



# NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND THREAT PERCEPTION IN NARRATIVES FROM BATTERED WOMEN

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## INTRODUCTION

Given the high emotional impact of trauma, it is expected that traumatic narratives contain more **affective process words** than narratives about other stressful, but not traumatic, memories.

**Negative emotions words**, as well as **words about death and dying** (as an indicator of perceived threat to the personal integrity, either to oneself or to others), have been associated to a worse adjustment after trauma (e.g., Alvarez-Conrad et al., 2001).

However, the different kind of negative emotions have been rarely explored. Also, in violence victims, the use of **words related to abuses** must be considered as an indicator of threat perception.

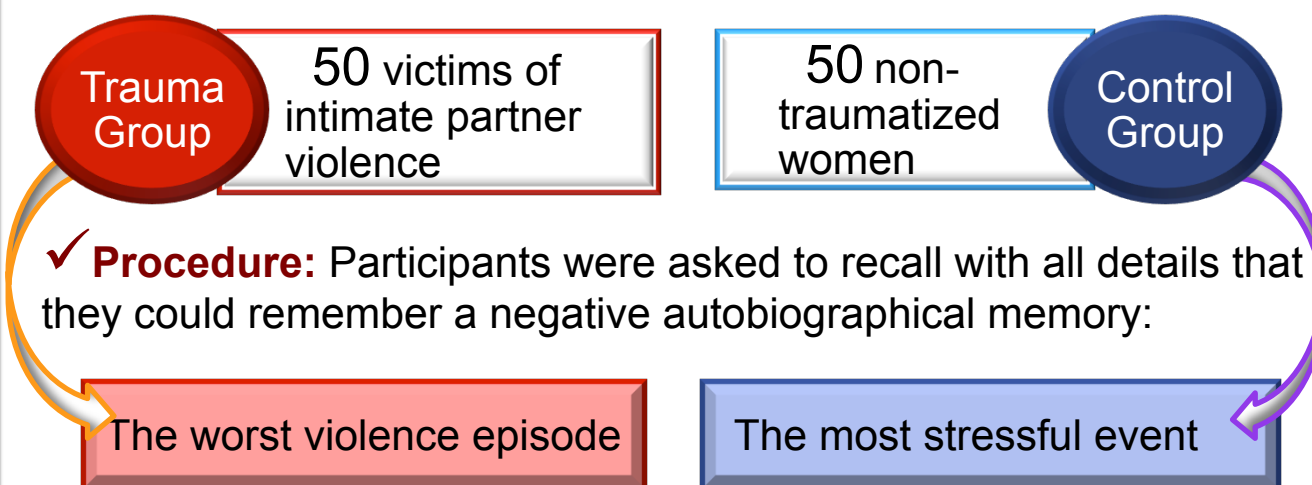
## OBJECTIVES

**Analyzing the use of negative emotions and threat perception words in trauma narratives from battered women by comparing with stressful narratives from non-traumatized women.**

**Exploring the relationship between the use of words and the development of psychological symptoms.**

## METHODS

✓ **Participants:** The sample was composed by 100 Spanish women in two groups matched by age:



✓ **Procedure:** Participants were asked to recall with all details that they could remember a negative autobiographical memory:

Oral narratives were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and linguistic variables were analyzed. Participants also filled out psychological symptoms measures.

✓ **Measures:**

Variables		Measures
Linguistic variables	Negative emotion words	Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC)
	Threat perception	
	Death words Abuse words*	
Psychological symptoms	PTSD symptoms	Global Assessment of PTSD (EGEP)
	Anxiety	Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)
	Depression	Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II)

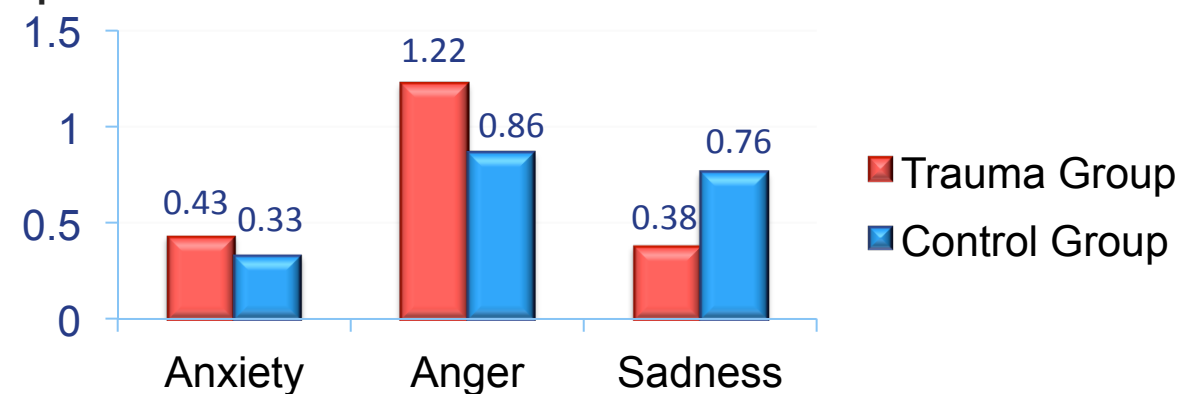
(\*) The category "Abuse words" was developed for this study. 5 clinicians expert in victimology and domestic violence judged the eligibility of the words included (e.g., *hit*, *humiliate*)

## DATA ANALYSIS

- The differences in linguistic variables between groups were explored using **U-Mann-Whitney test**. Shapiro-Wilk test was calculated.
- The relationships between linguistic variables and psychological symptoms were examined using **Pearson correlations**.

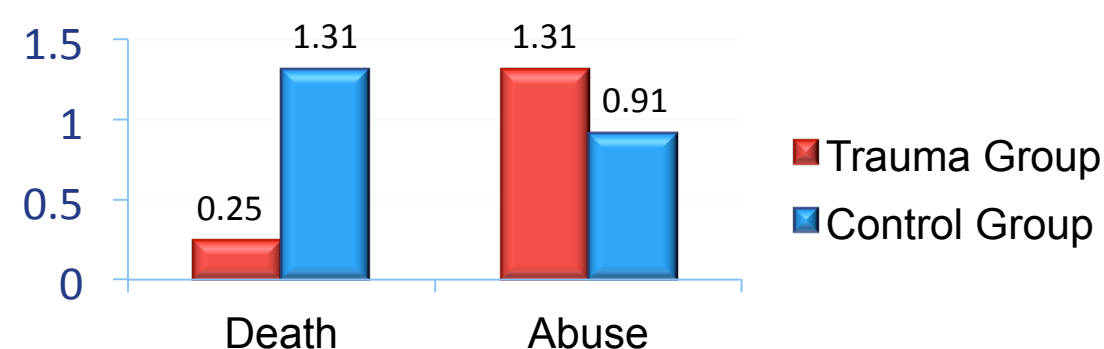
## RESULTS

Fig.1. Percentage of negative emotions for Trauma Group and Control Group



Narratives from trauma group contained significantly more words related to anxiety ( $Z=-2.103, p=.035$ ) and anger ( $Z=-3.151, p=.002$ ) than controls. There were no significant differences in the use of sadness words ( $Z=-1.412, p=.158$ ), although controls tended to report more sadness feelings.

Fig.2. Percentage of threat perception words for Trauma Group and Control Group



Trauma group used a greater number of abuse words ( $Z=-3.575, p<.001$ ), whereas among controls predominated words regarding death and dying ( $Z=-3.618, p<.001$ ).

Table 1. Correlations between linguistic variables and psychological symptoms for Trauma Group and Control Group

Variables	Trauma Group (n=50)			Control Group (n=50)		
	PTSD	Anxiety	Depress.	PTSD	Anxiety	Depress.
Negative emotions						
Anxiety	.177	-.003	-.081	-.178	-.104	-.251
Anger	.170	.251	.149	-.016	.245	.306*
Sadness	.072	.019	.095	-.123	.120	.170
Threat perception						
Death	-.031	.092	-.065	.410**	.014	.118
Abuse	.112	.121	.061	-.097	.064	.229

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

Unexpectedly, for the trauma group the use of negative emotions and words related to threat perception was not associated with any measure of psychological symptoms. However, for the control group, an increase in the use of anger words was significantly associated to depression symptoms; and death words were related to the severity of PTSD, specifically to negative cognitions and mood ( $r=.442, p=.001$ ), and arousal ( $r=.441, p=.001$ ).

## CONCLUSIONS

**Anger was the most common emotion, specially among battered women.** Depending on the nature of the stressful experience, the threat perception was evidenced in narratives through the use of different language domains.

Contrary to hypotheses, **for battered women none of linguistic variables was associated to the psychological adjustment**, while for non-traumatized women anger and death references were linked to the development of symptoms. All in all, this study highlights the need to adapt the eligibility of words explored across different samples, taking into account the context in which language is constructed and its implications for the victims' wellbeing.

### References

Alvarez-Conrad, J., Zoellner, L.A., & Foa, E.B. (2001). Linguistic predictors of trauma pathology and psychical health. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 15, 159-170.

### Acknowledgements

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### Further information

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