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Differences in treatment adherence, program completion, and recidivism among batterer subtypes

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to cross-validate Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart's typology in a Spanish sample of court-referred intimate partner violence batterers. The study also analyzed the typology's capability to predict treatment attendance, completion, and IPV recidivism two years after the treatment. The sample consisted of 210 batterers court referred to a batterer intervention program. Using cluster analysis, three batterer subtypes were identified in accordance with the original typology: family-only batterers, borderline/dysphoric, and generally violent-antisocial. The typology predicted program attendance, completion, and recidivism. Batterers from the generally violent-antisocial group attended a significantly lower number of sessions, presented the highest dropout levels, and had the highest recidivism rate followed by borderline/dysphoric and family-only batterers. These findings suggest that in order to increase the effectiveness of batterer intervention programs, batterers' different needs and risk profiles should be taken into account.

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Diferencias en la adherencia al tratamiento, finalización del programa y recaídas entre subtipos de maltratadores

RESUMEN

Este estudio tiene por objeto la validación cruzada de la tipología de Holtzworth-Munroe y Stuart en una muestra española de maltratadores de pareja remitidos por el tribunal. También analiza la capacidad de la tipología de predecir la asistencia al tratamiento, su finalización y las recaídas a los dos años del tratamiento. La muestra constaba de 210 maltratadores derivados por un tribunal a un programa de intervención. Mediante un análisis de clústers se descubrieron tres subtipos de maltratadores, según la tipología original: maltratadores familiares únicamente, límites/disfóricos y generalmente violentos-antisociales. La tipología predijo la asistencia al programa, su finalización y las recaídas. Los maltratadores del grupo generalmente violento-antisocial asistieron a un número de sesiones significativamente menor, mostraban el mayor grado de abandono y el mayor índice de recaídas, seguidos del grupo de límites/disfóricos y de los maltratadores familiares únicamente. Dichos resultados indican que para aumentar la eficacia de los programas de intervención con maltratadores hay que tener en consideración sus diferentes necesidades y los perfiles de riesgo.

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One of the main objectives in the field of intervention with intimate partner violence (IPV) batterers is to determine the efficacy of treatment programs in preventing recidivism. The meta-analyses that have evaluated batterer intervention programs (BIPs) reveal limited efficacy (e.g., Arias, Arce, & Vilariño, 2013; Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004; Eckhardt et al., 2013; Feder & Wilson, 2005). One explanation may be that current programs are "one size fits all" and therefore do not take into account the variety of characteristics, needs, and risk levels that differentiate IPV batterers (Cantos &

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O'Leary, 2014; Carbajosa, Boira, & Tomás-Aragonés, 2013; Coulter & VandeWeerd, 2009; Gover, 2011). This perspective has spawned an interest in recent decades to develop a typology with which to classify IPV batterers according to their characteristics. The study of typologies is based on the notion that different types of batterers can respond in varied ways to treatments and can present different levels of recidivism risk. Current interventions might therefore be more efficacious if they were adapted to the different batterer types (Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005; Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2003; Huss & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2006).

In this context, numerous studies have identified various IPV batterer subtypes. Most studies report two (Goldstein, Cantos, Brenner, Verborg, & Kosson, 2016), three (Huss & Ralston, 2008; Stoops, Bennett, & Vincent, 2010), or four subtypes (Eckhardt, Holtzworth-Munroe, Norlander, Sibley, & Cahill, 2008; Thijssen & de Ruiter, 2011). Of all the classifications proposed, the theoretical typology developed by Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart (1994) has attracted the most attention and has been validated in numerous studies involving different populations, contexts, and countries (Cunha & Gonçalves, 2013; Johnson et al., 2006; Stalans, Yarnold, Seng, Olson, & Repp, 2004; Thijssen & de Ruiter, 2011; Walsh et al., 2010). This model proposes three batterer subtypes based on dimensions of frequency, severity, and generality of the violence, and psychopathological characteristics. The first subtype, the family-only (FO) batterer, is characterized by low levels of physical and psychological violence against the partner and presents low rates of pathologies, substance abuse, and criminal activity. The second subtype, the borderline/dysphoric (BD) batterer, shows higher levels of physical and psychological violence than the first group and is likely to be violent outside the intimate partner relationship and to be more involved in criminal activities. At a pathological level this group typically presents borderline and dependent personality traits, with high levels of depression, impulsivity, anger, and substance abuse. Finally, the generally violent-antisocial batterer (GVA) presents higher levels of all types of violence and criminal activity than the previous two subgroups, and has a notably higher presence of antisocial personality traits. In a subsequent study, Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, and Stuart (2000) validated their theoretical model in a community sample of IPV batterers. The study confirmed the three subtypes described, but also included a new subtype: the low-level antisocial (LLA) batterer. This group of batterers falls between the FO and BD subtypes in severity of partner and generalized violence, and has a higher presence of antisocial traits than the FO and BD subtypes, but lower than the GVA subtype. A subsequent follow-up study of the same sample examined the stability of this typology. Despite some inconsistencies, the levels of violence continued to be lower in the FO group and more severe in the GVA group (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2003).

Despite the widespread support for Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart's (1994) typology, it is not without its limitations. The distribution of the batterer subtypes varies according to the research setting, the sample (communities, court-referred, or prison), and the instruments and techniques used to determine the clusters (Huss & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2006; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Huss, & Ramsey, 2000). In their review of Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart's (1994) typology, Dixon and Browne (2003) compared various studies using voluntary and court-referred samples of batterers. The results revealed significant differences in the proportions of FO and GVA subtypes in the two sample types. Specifically, the court-referred samples had fewer FO-type batterers than the voluntary samples (38% vs. 59%, respectively), and a higher proportion of BD (24% vs. 16%) and GVA batterers (36% vs. 23%). Recent studies using different characterization techniques and with samples mainly comprising court-referred batterers continue to show this pattern of variation in percentages and in the number of batterer subtypes within the same context. Hence, in studies that

classify the sample in three subtypes the figures range between 25% and 38% of FO batterers, 42% and 48% of BD batterers, and 13% and 23% of GVA batterers (Huss & Ralston, 2008; Stoops et al., 2010). In other studies classifying the sample into four subtypes (including LLA), the same variations persist, with figures ranging between 30% and 37% of FO batterers, 24% and 43% of LLA batterers, 20% and 21% of BD batterers, and 6% and 18% of GVA batterers (Eckhardt et al., 2008; Thijssen & de Ruiter, 2011). Bearing in mind that the proportion of each batterer subtype varies from one context to another (voluntary vs. court referred), and even among studies carried out in the same setting, it would appear that these typologies need to be validated in specific intervention contexts.

In the Spanish setting, the study of typologies has mainly focused on limited samples of IPV batterers in prison or a combination of court-referred and prison batterers (Loinaz, 2014; Llor-Esteban, García-Jiménez, Ruiz-Hernández & Godoy-Fernández, 2016; Ruiz-Hernández, García-Jiménez, Llor-Esteban, & Godoy-Fernández, 2015). In the court-referred context only, Graña, Redondo, Muñoz Rivas, and Cantos (2014) classified a large sample of IPV batterers into three types according to risk level (low, moderate, and high), similar to the typology proposed by Cavanaugh and Gelles (2005).

Apart from their descriptive interest, typologies are also used because of their capability to predict the future behavior of men who batter. Few studies have assessed the relationship between typologies and program outcomes. In terms of dropout rates, studies with mixed samples of voluntary and court-referred batterers classified into the three subtypes of the original typology show significant differences in the proportion of batterers who complete their programs (between 66% and 78% for FO, 57% and 59% for BD and 14% and 50% for GVA) (Huss & Ralston, 2008; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000). Other studies classifying batterers into a different number of subtypes and using court-referred batterer samples report similar results. For example, Eckhardt et al. (2008) classified a sample of batterers (N = 199) into four subtypes (including LLA) and reported a 77% completion rate for the FO group, 62.7% for the LLA, 38.5% for the BD, and 9.1% for the GVA groups. Taken together, this group of studies evidences a possible pattern in dropout levels regardless of the number of clusters, the proportion of batterers in each cluster, or the techniques used to determine them. The group of batterers with the lowest risk factors (FO) is more likely to complete the treatment, followed by subtypes LLA, BD, and GVA.

With regard to recidivism, figures for repeated gender violence offenses are high, reaching up to 51% in follow-ups of up to 10 years (Richards, Jennings, Tomsich, & Gover, 2014), and around 20% after treatment (Gondolf, 1997, 2003). As with the dropout rate, recidivism appears to vary according to typologies. From a theoretical perspective, different risk levels have been associated with each subtype: low risk for FO, moderate risk for BD, and high risk for GVA (Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005). Several studies support the validity of this type of classification. For example, in a sample of court-referred batterers, Eckhardt et al. (2008) found significant differences among subtypes in relation to general criminal recidivism (17.5% for FO, 24.7% for LLA, 37.5% for BD, and 45.5% for GVA). In another study, Huss and Ralston (2008) identified the same differences in recidivism of specific IPV offenses classified into three subtypes (10.6% FO, 23.9% BD, and 39.1% GVA). As in the case of dropout rates, there seems to be a gradual increase in recidivism rates from the low-risk FO group to the high-risk GVA group profile. As well as detecting these differences, the typology has shown some capacity to predict program attendance, dropout, and recidivism. Hence, belonging to the GVA group and presenting borderline traits have been shown to be good predictors (Eckhardt et al., 2008; Huss & Ralston, 2008; Stoops et al., 2010). In sum, the results of these studies show that IPV batterers are heterogeneous