

# The impact of child abuse and neglect on psychological violence in intimate relationships

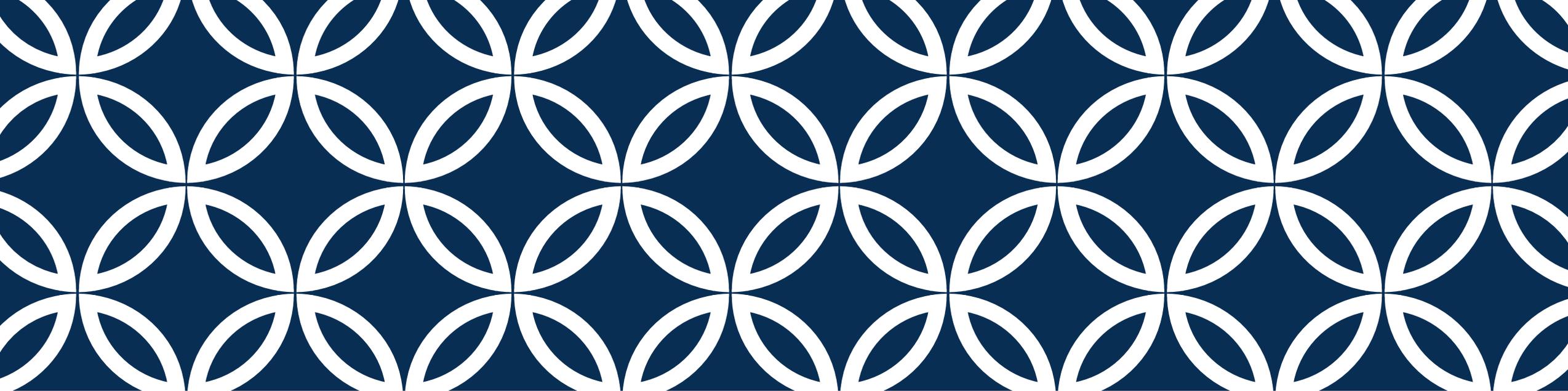
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I, Caroline Dugal, have no commercial relationships to disclose.

# Introduction: Psychological IPV

- Psychological IPV
  - The use of verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to mentally or emotionally harm and/or exert control over one's partner.
  - The most prevalent form of violence in couples: 84% of individuals in clinical populations.
- Child abuse and neglect are associated with an increased risk of sustaining and perpetrating IPV in adulthood (Godbout et al., 2009).

# Introduction: Child abuse and neglect

- However, not all victims of child maltreatment (CM) become IPV perpetrators nor are revictimized.
  - The experience of multiple types of CM, known to generate more important and complex repercussions than a single type of abuse, could partly explain these different trajectories.
  - According to several authors, IPV is more strongly related to cumulative types of CM, such as the experience of both psychological and physical abuse.

# Introduction: Child abuse and neglect and IPV

- While cumulative CM has somewhat consistently been associated with later IPV, the mechanisms underlying this relationship still remain unclear.
- By reflecting the complex repercussions of cumulative CM and by acting as a known risk factor for both IPV perpetration and victimization, disturbances in emotion regulation might help explain the link between CM and IPV.

# Introduction: Emotion dysregulation

- Emotion dysregulation:
  - Inability to control and tolerate strong and negative affect, without resorting to avoidance strategies that distract, soothe, or draw attention away from emotional distress.
- Adult survivors of CM tend to exhibit emotional instability, problems in inhibiting the expression of strong affects, and the use of tension reduction behaviors (i.e., self-injury, binge–purge eating, impulsivity, excessive risk-taking and some instances of aggression).

# Introduction: Emotion dysregulation

- Both male and female survivors of CM are more vulnerable to resort to aggression when relational problems challenge their ability to regulate negative emotions
  - Psychological IPV as a way to cope when challenged with inability to regulate negative emotions.
  - In other words, emotion dysregulation could prevent from using adequate conflict resolution skills.

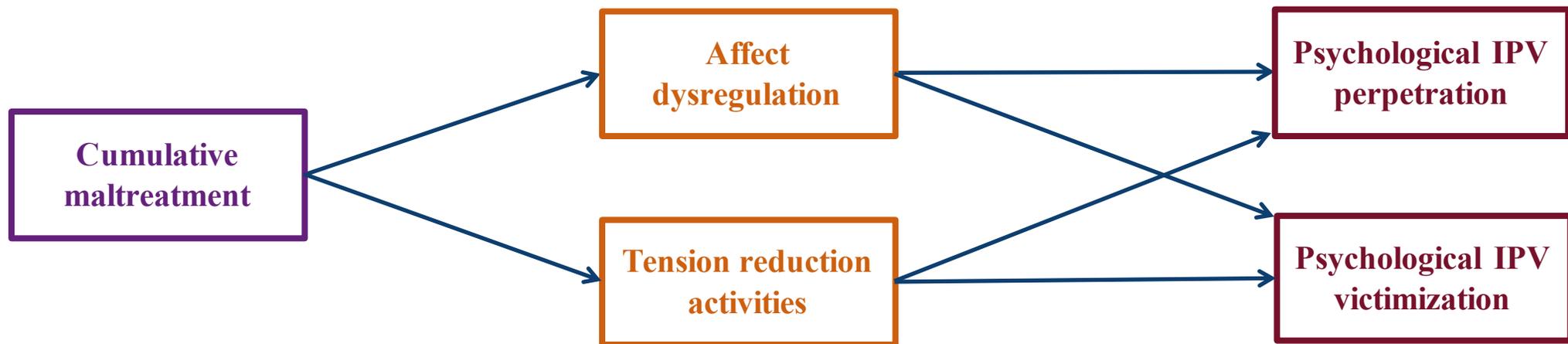
# Objectives of the study

- Examine the mediating role of emotion dysregulation in the relationship uniting cumulative CM and psychological IPV.
- Determine whether the strength of the associations between cumulative CM, emotion dysregulation and psychological IPV varies across gender.



# Hypotheses

- It is expected that the experience of cumulative CM leads to deficits in emotion regulation (i.e., less affect regulation capacities and higher use of tension reduction behaviors), which in turn leads to higher levels of IPV (both perpetration and victimization).
- It is expected that these associations will be similar across gender.



# Procedure and participants

- Clinical sample: Adults consulting for sexual and relational difficulties.
- Participants: 162
  - 59.9% women      40.1% men
- Marital status:
  - Married: 21.6%
  - Common-law partnership or cohabiting: 42.6%
  - Relationship with a regular partner: 22.2%
  - Relationship during the past year but now single: 13.6%
- Mean age: 38.2 years ( $SD = 12.5$ , range 17-70)
- Graduate or professional studies degree: 80.2%
- Income: 30.7% reported an income  $\geq$  \$CDN40,000

# Measures

- Childhood Maltreatment : Early Trauma Inventory-Self-Report (Bremner et al., 2007; Godbout et al., 2011).
  - Physical, psychological and sexual abuse
  - Physical and psychological neglect
  - Witnessing physical and psychological violence
  - Bullying
- Each scale was dichotomously coded (0 = absence, 1 = presence) and added to obtain a continuous score of cumulative maltreatment (0-8), indicating the number of different types of CM experienced.
- Emotion dysregulation : Inventory of Altered Self-Capacities (IASC; Briere, 2000).
  - **Affect regulation** : mood swings, problems in inhibiting the expression of anger.
  - **Tension reduction activities** : the tendency to react to painful internal states with externalizing behaviors that distract, soothe, or reduce internal distress.
- Psychological IPV : Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS-2; Straus et al., 1996).
  - Perpetrated and sustained.

# Descriptive statistics

Types of CM	Prevalence
1 type of CM	8.6% ( $n = 14$ )
2-3 types of CM	32.1% ( $n = 52$ )
4 or more types of CM	53.7% ( $n = 87$ )

	Mean ( <i>SD</i> )
Average number of types of CM	3.93 (2.20)

No difference across gender	$t(160) = .19, ns$
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# Descriptive statistics

Types of CM	Prevalence
Physical abuse	50.0% ( <i>n</i> = 81)
Psychological abuse	61.7% ( <i>n</i> = 100)
Sexual abuse	41.6% ( <i>n</i> = 67)
Physical neglect	29.6% ( <i>n</i> = 48)
Psychological neglect	71.6% ( <i>n</i> = 116)
Witnessing physical violence	63.0% ( <i>n</i> = 102)
Witnessing psychological violence	18.5% ( <i>n</i> = 30)
Bullying	63.0% ( <i>n</i> = 102)

## Difference across gender

Sexual abuse: 20.3% of men, 55.7% of women

$\chi^2(1) = 19.84, p < .001$

# Descriptive statistics

Clinical cut-off	Prevalence
Affect dysregulation	41.5% ( $n = 73$ )
Tension reduction activities	35.2% ( $n = 57$ )

	Mean ( <i>SD</i> )
Affect dysregulation	19.75 (7.84)
Tension reduction activities	14.80 (4.39)

No difference across gender

# Descriptive statistics

Psychological IPV	Prevalence	Mean ( <i>SD</i> )
Perpetration	50.9% ( <i>n</i> =84)	1.10 (1.51)
Victimization	53.7 % ( <i>n</i> =87)	1.15 (1.44)

Severity	Minor	Severe
Perpetration	47.5% ( <i>n</i> = 47)	52.5% ( <i>n</i> = 52)
Victimization	36.6% ( <i>n</i> = 37)	63.4% ( <i>n</i> = 64)

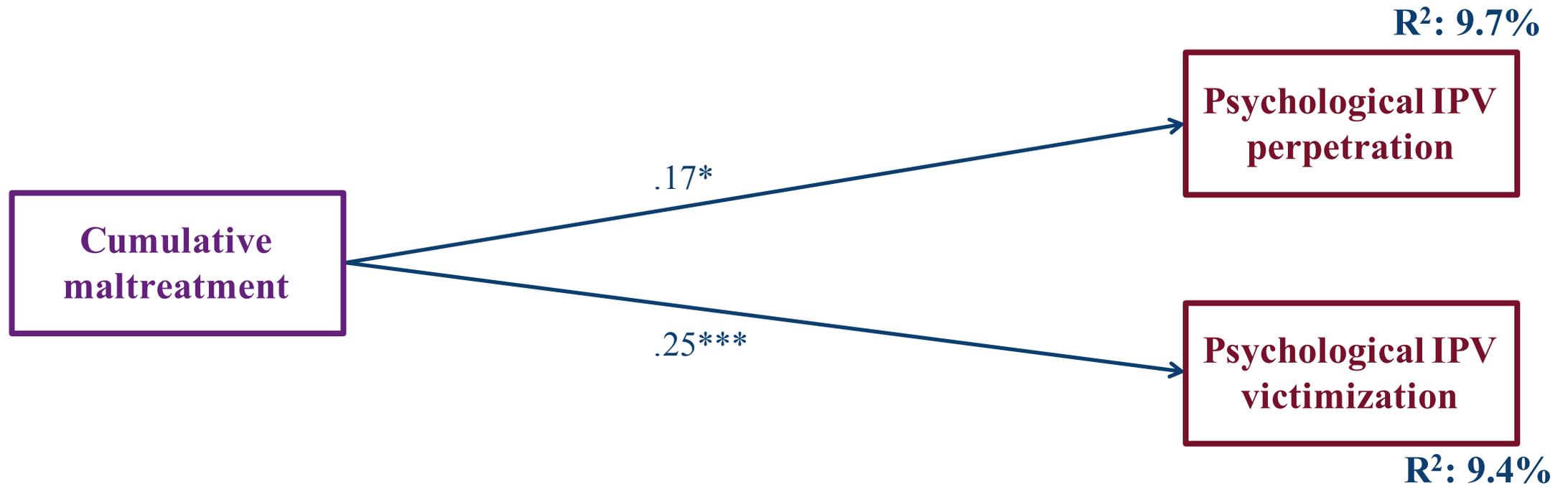
No difference across gender

# Bivariate correlations

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Cumulative CM	-				
Affect dysregulation	.20*	-			
Tension reduction activities	.40***	.63***	-		
Perpetrated psychological IPV	.17*	.35***	.31***	-	
Sustained psychological IPV	.25**	.25**	.29***	.76***	-

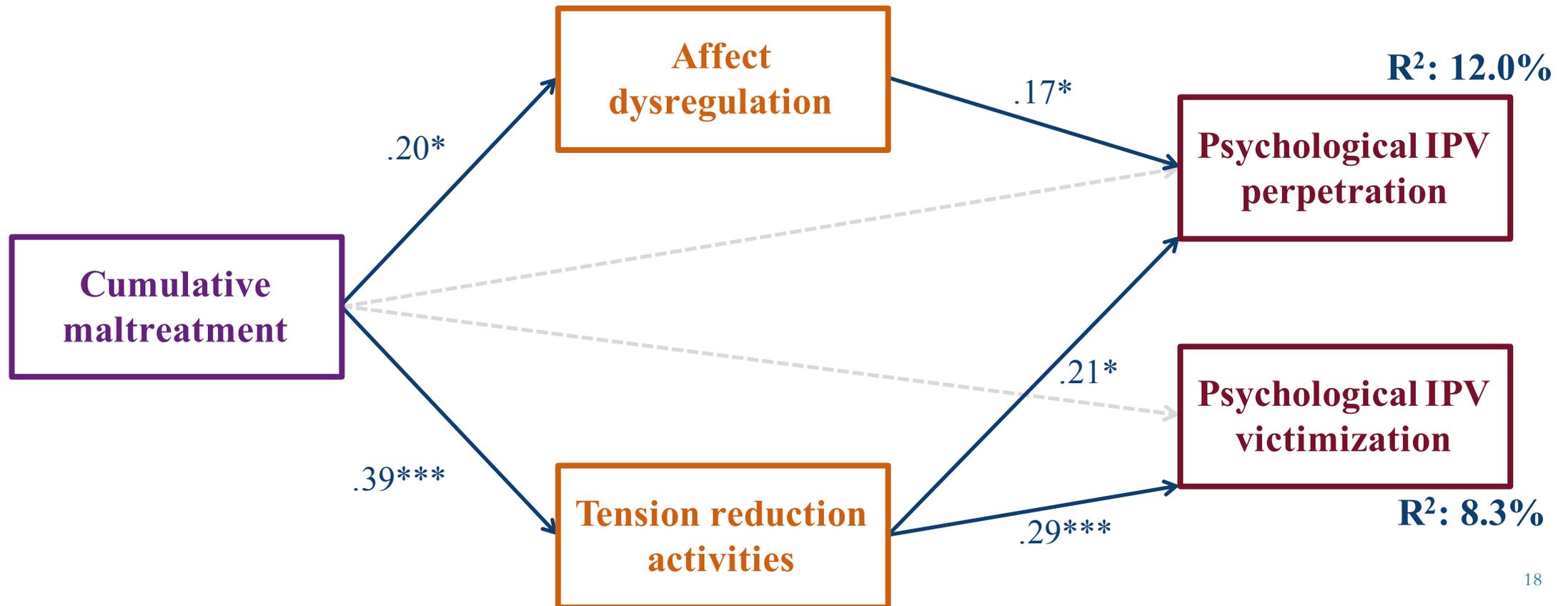
*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

# Integrative model



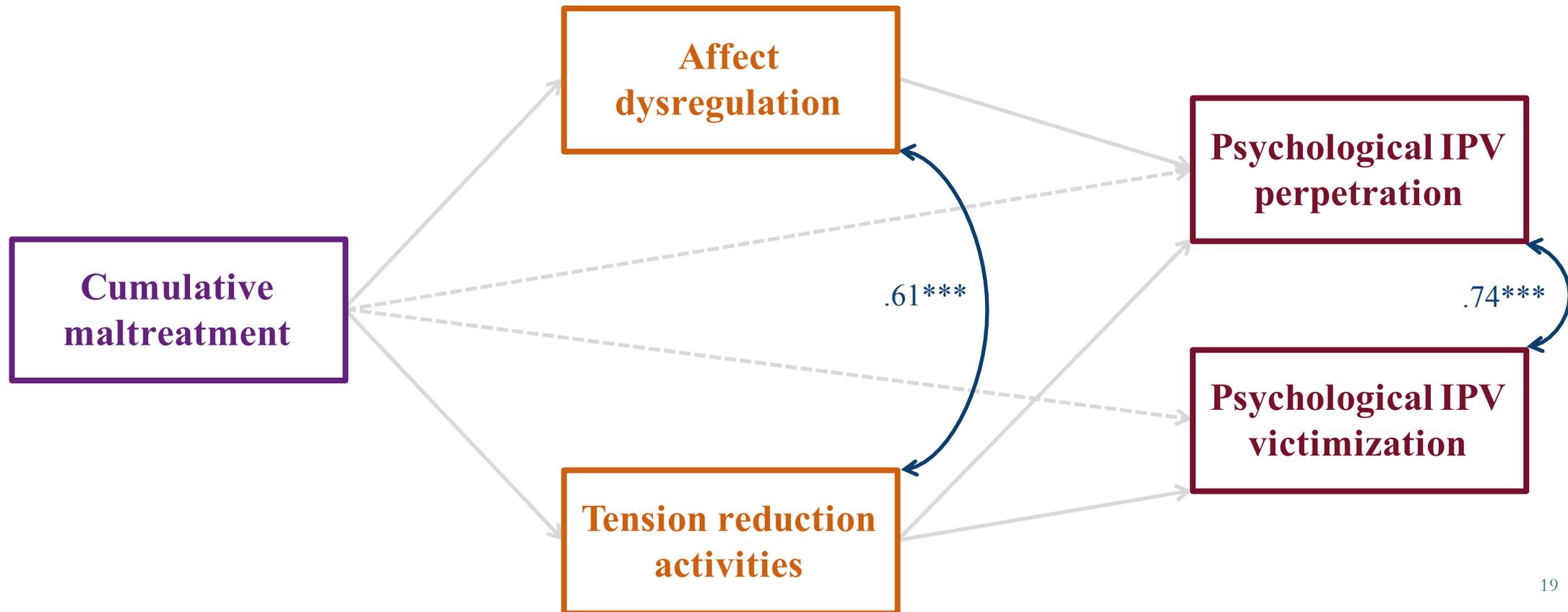
# Integrative model

CFI: .99, RMSEA: .08, IC [.00; .17],  $\chi^2[3] = 6.13, p = .11$ , Ratio  $\chi^2/dl = 2.04$ , SRMR = .04.



# Integrative model

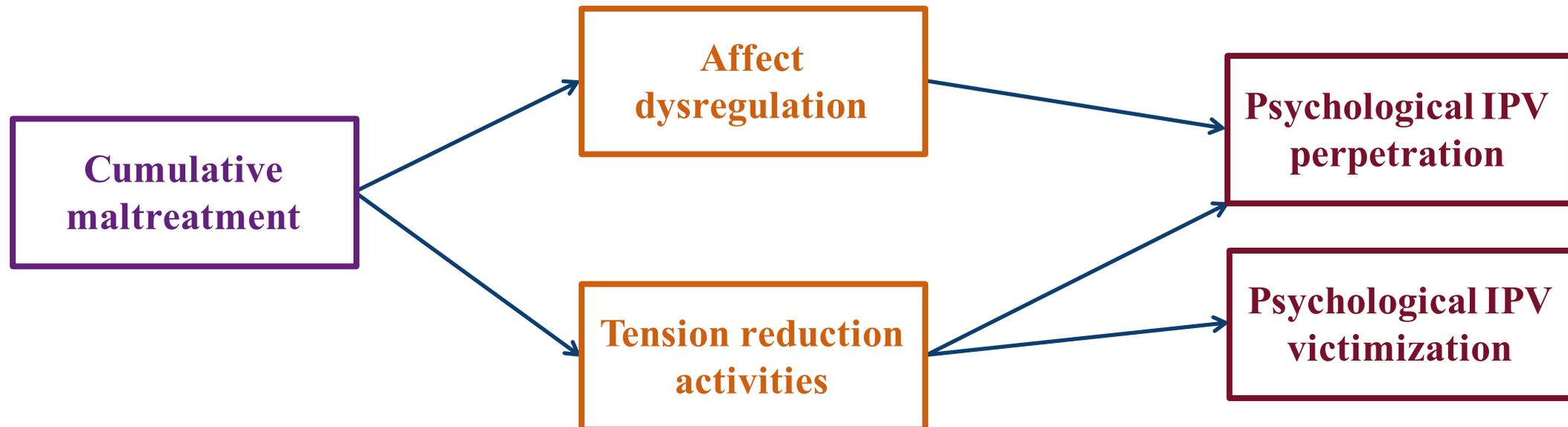
CFI: .99, RMSEA: .08, IC [.00; .17],  $\chi^2[3] = 6.13, p = .11$ , Ratio  $\chi^2/dl = 2.04$ , SRMR = .04.



# Gender invariance

CFI: .99, RMSEA: .06, IC [.00; .17],  $\chi^2[6] = 7.99$ ,  $p = .24$ , Ratio  $\chi^2/dl = 1.33$ , SRMR = .05.

$\Delta\chi^2(12) = 9.15$ ,  $p = 0.69$



# Conclusions

- The relationship between cumulative CM and psychological IPV seems to be mostly driven by the behavioral components of emotion dysregulation rather than by its cognitive components.
  - The tendency to exteriorize intense and negative affect when faced with overwhelming emotions may be at the root of the use of psychological violence towards and by one's partner.
- Results emphasize the importance of CM experiences and affective functioning with regards to victimization.
  - By exteriorizing intense and negative emotions, individuals become more vulnerable to psychological IPV victimization.
  - Thus, tension reduction activities would affect IPV through its impact on both partners, underlining the importance of considering partner violence as a dyadic and bidirectional, rather than an individual and unidirectional phenomenon.

# Implications

- The experience of multiple types of CM interferes with various areas of functioning in adulthood; more research must be conducted on this subject.
- Since the majority of the variance in IPV remained unexplained, the need to examine other variables contributing to violence in intimate relationships persists.
  - Perpetration of violence in intimate relationships is a complex phenomenon; many variables should be considered when studying this specific type of abuse.
  - What are the reasons for the use of IPV? Cultural context?
- Results highlight the necessity to...
  - Assess maltreatment and IPV experiences in individuals consulting for sexual or relational problems.
  - Teach effective emotion regulation abilities and conflict resolution skills to CM survivors in order to prevent violence in their relationships.

Thank you!  
Questions?

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