Exploring Narcissism
in a Group of Male Batterers

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Statement of the Research Problem

This study has two unique features which will allow it to add to the knowledge base of interpersonal violence. The first feature seeks to clarify and define the type of narcissism (covert or overt) most involved in the perpetration of physical violence. Bushman and Baumeister (1998) indicate that developing unrealistic opinions of oneself (narcissism) and having those beliefs constantly rejected by others is a formula for violence. Up to this point, the few studies that have examined levels of narcissism among perpetrators of physical violence have used either a global assessment such as the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI) or a partial assessment of narcissism (overt) as is assessed through the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). This study investigates the relationship of overt and covert narcissism as they may relate to perpetrators of interpersonal violence. The second feature of the study compares the relative predictive power of narcissism for intimate partner violence against the most consistent risk factors identified in the literature. And by so doing, this study will contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of interpersonal violence.

Although the inspiration for this research is credited to Roy Baumeister (1997) and his work regarding threatened egotism, this work also builds upon the efforts of several researchers including Raskin and Hall (1979) and their construction of the original Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) and the forty-item revised form of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory by Raskin and Terry (1988) as well as Wink’s (1991) description of the two faces of narcissism (overt and covert) and Hendin and Cheek’s (1997) introduction of the Hypersensitivity Narcissistic Scale (HSNS) as a measure of covert narcissism.
Research Background and Hypotheses

Conceptual Definitions

Narcissism

Narcissism refers to excessive preoccupation with the self and one's own self-image and appearance in the eyes of others. In this study, narcissism is defined as passionately wanting to think well of oneself regardless of whether those thoughts are justified or not (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). In other words, narcissism is not necessarily the same as high self-esteem but rather it is the equivalent of an inflated self-appraisal.

Wink (1991) conducted a principal-components analysis of six MMPI-based narcissism scales which yielded two orthogonal dimensions: an overt form of narcissism (manifesting as grandiosity and exhibitionism) and a covert form of narcissism (best understood as a vulnerability-sensitivity trait). This finding was replicated by Rathvon and Holmstrom (1996). Since this time, narcissism has been generally regarded as having these two dimensions. This study will examine narcissism from both perspectives.

Overt narcissism

The overt form of narcissism manifests as grandiosity. The over inflated or overt narcissistic type has too much pathological narcissism or subjective self-awareness (the immediate experience of self as a center of thought, feelings, and action) which makes one feel both alive and important and yet it deprives one of self reflection and self-knowledge (Bach, 1994). Overt narcissism will be measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988), the most widely employed measure of narcissism (Tschanz, Morf, & Turner, 1998).

Covert narcissism

The covert form of narcissism is reflected as hypersensitivity. The deflated, covert or hypersensitive narcissistic type has too little healthy narcissism or objective self-awareness (the awareness of the self as an object among other objects, as a self among other selves) which helps us to know our place in the world and to reflect upon it. Covert narcissism will be measured by the Hypersensitivity Narcissistic Scale (HSNS).

Physical abuse of a female

Male-to-female IPV is defined in the Kentucky Revised Statutes as a fourth degree assault. A person is guilty of assault in the fourth degree when: “(a) He intentionally or wantonly causes physical injury to another person; or (b) With recklessness he causes physical injury to another person by means of a deadly weapon or a dangerous instrument” (KRS 508.030). For the purpose of this study, individuals considered to be intimate partner abusers will be males convicted of fourth degree assault on a female.

Operational Definitions

A total of twelve variables will be identified. A description of how each of these will be operationalized is provided in the next section. Eleven variables are classified as
independent variables (IV) and one dichotomous variable is identified as the dependent variable (DV).

**Independent Variables**

1. **Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)**
   - The overt dimension of narcissism will be represented by the total score on the NPI and will be analyzed as interval data. The range of scores is 0 - 40 with higher scores representing higher levels of inflated or overt narcissism.

2. **Hypersensitivity Narcissistic Scale (HSNS)**
   - The covert dimension of narcissism will be represented by the total score on the HSNS and will be analyzed as interval data. The range of scores is 10 - 50 with higher scores representing higher levels of hypersensitive or deflated narcissism.

3. **A maladaptive pattern of alcohol use**
   - Alcohol use will be measured by the total number of “yes” endorsements on the CAGE (Ewing, 1984), an internationally used, 4-item assessment instrument for identifying alcoholics. Item responses on the CAGE are scored 0 or 1, with a higher score indicative of alcohol problems. A total score of 2 or greater is considered clinically significant.

4. **Anger**
   - Anger will be measured as the total interval data score for the 10 items of the trait anger subscale of the State-Trait Anger Scale (STAS) (Spielberger, Jacobs, Russel, & Crane, 1983). The range of scores is 10 - 40 with higher scores representing higher levels of anger.

5. **Experiencing family of origin violence**
   - Experiencing family of origin violence will be measured as the total interval data score for the 4 items of a sub-scale constructed by Rosenbaum and O’Leary (1981). The range of the total score is 0 - 24 with higher scores representing higher levels of experiencing family of origin violence.

6. **Witnessing family of origin violence**
   - Witnessing family of origin violence will be measured as the total interval data score for the 4 items of a sub-scale constructed by Rosenbaum and O’Leary (1981). The range of the total score is 0 - 24 with higher scores representing higher levels of witnessing family of origin violence.

7. **Income**
   - Income will be measured as the self-reported annual income of the perpetrator.

8. **Relationship discord**
   - Relationship discord will be measured as the total interval data score for the 7 items of the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) developed by Hendrick (1988). The RAS is a seven-item instrument designed to measure satisfaction in relationships. Originally developed with two samples of college students (N = 235, N = 57), the scale is designed to measure satisfaction in relationships and is not limited to marital relationships. The RAS has very good internal consistency, with an alpha of .86. The RAS has good concurrent validity and good predictive
validity. After reverse-scoring items four and seven, items are summed for a total score. Scores can range from 7 (low satisfaction) to 35 (high satisfaction).

9. Age
Age will be represented by the interval data reported by the respondent in the demographic section of the survey.

10. Employment status
Employment status at the time of the offense will be recorded as nominal data with the number one representing “full time employment,” the number two representing “part time employment” status and number three representing “unemployment.”

11. Educational level
Educational level will be measured with the interval data collected in the demographic section of the survey as reported by the participant.

**Dependent Variable**

**Perpetrator status**
Perpetrator status was treated as a dichotomous variable. Participants convicted of or admitted to intimate partner violence were coded as perpetrators. Those participants who had no record of or admission of IPV were coded as a non-perpetrator and these participants constituted the comparison group.

**Research Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1**
The overt dimension of narcissism as measured by the total score on the NPI will be higher for participants who are identified as perpetrators versus those that are identified as non-perpetrators.

**Hypothesis 2**
The covert dimension of narcissism as measured by the total score on the HSNS will be higher for participants who are identified as perpetrators versus those that are identified as non-perpetrators.

**Hypothesis 3**
Perpetrators of IPV will demonstrate higher levels of anger, as measured by the trait anger subscale of the State-Trait Anger Scale (STAS), than non-perpetrators.

**Hypothesis 4**
Perpetrators of IPV will show higher scores on the variable Experiencing Family of Origin Violence, as measured by the total score on the four items of the sub-scale constructed by Rosenbaum and O’Leary (1981), than non-perpetrators.
Hypothesis 5
Perpetrators of IPV will have higher scores on the variable Witnessing Family of Origin Violence, as measured by the total score on the four items of the sub-scale constructed by Rosenbaum and O’Leary (1981), than non-perpetrators.

Hypothesis 6
Perpetrators of IPV will have higher levels of relationship discord, as measured by the total score on the seven items constituting the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), than non-perpetrators.

Hypothesis 7
Perpetrators of IPV will have higher levels of maladaptive alcohol use, as measured by the total score on the CAGE, than non-perpetrators.

Logistic Regression Hypothesis
It is hypothesized that overt narcissism, covert narcissism, experiencing family of origin violence, witnessing family of origin violence, and educational level will be significant predictors of intimate partner violence.

Methodology

Based on an extensive review of the literature, the variables which are most consistently related to IPV will be used as independent variables along with narcissism to examine their strength as potential predictors of IPV. The determination of which variables most consistently predict IPV was done by analyzing two meta analysis.

The first meta analysis was conducted by Hotaling and Sugarman (1986), who reviewed over 400 empirical reports on husband to wife violence. Their meta analysis yielded 38 potential risk markers of husband-to-wife violence using 52 case-comparison studies as the source of data.

These 38 risk markers were then divided into four categories: consistent risk, inconsistent risk, consistent nonrisk, and risk markers with insufficient data. To be classified as a “consistent risk marker” a risk marker had to be measured in at least three independent investigations and found to be significantly related to husband-to-wife violence in the predicted direction in at least 70% of these investigations. Of the 38 abuser risk markers in the Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) study, nine markers showed a consistent pattern of findings across reports.

Black, Schumacher, Smith-Slep, and Heyman (1999) published a risk factor literature review for male-to-female partner physical aggression that was to serve as the second meta analysis. Their original literature search for male-to-female partner physical aggression resulted in the retrieval of 2,179 articles. Only 35 articles contained studies satisfying the scientific rigor that Black, Schumacher, Smith-Slep, and Heyman (1999) required for inclusion in this review.

The synthesis of the Hotaling and Sugarman’s (1986) review and the Black, Schumacher, Smith-Slep, and Heyman (1999) review yielded nine risk factors most often identified with IPV. These risk factors along with overt and covert measures of narcissism served as the nine independent variables for this study.
Sample
The study sample consisted of a convenience sample of individuals who had recently been referred by the District Court in Northern Kentucky to an anger management group or to the Kentucky Alternatives Program (KAP) for monitoring of the counseling or outpatient psychotherapy requirement imposed by the court as a result of their conviction of fourth degree assault (IPV). The comparison group was also a convenience sample of individuals who self-report that they have not been convicted of IPV. The final study group consisted of 54 IPV perpetrators and 64 non-perpetrators in the control group for a total of 118 subjects.

Results

Hypothesis 1
The overt dimension of narcissism, as measured by the total score on the NPI, will be higher for participants who are identified as perpetrators versus those that are identified as non-perpetrators. An independent groups t-test revealed that the hypothesis was rejected. The perpetrator group (M =13.57, SD = 6.80) did not differ from the non-perpetrator group (M =11.36, SD = 6.65) as predicted, t (116) = 1.78, p >.05.

Hypothesis 2
The covert dimension of narcissism, as measured by the total score on the HSNS, will be higher for participants who are identified as perpetrators versus those that are identified as non-perpetrators. An independent groups t test revealed that the hypothesis was accepted. The perpetrator group (M = 29.09, SD = 5.46) differed from the non-perpetrator group (M = 25.97, SD = 6.23) as predicted, t (116) = 2.87, p < .01.

Hypothesis 3
Perpetrators of IPV will demonstrate higher levels of anger, as measured by the trait anger subscale of the State-Trait Anger Scale (STAS), than non-perpetrators. An independent groups t test revealed that the hypothesis was rejected. The perpetrator group (M = 19.74, SD = 7.27) did not differ from the non-perpetrator group (M = 18.55, SD = 5.48) as predicted, t (116) = 1.02, p > .05.

Hypothesis 4
Perpetrators of IPV will show higher scores on the variable Experiencing of Family of Origin Violence, as measured by the total score on the four items of the sub-scale constructed by Rosenbaum and O’Leary, than non-perpetrators. An independent groups t test revealed that the hypothesis was accepted. The perpetrator group (M = 7.93, SD = 7.16) differed from the non-perpetrator group (M = 4.22, SD = 5.08) as predicted, t (115) = 3.18, p < .01.

Hypothesis 5
Perpetrators of IPV will have higher scores on the variable Witnessing of Family of Origin Violence, as measured by the total score on the four items of the
sub-scale constructed by Rosenbaum and O’Leary, than non-perpetrators. An independent groups t test revealed that the hypothesis was accepted. The perpetrator group (M = 5.17, SD = 5.67) differed from the non-perpetrator group (M = 2.90, SD = 2.31) as predicted, t (115) = 2.74, p < .01.

**Hypothesis 6**
Perpetrators of IPV will have higher levels of Relationship Discord, as measured by the total score on the seven items constituting the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), than non-perpetrators. An independent group t test revealed that the hypothesis was accepted. The perpetrator group (M = 22.87, SD = 6.95) differed from the non-perpetrator group (M = 27.34, SD = 5.80) as predicted, t (110) = -3.71, p < .001.

**Hypothesis 7**
Perpetrators of IPV will have higher levels of maladaptive alcohol use, as measured by the total score on the CAGE, than non-perpetrators. An independent groups t test revealed that the hypothesis was rejected. The perpetrator group (M = 1.43, SD = 1.50) did not differ from the non-perpetrator group (M = 1.11, SD = 1.14) as predicted, t (116) = 1.271.

An enter method regression analysis was performed using SPSS to predict the likelihood of being a male perpetrator of interpersonal violence. The enter method allows for all predictors to enter the equation simultaneously and is considered the preferred method of logistic regression analyses for hypothesis-testing research, especially when the order or importance of the predictor variables is uncertain (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). All relevant predictors were entered into the equation simultaneously. The following nine predictor variables were utilized in the logistic regression analysis: (a) Age, (b) Education, (c) Employment Status, (d) NPI TOTAL, (e) HSNS, (f) CAGE, (g) Anger, (h) Experiencing Family of Origin Violence, (i) Witnessing Family of Origin Violence.

Logistic regression revealed that prediction success was fair with 81.7 percent of non perpetrators and 66.7% of perpetrators correctly predicted, for an overall percentage of 74.6%. Hypersensitive Narcissism (HSNS) and Experiencing Violence as a child were the best predictors (risk factors) of being a perpetrator of IPV. Based on the odds ratios, those men who have higher HSNS scores and those men who have experienced physical abuse as a child are 1.14 and 1.15 more likely to be a perpetrator of interpersonal violence. To the best of this researcher’s knowledge, this is the first study to examine hypersensitive or covert narcissism in a group of male batterers.

Age and Education were found to be the best protective factors against being a perpetrator of IPV. The older the men are and the more education they have, the lower the probability of perpetrating interpersonal violence.

A receiver operating characteristics (ROC) analysis was also performed. Using a ROC analysis, it is possible to determine the score obtained that produces maximum sensitivity and specificity. An ROC curve is obtained by plotting sensitivity (true positive rate) against the false positive rate for all possible cut-off points of the instrument. “The big advantage of the ROC approach is that it is not affected by base-
rates” (Rubenzer, 2002, p. 18). Because of this, Areas Under the Curve (AUC) values are comparable across studies and across different measures.

Using a ROC analysis, an Areas Under the Curve (AUC) value was calculated. This study produced an overall AUC of .82. A rough guide for classifying the accuracy of a diagnostic test is the traditional academic point system: .90-1 = excellent (A); .80-.90 = good (B); .70-.80 = fair (C); .60-.70 = poor (D); and .50-.60 = fail (F) (Tape, 2003). Using this system, we can see that with an overall AUC of .82, the accuracy of prediction using these 10 variables falls into the “good” range. Another way we can understand that value is by comparing it to data obtained from another relevant study. In the area of violence assessment, The Violence Recidivism Assessment Guide (VRAG) is considered to be a superior instrument. The VRAG typically achieves an AUC value of .75 (Rubenzer, 2002) which means that there is a 75% chance that an actually violent person would score above the cutoff for violence. In this study an AUC value of .82 was obtained.

Utility for Social Work Practice

As this study suggests, men who observe family of origin violence and those who experience family of origin violence may be imprinted or influenced in such a way that they become more likely to perpetrate violence than men who did not observe or experience violence in their families of origin.

Gabbard (1994) says the hypervigilant (or covert) narcissist is best described by Kohut (1971) rather than by Kernberg (1975) and therefore in this study the perpetrator of IPV is best described by Kohut (1972) rather than by Kernberg (1975). Social workers interested in working with male perpetrators of IPV should familiarize themselves with Kohut’s (1972) description of narcissism.

Hockenberry (1995) has suggested a theory that future researchers may also wish to explore. He has proposed that the two faces of narcissism (overt and covert) may be sensitive to differing stimuli. The narcissistic personality depicted by Kohut may be more likely to react with violence in response to being abandoned or negated whereas the narcissistic personality depicted by Kernberg may be more likely to react with violence in response to feeling shamed or in an attempt to restore autonomy. Researchers should test this notion. Future investigators could investigate both types of narcissism in relation to the trigger mechanisms of shame and abandonment.
References


### Table 1

**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 118)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Perpetrators of IPV (n = 54)</th>
<th>Non-Perpetrators of IPV (n = 64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>43 (19 - 62)</td>
<td>59 (18 - 77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>33 years</td>
<td>37.4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; quartile</td>
<td>$400 - $15,000</td>
<td>$700 - $16,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; quartile</td>
<td>$15,001 - $24,000</td>
<td>$16,751 - $35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; quartile</td>
<td>$24,001 - $30,000</td>
<td>$35,001 - $47,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; quartile</td>
<td>$30,001 - $60,000</td>
<td>$47,751 - $87,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>47 (87.0%)</td>
<td>35 (54.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>4 (7.5%)</td>
<td>17 (26.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors degree</td>
<td>3 (5.6%)</td>
<td>9 (14.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate school</td>
<td>0 (.0%)</td>
<td>3 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Status</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>14 (25.9%)</td>
<td>10 (16.4%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part-time employment</td>
<td>3 (5.6%)</td>
<td>11 (18 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time employment</td>
<td>37 (68.5%)</td>
<td>40 (65.6%)</td>
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</table>
### Table 2

*Demographic Comparisons for perpetrator and non-perpetrators of IPV*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Perpetrator of IPV</th>
<th>Non-perpetrators of IPV</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9.78</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>15.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>23,044</td>
<td>12,758</td>
<td>35,405</td>
<td>23,611</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>11.85</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>12.17</td>
<td>2.24</td>
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*p=<.001

### Table 3

*Comparative Mean Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Perpetrator M</th>
<th>Non-Perpetrator M</th>
<th>Other Reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NPI Total</td>
<td>13.57</td>
<td>11.36</td>
<td>16.5 (479 males) (Raskin &amp; Terry, 1998); 17.02 (perpetrators) 15.08 (non-perpetrators) (Beassley &amp; Stoltenberg, 1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSNS</td>
<td>29.09</td>
<td>25.97</td>
<td>29.03 (142 college males) (Hendin &amp; Cheek, 1997); 22.7 (abusive parents) (Wiehe, 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAGE</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>Means not reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait Anger</td>
<td>19.74</td>
<td>18.55</td>
<td>18.49 (college males) (Spielberger, Jacobs, Russel, &amp; Crane, 1983)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience Violence</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>5.75 (adult males) (MacEwen &amp; Barling, 1988)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Witness Violence</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>5.26 (adult males) (MacEwen &amp; Barling, 1988)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relation Discord</td>
<td>22.87</td>
<td>27.34</td>
<td>29.14 (college males) (Hendrick, 1988)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Table 4

*Group Differences for Risk Factors Associated with Intimate Partner Violence Between Perpetrators and Non-Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Perpetrator</th>
<th>Non-Perpetrator</th>
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<tr>
<td>NPI Total</td>
<td>13.57 6.80</td>
<td>11.36 6.65</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>1.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSNS</td>
<td>29.09 5.46</td>
<td>25.97 6.23</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>2.87**</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAGE</td>
<td>1.43 1.50</td>
<td>1.11 1.14</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>1.271</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trait Anger</td>
<td>19.74 7.27</td>
<td>18.55 5.48</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>1.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience Violence</td>
<td>7.93 7.16</td>
<td>4.22 5.08</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>3.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness Violence</td>
<td>5.17 5.67</td>
<td>2.90 2.31</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>2.74**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation Discord</td>
<td>22.87 6.95</td>
<td>27.34 5.80</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>-3.71***</td>
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</table>

*p<.05  **p<.01  ***p<.001

### Table 5

*Logistic Regression Results (N=114)*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>SE</th>
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<th>Odds Ratio</th>
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<tr>
<td>NPI Total</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>1.104</td>
<td>1.044</td>
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<td>HSNS</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>7.06**</td>
<td>1.144</td>
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<td>CAGE</td>
<td>-.152</td>
<td>.189</td>
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<td>.859</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trait Anger</td>
<td>-.069</td>
<td>.048</td>
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<td>.933</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience Violence</td>
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<td>.052</td>
<td>7.468**</td>
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<td>Witness Violence</td>
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<td>1.03</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>.936</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>.14</td>
<td>10.05**</td>
<td>.642</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05  **p<.01