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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Romantic Attachment and Intimate Partner Violence Perpetrated by Individuals Seeking Help: The Roles of Dysfunctional Communication Patterns and Relationship Satisfaction

Laurie Arseneault[1] · Audrey Brassard[1,2] · Audrey-Ann Lefebvre[1,2] · Marie-France Lafontaine[3] · Natacha Godbout[2,4] · Marie-Ève Daspe[2,5] · Claudia Savard[2,6] · Katherine Péloquin[2,5]

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Abstract

Purpose Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a problematic and important social phenomenon (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021) that has been repeatedly linked to attachment insecurities (Velotti et al., 2020). However, the mechanisms linking these two variables remain understudied. This study examines the direct and indirect associations between attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) and perpetration of IPV (psychological, physical, sexual, coercive control) through the use of dysfunctional communication patterns (i.e., demand/demand, I demand/my partner withdraws, my partner demands/I withdraw) and lower relationship satisfaction.

Methods A sample of 613 men and non-binary people who consulted organizations providing help to individuals with relationship or IPV-related difficulties answered online questionnaires. A path analysis was conducted to test the direct and indirect associations between attachment insecurities and perpetrated IPV through communication patterns and relationship satisfaction.

Results The results showed a direct and positive association between attachment anxiety and perpetration of coercive control, and an indirect and positive association between attachment insecurities and psychological violence through the demand/demand pattern. The results also revealed an indirect and positive association between attachment anxiety and psychological violence, sexual violence, and coercive control through the I demand/my partner withdraws pattern. Finally, an indirect and positive association was observed between attachment insecurities and all types of violence studied through lower relationship satisfaction.

Conclusions This study provides key individual and relational correlates of IPV perpetration that can inform prevention and intervention among men and non-binary people.

Keywords Intimate partner violence · Adult attachment · Communication · Relationship satisfaction

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✉ Audrey Brassard
Audrey.Brassard2@Usherbrooke.ca

[1] Department of Psychology, University of Sherbrooke, 2500, boul. University, Quebec J1K 2R1, Canada

[2] The Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Intimate Relationship Problems and Sexual Abuse (CRIPCAS), Montréal, Canada

[3] University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada

[4] Université du Québec à Montréal, Montréal, Canada

[5] Université de Montréal, Montréal, Canada

[6] Université Laval, Quebec, Canada

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Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a widespread phenomenon found throughout the world (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). In Canada, many adults report having experienced at least one act of psychological (women: 43%, men: 35%), physical (women: 23%, men: 17%), or sexual (women: 12%, men: 2%) IPV during their lifetime (Statistics Canada, 2018). Researchers have also emphasized the importance of examining coercive control tactics in IPV research, as it is estimated that 24% of IPV cases could be considered coercive control (Myhill, 2015). The numerous consequences of IPV on physical (e.g., head injury, insomnia, fatigue; Domenech del Rio & Sirvent Garcia del Valle, 2017; Galovski et al., 2021) and psychological health (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder, depressive and anxious symptoms; Gehring & Vaske, 2017; Iverson et al., 2017; Mapayi et al., 2012) are well-documented. Because these consequences can reach a high degree of severity – including death (Zara & Gino, 2018) – it is crucial to further document the mechanisms that contribute to the perpetration of IPV to guide intervention and prevention practices. Male perpetrators of IPV are predominant in the present study because the consequences of their violent acts tend to be more severe for their victims (Fletcher et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2014).

Attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) are a well-documented risk factor for perpetrating IPV (e.g., Velotti et al., 2020). Yet, the mechanisms that explain the associations between attachment insecurities and IPV require further exploration. Dysfunctional communication patterns (e.g., Pickover et al., 2017) as well as low relationship satisfaction (e.g., Lefebvre et al., 2021) are both promising mechanisms to better understand the relationship dynamics that can lead to IPV. A preliminary study by Fournier et al. (2011) showed that the associations between attachment insecurities and the perpetration of IPV (physical and psychological) could partly be explained by the *I demand/my partner withdraws* communication pattern and low relationship satisfaction in a small sample of men seeking help. The present study aims to replicate and extend these findings, by relying on a larger sample of individuals seeking help and on a broader range of violent behaviors and dysfunctional communication patterns.

Intimate Partner Violence

IPV refers to various types of behaviors committed by an intimate (ex-) partner that are intended to cause harm (WHO, 2021). Psychological IPV consists of verbal (e.g., insulting, humiliating) and non-verbal (e.g., sulking) behaviors aimed at psychologically hurting the romantic partner (Breiding et al., 2015). Physical IPV is defined as the intentional use of physical strength that can lead to injuries, physical harm, disability, or death. Sexual IPV refers to all sexual behaviors or attempts directed at the romantic partner without their consent (Velotti et al., 2020). Coercive control involves verbal and non-verbal behaviors such as intimidation, threats, and monitoring and/or limiting a partner's whereabouts, finances, or communication with friends and family (Breiding et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2014). According to Johnson's IPV typology (1995, 2008), there are two overarching dynamics of IPV: intimate terrorism and situational couple violence. *Intimate terrorism* refers to a relationship in which there is an increased presence of coercive control and one (mostly male) partner uses violence or other control tactics to try to dominate and control their (mostly female) partner (Johnson et al., 2014; Myhill, 2015). *Situational couple violence* occurs during specific conflicts where there is ultimately an escalation of violence due to the failure of emotion regulation or conflict resolution strategies. This dynamic involves less coercive control than *intimate terrorism* and it is estimated that women are as likely as men to perpetrate this type of violence. Although researchers often classify participants according to their clinical versus non-clinical status (Love et al., 2020) as a proxy of these two key dynamics, individuals seeking help in a community service for their violent behaviors could correspond to either type of couple dynamics. Indeed, some participants are court-ordered to seek help to cease their violent behaviors, whereas some are voluntarily seeking help to improve their relationship (or strongly encouraged to by their partner or peers). Because of the relational nature of IPV, it is relevant to study relational variables such as romantic attachment, which has previously been associated with the perpetration of IPV (Spencer et al., 2021; Velotti et al., 2020).

Adult Attachment Theory

The attachment theory developed by Bowlby (1969/1982) refers to the relationship that originally develops between children and their caregivers (attachment figures). Depending on the stability and quality of the care received and the sensitivity of the responses to their needs, children gradually create internal representations of themselves and others. These representations are relatively stable over time and individuals tend to reproduce the established relationships with their attachment figures, which, later on, serve as models in their adult relationships (Brassard et al., 2017; Fraley & Dugan, 2021). The two-dimensional conceptualization of attachment (anxiety and avoidance) is used in the current study (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Attachment anxiety refers to a strong fear of abandonment that can lead to maladaptive behaviors (e.g., control, jealousy) due to the

hyperactivation of the attachment system. Individuals high in attachment anxiety, who have a negative self-image, tend to excessively seek reassurance from their partner when they perceive a threat to their relationship. Attachment avoidance refers to discomfort with emotional and physical intimacy leading to withdrawal behaviors (e.g., strong independence, need for distance) resulting from the deactivation of the attachment system. Individuals high in avoidance, who have a negative image of others, will be suspicious of others and will attempt to avoid emotional and physical proximity (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Studies have shown that individuals perpetrating IPV are more likely to present attachment insecurities (e.g., Fournier & Brassard, 2010; Velotti et al., 2018). Insecure partners' lack of conflict management skills makes them more at risk to use coercive tactics, insults, and threats, which can result in an escalation of violence. Theoretically, attachment anxiety would be related to the perpetration of IPV as an inadequate attempt to regain closeness with a partner. People with attachment anxiety may perpetrate IPV as a pursuit strategy, in which they attempt to avoid rejection or regain their partner's attention, respect, or love. For anxious individuals, IPV may be seen as a form of protest in response to perceived rejection or unresponsiveness. Violent behaviors would be triggered by the individual's own insecurities (e.g., fear that the partner will leave) or by the partner's perceived inappropriate behavior (e.g., unavailability; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Attachment avoidance would be related to the perpetration of IPV as an inappropriate attempt to maintain distance from a partner or to free avoidant individuals from insistent and intrusive demands, as they do not tolerate proximity (e.g., Allison et al., 2008; Spencer et al., 2021). Individuals with attachment insecurities are typically less able to regulate emotions arising from managing proximity and distance with their partner, increasing their risk to act impulsively and perpetrate IPV (Spencer et al., 2021). The maladaptive thoughts and behaviors elicited by attachment insecurities may also lead to dysfunctional patterns of interaction with the romantic partner and to lower relationship satisfaction (Bonache et al., 2019).

The Role of Dysfunctional Communication Patterns

When faced with conflicts, insecure partners tend to express less affection, compromise less frequently, experience more post-conflict distress, and use coercion, dysfunctional conflict resolution and attacks more frequently (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Communication is therefore a relevant variable to examine when studying IPV, as couples engaging in IPV (e.g., insults, humiliation) may show communication weaknesses that can potentially lead to an escalation of violence (Love et al., 2020). Among dysfunctional conflict resolution styles, the "I demand/my partner withdraws" communication pattern is one of the factors most strongly related to the perpetration of IPV (Love et al., 2020). This pattern occurs when the individual, often the anxiously attached one, pressures the other partner to respond to their demand, for example, by criticizing, complaining, or insulting, while the partner, often the avoidant one, withdraws into inaction or silence (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Fournier & Brassard, 2010). The "my partner demands/I withdraw communication pattern", on the contrary, occurs when the partner pressures the individual to respond to their demand while the individual withdraws. The demand/demand pattern occurs when both partners accuse, insult, or blame each other (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). These patterns tend to intensify, due to both partners' needs remaining unmet, and therefore, can lead to an escalation of violence (Fournier et al., 2011; Love et al., 2020).

Dysfunctional communication patterns have been related to attachment (e.g., Domingue & Mollen, 2009; Millwood & Waltz, 2008). For example, in Domingue and Mollen's (2009) study of couples, those in which both members presented attachment insecurities used more demand/demand and I demand/my partner withdraws communication patterns than those in which only one or neither partner presented attachment insecurities. Attachment-related anxiety has been associated with a "pursuer or blaming role" (i.e., I demand/my partner withdraws, demand/demand; e.g., Bonache et al., 2019; Dugal et al., 2021). Anxious individuals are more prone to intrusive and coercive behavior, which may be used to restore relational closeness. They also have the tendency to be persistent in an unpleasant interaction (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Attachment avoidance has been associated more strongly with a "defensive or withdrawer role" (i.e., my partner demands/I withdraw; e.g., Bonache et al., 2019; Dugal et al., 2021). Avoidant individuals are more prone to emotional control (i.e., bottling up emotions) and to lower levels of conversational involvement. They have the tendency to be distant and to adopt disinterested communication styles. When faced with psychological or physical closeness with an insistent partner, avoidant individuals might use IPV to distance themselves (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Dysfunctional communication patterns have also been associated with IPV perpetration. Love et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis found that the use of the demand/withdraw communication pattern was one of the strongest risk factors for IPV in both clinical and non-clinical samples. Fournier et al.'s (2011) study of 55 help-seeking men found an indirect and positive association between attachment anxiety, but not avoidance, and physical and psychological IPV, via the

"I demand/my partner withdraws" communication pattern. Dugal et al.'s (2021) recent study of couples from the community found an indirect association between attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) and sexual coercion victimization and perpetration via the demand/withdraw communication patterns. Finally, their results showed an indirect association between attachment avoidance and sexual coercion perpetration via the demand/demand communication pattern (Dugal et al., 2021). These results all support the relevant role of dysfunctional communication patterns to understand how attachment insecurities may contribute to IPV perpetration. Indeed, people with attachment insecurities would be more inclined to resort to dysfunctional communication patterns because of the hyperactivation (anxiety; demands) or deactivation (avoidance; withdraws) of their attachment system.

The Role of Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction, which refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of relationship quality at a given time (Bradbury et al., 2000; Sabourin et al., 2005), may also provide insight into why more insecure individuals perpetrate IPV. According to Candel and Turliuc's (2019) meta-analysis of 132 studies, anxiety and avoidance were significantly related to lower relationship satisfaction in adults, regardless of gender. Low relationship satisfaction has also been repeatedly associated with physical IPV perpetration (see meta-analyses by Love et al., 2020; Stith et al., 2008). Fournier et al.'s (2011) cross-sectional study of 55 men seeking help found an indirect and positive relationship between attachment anxiety, but not avoidance, and their psychological IPV perpetration through their lower relationship satisfaction. A second study, by Lefebvre et al. (2021), including couples in therapy, showed that it was rather the partners' own attachment avoidance that was associated with their own perpetration of psychological and physical IPV through relationship dissatisfaction.

Another cross-sectional study showed a different sequence in the links between these variables. Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan's (2021) study of community couples found that men and women with anxious attachment were at greater risk of perpetrating psychological violence, which in turn was related to their own lower relationship satisfaction. A single longitudinal study by Gou and Woodin (2017), conducted with couples transitioning to parenthood, found a direct and indirect association between men's prenatal romantic attachment insecurities and their perpetration of psychological IPV at two years postpartum via their lower relationship satisfaction. This study appears to support the explanatory role of low satisfaction in the attachment-violence associations. Overall, past research suggests that lower relationship satisfaction also play a role in the link between attachment insecurities and IPV. People with attachment insecurities are more likely to present lower relationship satisfaction due to the hyperactivation (anxiety; e.g., perceiving more conflict in the couple, pessimism, doubts about their partner's love for them) or deactivation (avoidance; e.g., offering little support to their partner, bottling up emotions, distrust) of their attachment system. In turn, lower relationship satisfaction may lead to negative and hostile behaviors with one's partner, which increases the risk of engaging in IPV (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

The studies reviewed here have some limitations. Most included only one or two types of IPV, sexual violence and coercive control being understudied, and one or two types of dysfunctional communication patterns. In addition, they were conducted among relatively small samples and very few included IPV perpetrators seeking help. To address these limitations, the current study simultaneously examines physical, psychological, sexual violence, and coercive control, and three types of dysfunctional communication patterns, including the demand/demand pattern, which is often overlooked in research. By examining more types of IPV in a larger clinical sample of individuals consulting for IPV-related difficulties, it may be possible to identify avenues for prevention and intervention specific to IPV perpetrators seeking help.

Objective and Hypothesis

The aim of this study is to examine the direct and indirect associations between participants' attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) and their IPV perpetration (physical, psychological, sexual, coercive control), through their use of dysfunctional communication patterns (demand/demand, I demand/my partner withdraws, my partner demands/I withdraw) and their lower relationship satisfaction. The first hypothesis (H1) states that there would be direct and positive associations between attachment insecurities and all types of IPV perpetration. Although fewer studies have examined sexual IPV and coercive control, we expected a similar pattern of results based on attachment theory. The second hypothesis (H2) suggests the presence of indirect and positive associations between attachment insecurities and IPV through the use of dysfunctional communication patterns. More specifically, attachment anxiety would be associated with higher perpetrated IPV through the demand/demand and the I demand/my partner withdraws communication patterns (H2a), whereas attachment avoidance would be associated with higher perpetrated IPV through the demand/demand and the my partner demands/I

withdraw communication patterns (H2b). The third hypothesis (H3) stipulates that there would be indirect and positive associations between attachment insecurities and IPV through lower relationship satisfaction.

Method

Participants and Procedure

This study included a sample of 613 Canadian adults seeking help for relationship or IPV-related difficulties, aged between 18 and 77 ($M = 38.3$, $SD = 11.6$). In terms of gender identity, most participants identified as male (99.5%), while three identified as non-binary (0.5%). A vast majority of participants described their sexual orientation as heterosexual (95.4%), while some reported being bisexual (1.5%), gay (1.3%), pansexual (0.5%), in questioning (0.3%), or two-spirited (0.2%). Some of them preferred not to answer the question (0.8%). Most participants were born in Canada (88.9%), but some were born elsewhere in the Americas (e.g., Haiti, Colombia; 3.3%), in Africa (e.g., Algeria, Morocco; 3.9%), in Europe (e.g., France, Belgium; 3.1%), in Asia (e.g., Russia; 0.7%) or in Oceania (French Polynesia; 0.1%). Participants were in a cohabiting relationship (57.4%), married (22.5%), in a non-cohabiting relationship (16.0%), in the early stages of dating (3.6%), or in a polyamorous relationship (0.5%). Most participants (75.5%) had children. Participants were employed part- or full-time (66.0%), in school part- or full-time (2.0%), or reported another occupation (e.g., on medical leave, no paid occupation; 32.0%). The majority had a high school diploma (50.1%) and their median annual income was between CAN$35,000 and 39,000.

Participants were recruited as part of a larger study involving 13 Quebec organizations providing help to individuals with relationship or IPV-related difficulties. Each organization followed a standardized clinical protocol in which all new users answer a mandatory series of questionnaires (30–40 min) via the secure Qualtrics platform, using an electronic tablet, a computer or verbally, accompanied by a practitioner. To participate in the study, users had to consent to the use of their data for research purposes. Each participating organization received a summary of each user's responses, which allowed the therapists to better tailor their intervention. Data was collected from April 2021 to December 2021. To be included in the present study, participants had to be assigned male at birth or self-identify as male or non-binary, be over 18 years of age, and be able to speak and read French (94.6%), English (5.1%), or Spanish (0.3%). They also had to be in a relationship when entering the service to answer the relationship measures. Of the 1285 participants who initially took part in the research, 22 were excluded because they were not aged 18 years or older and 650 were excluded because they were not in an intimate relationship when entering therapy.

Instruments

Intimate Partner Violence. A short form of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2S; Straus & Douglas, 2004) was used to assess the frequency of psychological, physical, and sexual IPV in the past 12 months. Participants responded to items measuring psychological (e.g., I insulted or swore at my partner; 2 items), physical (e.g., I pushed or shoved my partner; 2 items) and sexual (e.g., I insisted on sex when my partner did not want to, but did not use physical force; 2 items) IPV on a scale ranging from 0 (*this never happened*) to 6 (*more than 20 times in the past year*). As suggested by Straus and Douglas (2004), the answers to each item were transformed into a midpoint (e.g., "3 to 5 times in the past year" was coded as 4, "more than 20 times" was coded as 25) and then summed to create a total score for each subscale. A high score refers to a greater frequency of psychological, physical, or sexual IPV perpetrated in the past year. Although it was not possible to calculate reliability coefficients for the two items from each subscale in the present study, a global omega coefficient (ω) of 0.68 was found for the six items. Adequate internal consistency of this short scale has been demonstrated (Straus & Douglas, 2004). Construct validity was also demonstrated with correlations with the CTS2 (Straus & Douglas, 2004).

Coercive Control. The Coercive Control Scale (CCS; Johnson et al., 2014) was used to assess coercive control perpetrated by participants in the past 12 months. Four items (e.g., I tried to limit my partner's contact with family and friends) were assessed using a seven-point scale ranging from 0 (*this never happened*) to 6 (*more than 20 times in the past year*). Answers were recoded in the same way as the CTS2S to create the total coercive control score. A higher score indicated a greater frequency of coercive control used in the past year. In the present sample, an Omega reliability coefficient of 0.61 was found for these four items. Adequate internal consistency of the CCS was demonstrated by Johnson et al. (2014). According to Johnson et al. (2014), several items on the CCS are consistent with those on the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Survey (PMWS; Tolman, 1989), the validity of which has been tested using correlations with other measures (Tolman, 1999).

Attachment. Attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) were assessed using the 12-item short version of the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR-12; Lafontaine

et al., 2016). Participants were asked to respond to a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The two subscales' scores were calculated by averaging their respective six items. High scores indicated high levels of attachment anxiety (e.g., I worry about being abandoned) or avoidance (e.g., I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners). In the present sample, omega coefficients were adequate for anxiety (ω = 0.90) and avoidance (ω = 0.83). Reliability of the ECR-12 was demonstrated for anxiety and avoidance by Lafontaine et al. (2016). Factorial validity was demonstrated through confirmatory factor analyses conducted on five samples, including couples consulting for relationship difficulties (Lafontaine et al., 2016).

Dysfunctional Communication Patterns. The use of dysfunctional communication patterns was measured using five items from the shortened and validated version of the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ-SF; Christensen & Heavey, 1990). The demand/demand (e.g., Both my partner and I blame, accuse, and criticize one another; 1 item), I demand/my partner withdraws (e.g., I am insistent and make requests while my partner withdraws, remains silent, or refuses to continue the discussion; 2 items), and my partners demands/I withdraw (e.g., my partner is insistent and makes demands while I withdraw, remain silent, or refuse to continue the discussion; 2 items) communication pattern items were answered on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 9 (*very likely*). A high mean score referred to an increased use of each dysfunctional communication pattern. Both predictive and discriminant validity have been demonstrated (Guay et al., 2003; Noller & White, 1990).

Relationship Satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was measured with a shortened and validated version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-4; Sabourin et al., 2005). Three items (e.g., Do you confide in your partner?) were rated on a six-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*all the time*) and the fourth item was rated on a seven-point scale from 0 (*extremely unhappy*) to 6 (*perfect*). The four items were summed to create the participants' relationship satisfaction score, a higher score indicating a high level of relationship satisfaction. The internal consistency of the DAS-4 was adequate in the present sample (ω = 0.77). The DAS-4 has been correlated with the DAS-32 ($r = .94$) and its predictive validity has been validated with a longitudinal study examining the prediction of separation and divorce (Sabourin et al., 2005).

Data Analyses

Descriptive (e.g., mean, standard deviation) and correlational analyses were conducted in SPSS27 software to identify preliminary associations between the studied variables as well as to examine normality, patterns of missing data, and the presence of extreme values. Preliminary analyses (e.g., ANOVAs, correlations) were conducted to determine if certain sociodemographic variables (e.g., age, cohabitation, children) should be controlled for in the main analyses. To test the three research hypotheses, a path analysis was conducted in M*plus*8 software, which allows for the simultaneous testing of direct and indirect associations as well as the handling of missing data, while limiting non-normality bias. To test the significance of the indirect associations between attachment insecurities and IPV perpetrated via dysfunctional communication patterns and relationship satisfaction, a resampling procedure (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) on 10,000 samples was conducted to obtain confidence intervals (95%) around the regression coefficients of the indirect effects. To test if the model fit the data well, four fit indices were calculated; a non-statistically significant chi-square value, a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) value of 0.90 or greater, a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value of less than 0.06, and a Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of less than 0.08 indicated a good fit between the data and the model (Kline, 2016).

Results

Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlations for all studied variables are presented in Table 1. In the past year, 82.2% of the participants reported having resorted to psychological IPV, 34.2% to physical IPV, 12.7% to sexual IPV, and 61.4% to coercive control at least once. Skewness and kurtosis indices revealed that attachment insecurities, communication patterns, relationship satisfaction, and psychological IPV scores did not depart from normality. However, departure from normality was found for physical and sexual IPV as well as coercive control, suggesting that a robust estimator (MLR) should be selected for the path analysis. Missing values (0–3.3%) were completely at random according to Little's MCAR test, $\chi^2(65) = 50.29$, $p = .910$. Preliminary analyses (correlations, ANOVAs) revealed that no sociodemographic variables (age, couple status, number of children) were found to be relevant to control for in

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Pearson's Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Attachment anxiety	-									
2. Attachment avoidance	0.07	-								
3. Psychological violence	0.19**	0.14**	-							
4. Physical violence	0.09*	0.08	0.39**	-						
5. Sexual violence	0.07**	−0.02	0.18**	0.25**	-					
6. Coercive control	0.12**	0.10*	0.27**	0.20**	0.10*	-				
7. Relationship satisfaction	−0.27**	−0.54**	−0.33**	0.20**	−0.12**	−0.28**	-			
8. Demand/demand	0.31**	0.17**	0.37**	0.10*	0.11**	0.20**	−0.46**	-		
9. Demand/withdraw	0.41**	0.05	0.34**	0.11*	0.22**	0.16**	−0.35**	0.54**	-	
10. Withdraw/demand	0.26**	0.26**	0.29**	0.11**	0.06	0.24**	−0.50**	0.61**	0.48**	-
n	613	612	606	593	604	609	613	601	603	603
M	3.70	2.76	9.28	1.34	0.57	4.59	13.57	4.40	4.04	4.34
SD	1.74	1.36	9.89	4.43	2.51	8.08	3.79	2.73	2.38	2.46
Skewness	0.13	0.60	1.08	7.03	7.36	2.99	−0.25	0.22	0.32	0.22
Kurtosis	−1.06	−0.23	0.42	60.92	63.06	12.86	−0.22	-1.26	−0.97	-1.09

Notes. Demand/withdraw: I Demand / my partner withdraws. Withdraw/demand: I withdraw / my partner demands. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

the main analysis (all $ps > 0.05$). The path analysis model included all direct and indirect associations between attachment insecurities and perpetrated IPV through communications patterns and relationship satisfaction (see Fig. 1). Fit indices revealed that the model shows a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(2) = 0.055$, $p = .973$, CFI = 1.000, SRMR = 0.001, RMSEA = 0.000, 90% CI [0.000; 0.000].

Direct Associations

Figure 1 shows that attachment-related anxiety and avoidance were positively related to the demand/demand and my partner demands/I withdraw communication patterns, and negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Only attachment anxiety was related to a higher use of the I demand/my partner withdraws pattern. The demand/demand communication pattern was positively related to psychological IPV only. The I demand/my partner withdraws communication pattern was positively related to psychological violence, sexual violence, and coercive control, whereas the my partner demands/I withdraw communication pattern was not related to any type of IPV. Relationship satisfaction was negatively related to all types of IPV. Beyond these regression paths (and the following indirect) associations, only attachment anxiety remained directly related to a higher perpetration of coercive control. All direct links between attachment avoidance and IPV perpetration were non-significant.

Indirect Associations

Table 2 presents the significant indirect associations between attachment insecurities and perpetrated IPV through dysfunctional communication patterns (H2) and relationship satisfaction (H3). In partial support of H2, results showed that attachment anxiety and avoidance were related to higher perpetration of psychological violence through a higher use of the demand/demand pattern. In partial support of H2a, attachment anxiety was related to a higher perpetration of psychological and sexual IPV as well as coercive control through the I demand/my partner withdraws pattern. In contrast with H2b, attachment avoidance was not related to perpetrated IPV through the my partner demands/I withdraw communication pattern. In support of H3, attachment anxiety and avoidance were positively related to all four types of perpetrated IPV through lower relationship satisfaction.

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to extend the findings of previous research by examining the direct and indirect associations between participants' attachment insecurities and their perpetration of multiple types of IPV (psychological, physical, sexual, coercive control) via their use of three dysfunctional communication patterns and their lower relationship satisfaction. The results showed that higher attachment anxiety was directly related to higher perpetration of coercive control. Second, results revealed that both attachment-related anxiety and avoidance were indirectly related to a higher perpetration of psychological violence through a higher report of the demand/demand communication pattern. The results also revealed that attachment anxiety was indirectly related to a higher perpetration of psychological violence, sexual violence, and coercive control via a higher report of the I demand/my partner withdraws communication pattern. Attachment anxiety and avoidance were also positively related to the my partner demands/I withdraw communication pattern, but this pattern was not related

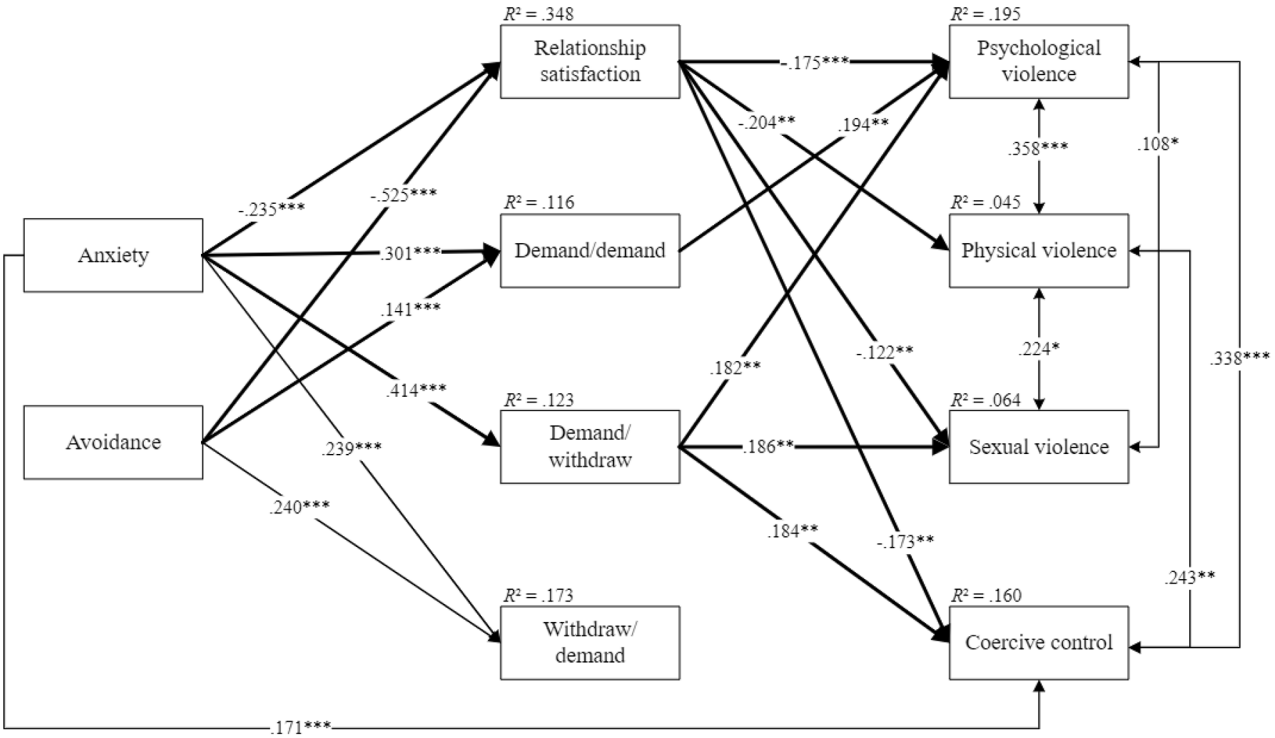

Fig. 1 Communication patterns and relationship satisfaction as intermediary variables of the associations between attachment insecurities and perpetration of IPV in individuals seeking help. *Note.* Standardized coefficients are shown. Correlations between predictors (anxiety and avoidance, $p = .105$) and intermediary variables (communication patterns and relationship satisfaction, all $ps < 0.001$) were included but not shown. Bold arrows represent significant indirect effects. A second model was tested with Windsorized data to reduce departure from normality due to outliers in IPV scores. This model yield similar results and did not differ from the current model, so we kept the model with our original data. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

to any form of IPV. Finally, both attachment anxiety and avoidance were related to the four types of perpetrated IPV via lower relationship satisfaction.

Attachment Anxiety, Dysfunctional Communication Patterns, and IPV

The results, partially supporting H1, show that there is a direct association between participants' attachment anxiety and their perpetration of coercive control. Indeed, in anxious individuals, hypervigilance toward signs of abandonment or rejection by their partner could lead them to perceive various situations as threatening to their relationship (e.g., partner's unavailability). Thus, anxious individuals, who may have difficulty regulating their emotions, may be at greater risk of using violent behaviors such as coercive control to regain a sense of security (e.g., watching their partner, forbidding them to see their friends; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Stevens, 2014). This would be an inappropriate, yet reassuring, way to regain closeness with their partner and thus, satisfy their attachment needs (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

The results, partially supporting H2, also show that participants' attachment anxiety is indirectly related to their higher perpetration of psychological violence through their greater use of the demand/demand communication pattern. These results are not surprising, as anxious individuals are more likely to make demands for reassurance or attention from their partner (Fournier & Brassard, 2010). If these demands are unanswered, they can turn into blame and criticism, which can lead the partner to respond and attack in return. This can result in an escalation of conflict in which each partner may intensify their own demands or criticism, increasing the risk of using IPV to force their partner to meet their demands (Papp et al., 2009). Enacting this systemic pattern and the associated conflict escalation can therefore quickly lead to psychological violence (e.g., insults, humiliation).

In partial support of H2, the results reveal that participants' attachment anxiety is indirectly associated with their higher perpetration of psychological violence, sexual violence, and coercive control through the I demand/my partner withdraws communication pattern. Indeed, the anxious individual may be particularly insistent in their demands for commitment or reassurance from their partner, causing the partner to gradually withdraw (Fournier et al., 2011). Because of the initial need that remains unmet, the

Table 2 Significant Indirect Associations between Attachment Insecurity and Perpetrated IPV via Communication Patterns and Relationship Satisfaction

Indirect effect	*B*	*SE*	*p*	95% CI
Attachment anxiety				
Psychological violence				
through relationship satisfaction	0.041	0.012	0.001	[0.020, 0.069]
through demand/demand	0.058	0.019	0.002	[0.024,
through demand/withdraw	0.076	0.023	0.001	0.100] [0.033, 0.124]
Physical violence				
through relationship satisfaction	0.048	0.019	0.012	[0.012, 0.091]
Sexual violence				
through relationship satisfaction	0.029	0.011	0.011	[0.007, 0.053]
through demand/withdraw	0.077	0.025	0.002	[0.028, 0.127]
Coercive control				
through relationship satisfaction	0.041	0.014	0.003	[0.016, 0.072]
through demand/withdraw	0.076	0.026	0.003	[0.027, 0.133]
Attachment avoidance				
Psychological violence				
through relationship satisfaction	0.092	0.026	< 0.001	[0.044, 0.144]
through demand/demand	0.027	0.011	0.013	[0.010, 0.055]
Physical violence				
through relationship satisfaction	0.107	0.040	0.007	[0.025, 0.188]
Sexual violence				
through relationship satisfaction	0.064	0.025	0.010	[0.014, 0.114]
Coercive control				
through relationship satisfaction	0.091	0.029	0.002	[0.033, 0.151]

Notes. Demand/withdraw: I Demand / my partner withdraws. Withdraw/demand: I withdraw / my partner demands

individual might intensify their demands toward the partner, who could further withdraw into inaction. This withdraw may increase frustration for the anxious individual, which could lead them to resort to IPV towards their partner (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Velotti et al., 2018). This violence could be expressed through insults or humiliation, but also in the form of coercive control, where the anxious individual could use control tactics to regain proximity with the withdrawing partner and lower their anxiety. It could also be expressed as sexual violence, where the anxious individual could be insistent or coercive towards sexuality, which they would use as an inadequate strategy to seek reassurance (Dugal et al., 2021). Indeed, anxious individuals tend to use sexuality to alleviate their insecurities and to confirm their partner's love for them (Birnbaum, 2010).

Attachment Avoidance, Dysfunctional Communication Patterns, and IPV

In support of H2, the results revealed a positive and indirect association between attachment avoidance and psychological IPV through the demand/demand communication pattern. This result may seem counterintuitive, as avoidant individuals tend to withdraw during conflicts (Fournier & Brassard, 2010). However, after repeated attempts of the avoidant individual to withdraw from the conflict, the partner's demands may intensify. By failing to withdraw, the avoidant individual may turn to psychological violence (e.g., blaming, threats) to restore a comfortable level of distance from their partner and thus, enter a demand/demand communication pattern rather than a my partner demands/I withdraw pattern (Bartholomew & Allison, 2006; Feeney, 2016). It is also possible that avoidant individuals tend to repress their needs and emotions and, through accumulation, come to express them by yelling, insulting, or criticizing (Brassard et al., 2014). Therefore, although avoidant individuals typically find themselves in a withdrawer position, it is not the my partner demands/I withdraw pattern that would explain their perpetration of IPV.

Attachment Insecurities, Relationship Satisfaction, and IPV

Finally, in support of H3, the results showed an indirect and positive association between both attachment anxiety and avoidance and all types of IPV via lower relationship satisfaction. Attachment anxiety is associated with more negative attributions and affects towards the relationship (e.g., more perceived conflict, pessimism), which may contribute to lower relationship satisfaction. The anxious individuals are more likely to overthink situations and their partner's behaviors due to hyperactivation of their attachment system in the face of a potential threat to their relationship, negatively coloring their relationship satisfaction (Candel & Turliuc, 2019). The avoidant individuals, in contrast, are more likely to be suspicious, pessimistic, give little support, and express little need due to the deactivation of their attachment system, also leading to the deterioration of their relationship satisfaction over time (Candel & Turliuc, 2019; Gou & Woodin, 2017). According to Bartholomew and Cobb (2011), partners' attachment insecurities and the dyadic context of lower relationship satisfaction would contribute to the risk of perpetrating IPV. Indeed, individuals with lower relationship satisfaction tend to respond with negativity, criticism, or hostility, which contributes – in

addition to communication patterns – to the escalation of violence (Bartholomew & Cobb, 2011; Johnson & Whiffen, 2003; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The results of the current study support and expand these findings by showing that participants with attachment insecurities report greater use of psychological, physical, sexual IPV and coercive control, partly because they are dissatisfied or unhappy in their relationship.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study relied on a large sample of individuals seeking help and considered four types of IPV, including sexual violence and coercive control, which are often overlooked. It also included three types of dysfunctional communication patterns. All associations among these variables were tested in a single model, which allowed considering pre-existing associations between the variables under study. However, there are some limitations to this study. First, it did not rely on a dyadic design that would include data from the partner. As mentioned by Bartholomew and Cobb (2011), it is important to consider IPV as a dyadic phenomenon and therefore, to include both partners. Second, since men, who constitute the majority of our sample, tend to underestimate their own violence, it would be relevant for future studies to consider the other partner's perspective as another source of information (Myhill, 2015). Third, it would be relevant to control for social desirability, as male perpetrators of IPV might be prone to report less violence than they actually perpetrate (Emery, 2010). Fourth, this study used a correlational and cross-sectional design which did not permit for the determination of the temporal sequence of associations among the variables (or establishing causality). In future research, a longitudinal design with multiple measurements could contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms preceding the perpetration of IPV. Fifth, the inclusion criterion of being in a relationship at the time of the study without asking about relationship length could have induced additional bias. If the relationship was shorter than one year, it is possible that some of the IPV measures, all assessing IPV in the past 12 months, may be capturing events that preceded the current relationship, which may weaken the argument that dysfunctional communication patterns with the current partner predicted IPV perpetration (especially if it occurred in a different relationship). Finally, generalizability of these findings is limited to heterosexual and cisgender men experiencing relationship difficulties. Research relying on larger samples is needed to provide a picture of women, trans, or non-binary perpetrators of IPV, since only 3 non-binary people took part in the study.

Implications for Intervention and Research

This study has several implications, including a better understanding of the relational context and characteristics of IPV perpetrators to prevent violent behaviors. It also supports the relevance of assessing attachment, communication patterns, and relationship satisfaction to identify individuals who are more at risk of perpetrating IPV and to target some factors to focus on during treatment. For example, it would be relevant to teach constructive non-violent communication skills in therapy to stop the escalation of violence that dysfunctional communication patterns may bring. Our results also highlight that each partner may contribute to communication difficulties. Although couple therapy for IPV is not recommended in the presence of severe unidirectional violence (i.e., intimate terrorism; Lussier et al., 2008; Stith et al., 2011), it has been recommended for couples experiencing dysfunctional relational patterns that escalate to IPV (low to moderate severity; Karakurt et al., 2016). Our results support the use of couple approaches such as Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT; Johnson, 2020), which helps foster secure attachment as well as relationship satisfaction, in the context of situational IPV. In this approach, attachment needs and insecurities are seen as underlying each partner's position in a dysfunctional interaction cycle (often labelled demand-withdraw or pursuit-distance) that can lead to IPV (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020). EFT therapists create a safe therapeutic space where they help partners understand the needs and fears underneath their problematic behaviors, regulate their emotions, and express these needs and emotions in a respectful way to de-escalate the conflict. Taking responsibility for one's behavior in the negative cycle becomes a therapeutic goal, and the interaction cycle is explored to help the partners learn safer ways to get their needs met (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020).

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