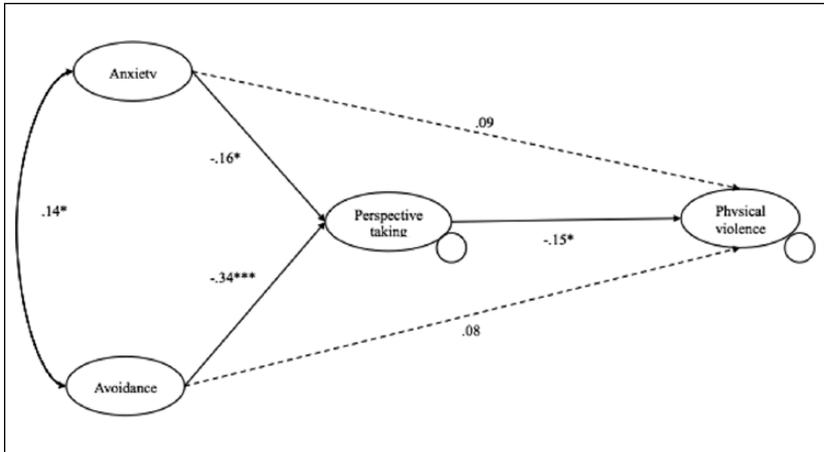


Figure 2. Standardized coefficients for the mediating role of perspective taking in the association between romantic attachment and physical violence in women.

Note. Dashed lines represent non-significant associations.

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

perspective taking, which, in turn, was related to higher physical violence toward the partner. Attachment anxiety, however, was not significantly related to perspective taking. Perspective taking mediated the association between attachment avoidance and physical IPV (point estimate of .05 and a 95% bias corrected [BC] bootstrap CI = [.007, .118]), but not between attachment anxiety and physical IPV (point estimate of .01 and a 95% BC bootstrap CI = [.000, .049]).

In women, high attachment anxiety and avoidance were not significantly related to physical IPV, but were associated to low perspective taking. Low perspective taking was linked to higher physical violence toward the partner. Both associations between romantic attachment and physical IPV were mediated by low perspective taking (anxiety: point estimate of .02 and a 95% BC bootstrap CI = [.003, .066]; avoidance: point estimate of .05 and a 95% BC bootstrap CI = [.009, .110]).

Discussion

On the basis of attachment theory, we predicted that empathy toward the partner, in the form of perspective taking, would mediate the link between insecure romantic attachment and the use of physical IPV in a Chilean sample

of university students currently involved in an intimate relationship. To the best of our knowledge, only one study to date looked at a similar model, using psychological aggression as the outcome variable in a Canadian sample (Péloquin et al., 2011). Our findings closely replicate this study.

The main contribution of the current study is the finding that young adults with high insecure romantic attachment (anxiety and avoidance) report less perspective taking toward their partner, which, in turn, is associated with more frequent use of physical IPV. Our results give a context to the common idiom “I am not in your shoes” (*no estoy en tus zapatos*). The difficulty for Chilean university students to put themselves in their partner’s shoes not only refers to a lack of empathy toward the loved one but also seems to have great negative consequences such as the use of physical IPV.

More specifically, as hypothesized, we found that the association between avoidance of intimacy and physical IPV is mediated by low perspective taking in young adults Chilean men and women. As predicted, we also found low perspective taking to be a mediator of the association between attachment anxiety and IPV in young dating women, but, interestingly, not in young men. Findings for men rather revealed that attachment anxiety relates directly to physical IPV, not through a mediational process involving low perspective taking.

Overall, our results support the attachment theory and past empirical findings. Individuals with high attachment avoidance tend to expect very little from their partner due their negative models of others and are, therefore, less likely to reciprocate responsive behavior (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Showing empathy to the partner is also likely to increase intimacy with the partner, which is an undesirable outcome for individuals with high attachment avoidance. In a conflictual situation, this inability to consider the other’s point of view and lack of understanding could lead to inappropriate and disrespectful emotional reactions, such as pity or gloating when witnessing distress in their partner (Florian, Mikulincer, & Hirschberger, 2000; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005b), and could facilitate their use of physical violence toward their partner.

The mediational model involving attachment anxiety, low perspective taking, and IPV obtained in female students is coherent with existing literature. Due to their chronic self-preoccupation and constant worry about being rejected, women with high attachment anxiety would have little cognitive resources to devote to their partner’s own emotional suffering (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005b; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). As with attachment avoidance, this inability to consider their partner’s perspective would make them more susceptible to use physical IPV, but for different reasons. For individuals with high attachment anxiety, this inability to cognitively connect with the partner

might place them in a state of panic due to the fear of possibly losing their partner. This unbearable situation would prompt them to physically hurt their partner as a desperate way to feel close again (Bartholomew & Allison, 2006; Mayselless, 1991).

In men, however, although both high attachment anxiety and low perspective taking directly predicted IPV, perspective taking was not identified as a significant mediator of the association among romantic attachment insecurities and physical IPV. This finding is coherent with results obtained by Péloquin and colleagues (2011), who found no mediational process involving romantic attachment, empathy, and the use of psychological aggression in men. As suggested by these authors, the associations between attachment and IPV in men might be better explained by other factors, such as communication, relationship adjustment, anger, and jealousy (Fournier et al., 2011; Lafontaine & Lussier, 2005; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Taft et al., 2006). We could also examine other factors related to either attachment and/or IPV, such as emotion regulation (Guzmán, Lafontaine, & Levesque, 2016), partner distrust, and self-esteem (Buck et al., 2012).

Prevalence of IPV

Coherent with existing data pertaining to university students (Straus & Ramirez, 2007), there were no gender differences obtained in the perpetration of physical IPV. In other words, both men and women in our sample of Chilean university students equally reported using physical violence toward their partner in the past year. This demonstrates the importance of considering both male and female violence when developing models of IPV. The high percentage of men and women who reported using at least one act of physical IPV during the previous year in this Chilean sample was also of particular interest. Our findings are congruent with rates of IPV reported in previous studies conducted in Chilean university samples, which ranged from 26% to 71.7% (Saldivia & Vizcarra, 2012; Vizcarra & Póo, 2011). Research shows that IPV tends to be more prevalent in younger samples (e.g., O'Leary et al., 2014).

Limitations and Future Directions

A limitation of this research is that all of the participants in this study were university students from a specific region in Chile. Thus, it is possible that the responses from this sample are not representative of the general Chilean population. It is also possible that this sample does not reflect violence issues that may be present within a clinical sample of Chilean couples experiencing difficulties or couples involved in long-term relationships. Another limitation

concerns the correlational nature of our study, which precludes inference about causation. Although the theoretical model tested in the current study suggests that attachment insecurities and low empathy are potential precursors of IPV, it is also possible that IPV breeds insecure bonds and a chronic lack of understanding of the partner's experience over time. Longitudinal studies would be needed to examine the impact of IPV on the developmental course of partner attachment and perspective taking in the long run. While longitudinal designs still cannot afford causal inferences, they allow examining temporal sequencing between variables, which cross-sectional designs cannot do.

Clinical and Social Implications

Chile is one of the few South American countries that actively supports the prevention of IPV at a policy level (Law 20.066; Franceschet, 2010). Since 2005, a new law established the need to implement psychosocial treatment programs for men responsible for IPV. In this respect, IPV has been predominantly understood from a perspective where women are seen as the victims and men as the perpetrators. Consistent with this approach, policies and programs in Chile are solely aimed at helping female victims and reducing violent behaviors used by men toward them but not the reverse (Araujo, Guzmán, & Mauro, 2000; Ibaceta, 2011). Moreover, there are still very few government programs aimed at preventing and treating dating violence (Lehrer et al., 2013; Vizcarra & Póo, 2011). Instead, most of them are focused on what happens in married and cohabiting couples. Nevertheless, a dating violence prevention program for university students was recently developed by Vizcarra, Poo, and Donoso (2013) called "Building a Healthy Relationship With Your Partner." This program is currently being implemented in a university from the south of Chile as part of an ongoing research. Its main objective is to promote skills (e.g., communication, self-awareness, emotional expression, conflict resolution) to facilitate healthy partner relationships, which exclude violence.

If similar findings are replicated in other studies, this research could have practical implications for prevention, treatment, and university policy aiming to reduce physical IPV among young Chilean men and women. Specifically, interventions that target the attachment system and promote perspective taking skills could be especially useful. Mainly, the mediation findings obtained in the current research suggest that fostering changes to avoidant and anxious views of the self and others (i.e., reducing fear of intimacy, worries about being abandoned, frustrations when the partner is not available, etc.) may be a good way to promote the expression of empathy in partners (i.e., tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of the partner) and thus reduce the likelihood of using physical IPV.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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