

Subdued Electrodermal Response to Empathic Induction Task in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Perpetrators

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Abstract : Empathy is a cognitive-affective capacity whose deterioration is associated with aggressive behaviour. Deficient affective processing is one of the predominant risk factors in men convicted of intimate partner violence (IPV perpetrators), since it makes their capacity to empathize very difficult. The objective of this study is to compare the response of electrodermal activity (EDA), as an indicator of emotionality, to an empathic induction task, between IPV perpetrators and men without a history of violence. The sample was composed of 51 men who attended the CONTEXTO program, with penalties for gender violence under two years, and 47 men with no history of violence. Empathic induction was achieved through the visualization of 4 negative emotional-eliciting videos taken from an emotional induction battery of videos validated for the Spanish population. The participants were asked to actively empathize with the video characters (previously pointed out). The psychophysiological recording of the EDA was accomplished by the "Vrije Universiteit Ambulatory Monitoring System (VU-AMS)." An analysis of repeated measurements was carried out with 10 intra-subject measurements (time) and "group" (IPV perpetrators and non-violent perpetrators) as the inter-subject factor. First, there were no significant differences between groups in the baseline AED levels. Yet, a significant interaction between the "time" and "group" was found with IPV perpetrators exhibiting lower EDA response than controls after the empathic induction task. These findings provide evidence of a subdued EDA response after an empathic induction task in IPV perpetrators with respect to men without a history of violence. Therefore, the lower psychophysiological activation would be indicative of difficulties in the emotional processing and response, functions that are necessary for the empathic function. Consequently, the importance of addressing possible empathic difficulties in IPV perpetrator psycho-educational programs is reinforced, putting special emphasis on the affective dimension that could hinder the empathic function.

Keywords : electrodermal activity, emotional induction, empathy, intimate partner violence

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