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## A Field Study of a Comprehensive Violence Risk Assessment Battery

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## Abstract

We used archival data to examine the predictive validity of a pre-release violence risk assessment battery over six years at a forensic hospital ( $N=230$ , 100% male, 63.0% African-American, 34.3% Caucasian). Examining “real world” forensic decision-making is important for illuminating potential areas for improvement. The battery included the Historical-Clinical-Risk Management-20, Psychopathy Checklist-Revised, Schedule of Imagined Violence, and Novaco Anger Scale and Provocation Inventory. Three outcome “recidivism” variables included contact violence, contact & threatened violence, and any reason for hospital return. Results indicated measures of general violence risk and psychopathy were highly correlated but weakly associated with reports of imagined violence and a measure of anger. Measures of imagined violence and anger were correlated with one another. Receiver Operating Characteristic curve analyses revealed, unexpectedly, that none of the scales or subscales predicted recidivism better than chance. Multiple regression indicated the battery failed to account for recidivism outcomes. We conclude by discussing three possible explanations, including timing of assessments, controlled versus field studies, and recidivism base rates.

*Keywords:* anger, violence, risk assessment, recidivism, incremental validity, field study

### A Field Study of a Comprehensive Violence Risk Assessment Battery

Mental health providers in correctional, hospital, and community settings often rely on violence risk assessments to make decisions about client placements. “Dangerousness to others” became a primary criterion in the 1960s in federal law for involuntary hospitalization of individuals with mental disorders in the United States and continued to be used in subsequent case law (e.g., *Barefoot v. Estelle*, 1983; *Baxstrom v. Herold*, 1966; *O’Connor v. Donaldson*, 1975). Tort liability required mental health treatment providers to consider patients’ potential for violence beginning in the 1970s, and the dangerousness standard was expanded to authorize involuntary outpatient treatment in the 1980s, typically through state statutory and case law (Appelbaum, 1994).

Although the field of risk assessment initially began with unstructured clinical judgments that yielded poor predictions (Monahan, 1981; Steadman & Cocozza, 1974), significant progress has been made since that time. The extensive and impressive body of research regarding modern violence risk assessment has provided significant practical advances for the clinicians tasked with performing such assessments in real world settings. For instance, several structured assessment instruments have been developed to assist clinicians in formally assessing violence risk (e.g., Douglas, Hart, Webster, & Belfrage, 2013; Hare, 2003; Harris, Rice, & Quinsey, 1993).

Despite these advances, the utility of the research on violence risk assessment tools is limited by the extent to which the tools can translate to clinical sites (especially those unaffiliated with academic organizations or researchers) given that almost all of the research demonstrating the reliability and validity of these measures has been conducted in controlled settings. Fewer studies have examined how these instruments perform in “the real world,” though it is to be expected that poorer reliability and validity values will be seen when these tools are administered by everyday practitioners. Given that most risk assessments and subsequent treatment- and placement-related

decisions are done in the field rather than in more controlled research settings, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of these tools in the field is critical for targeting potential areas for improvement.

In the present study, we analyzed existing assessment data from a forensic psychiatric hospital in which clinicians are frequently tasked with conducting pre-release violence risk assessments to inform discharge decisions. The hospital policy specified a standard battery for violence risk assessments, which included well-known and frequently used violence risk assessment tools, but also included an index of anger, an approach not often discussed in the violence risk assessment literature. We sought to add to the violence risk assessment literature by (a) testing the field reliability and predictive validity of well-researched measures, and (b) examining the degree to which measuring anger adds incremental validity to the risk assessment battery. We thought the anger measure might improve the assessment because it measured a different trait (anger) via a different method (self-report as opposed to clinician-rated) than the measures most often studied in the violence risk assessment literature.

### **Advantages of Multi-Trait, Multi-Method Measurement**

The potential advantage of our approach is supported by the methodological and statistical benefits of using a multi-trait, multi-method approach to measurement (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Walters, 2006). For example, in a meta-analysis examining multi-methods by comparing risk tools to self-report measures in the prediction of criminal justice outcomes, Walters (2006) found that both kinds of measures accounted for incremental variance. That is, clinician-completed tools and self-report tools each contributed valuable and unique predictive validity information. Using a multi-trait, multi-method approach is particularly beneficial when the variables or tools used are independent of one another and provide unique and incrementally valid information (see Faust &

Ahern, 2012; Kahneman, 2011). Using more tools is not better, especially when the tools or variables provide overlapping or redundant information. Thus, an investigation like this of the strongest components of an assessment battery will yield data not only for the hospital itself (e.g., to inform policy and practice at the particular institution where this data was gathered), but also for other facilities regarding the reliability and validity of these tools in a real world settings.

### **Anger and Violence Risk**

Anger has long been associated with aggression and violence from both a theoretical perspective and as demonstrated through empirical evidence (Craig, 1982; Novaco, 2003; Novaco & Jarvis, 2002). Recent studies have shown anger to be related to physical aggression in inpatient settings (Doyle & Dolan, 2006a; McDermott, Quanbeck, Busse, Yastro, & Scott, 2008) as well as in the community (Doyle, Carter, Shaw, & Dolan, 2012; Doyle & Dolan, 2006b; Monahan et al., 2001; Skeem et al., 2006). As a result, the assessment of anger has increased in forensic psychiatric and correctional settings, and treatment programs targeting anger have been developed in hopes of reducing violence (see e.g., Haddock et al., 2009).

One self-report measure developed to assess the internal experience of anger is the Novaco Anger Scale and Provocation Inventory (NAS-PI; Novaco, 2003), which was the measure used in this study (see Methods section below). The NAS-PI has been shown to substantially correlate in the expected direction with other measures of anger and hostility, observers' ratings of angry behaviors, and occurrence of violent behaviors (Grisso, Davis, Vesselinov, Appelbaum, & Monahan, 2000; Novaco, 2003; Steadman et al., 2000). Doyle et al. (2012) found the NAS to be predictive of community violence following discharge from acute psychiatric hospitals in England up to 20 weeks post-discharge, and noted that anger was more predictive of violence than impulsiveness and psychopathy.

## Hypotheses

We developed several *a priori* hypotheses. First, we expected the established violence risk assessment measures would demonstrate acceptable unique and conjoint predictive validity on the outcomes of interest given the extant research demonstrating good predictive validity in more controlled research settings. Second, we expected the anger measure would correlate with the existing measures but would add unique incremental validity to the risk assessment battery when included with the existing risk assessment tools. Third, we expected the field reliability of the well-researched violence risk assessment measures would be lower than samples documenting the reliability of the tools more controlled research settings, given the typical decrease in cross-validation samples and in applied versus research samples (see e.g., DeMatteo et al., 2014; Monahan et al., 2005).<sup>1</sup>

## Method <sup>2</sup>

### Participants

Participants were male inpatients in a maximum security forensic psychiatric hospital in the southern United States. Patients who were considered for discharge between 2003 and 2009 were included in the current study. A formal assessment of violence risk was conducted as part of routine practice for each patient prior to their consideration for release from the hospital. A total of 230 participants were identified as having had a pre-release violence risk assessment during this period. Descriptive statistics for the participants are provided in Table 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Even in the MacArthur Violence Risk Assessment Study – arguably the “gold standard” of violence risk assessment research studies – the predictive validity of the Iterative Classification Tree model of violence risk prediction decreased substantially on a cross-validation sample as compared to the development sample (i.e., the Area Under the Curve decreased from .80 in the development sample to .63 in the cross-validation sample [Monahan et al., 2000; Monahan et al., 2005, respectively]).

<sup>2</sup> In this write-up, we conformed to the Risk Assessment Guidelines for the Evaluation of Efficacy (RAGEE guidelines) by providing specific information about this violence risk assessment study to add to the literature (see e.g., Singh, Yang, Mulvey, & the RAGEE group, 2014). The RAGEE guidelines were developed to increase transparency and consistency in the methodological reporting of predictive validity studies of violence risk assessments.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The various analyses included different subsets of participants, given the parameters of each particular analysis. Specifically, the scale descriptive statistics reported in Table 2 and the bivariate correlations reported in Table 3 for the Psychopathy Checklist Revised (PCL-R), Historical-Clinical-Risk Management-20 (HCR-20), and Schedule of Imagined Violence (SIV) are based on the entire sample of 230 people. However, the NAS-PI results only include the valid protocols ( $n = 126$  people, see below for subsample explanation). The AUC values reported in Table 4 for the PCL-R, HCR-20, and SIV are based on the subsample of people who had been released from the hospital ( $n = 203$ ), as it would not make sense to try to predict community recidivism for people who were still in the hospital. The AUC values for the NAS-PI are based on the sub-subsample of valid protocols for people who had been released from the hospital ( $n = 123$ ).

## Procedures

Data for the current study were archival and were collected from risk assessments conducted at the hospital as part of routine clinical practice.<sup>3</sup> Patients who became candidates for discharge<sup>4</sup> due to improvement in psychiatric stability were referred by their treatment team for the assessment. The assessment included a comprehensive review of historical information and risk factors, a review of the patient's hospital course, an interview with the patient, and completion

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<sup>3</sup> Although we examined events that happened in the past, our design allowed us to examine the *predictive* validity of archival data. This is because all of the assessments and measures were completed in the past, prior to the patients' hospital release – they were completed as *prospective* violence risk assessment batteries/reports. Years after these real-world prospective assessments were conducted, we looked at how well they were able to assess the risk of *future* violence that happened after the assessments were completed. Thus, this is not a postdictive validity study because we did not conduct the risk assessment “after the fact,” or test later in an attempt to get a valid score for something that happened earlier. The assessments happened prior to the outcomes of interest. We simply coded the archival data.

<sup>4</sup> Many of the patients in our sample were conditionally released with a court order that imposed conditions on the patients' behavior in order to remain in the community (e.g., in group home settings, at home with or without family members). Others were discharged without court-ordered conditional releases to a less restrictive setting within the department of mental health (i.e., a state psychiatric hospital). A few were discharged to the community unconditionally.



of several risk-related measures (see below). Results of the risk measures were integrated into a semi-structured report with the historical and current clinical information, as well as a final risk judgment formulated by the clinician in light of the assessment information. The final risk judgments (guided by the HCR-20) were categorized by the clinicians as low (25.8%), moderately low (23.1%), moderate (39.7%), moderately high (7.4%), or high (3.9%).

The clinicians who conducted the evaluations over the six-year period assessed in this report were doctoral-level clinical staff members and advanced graduate clinical psychology practicum students who assisted with the assessments while under supervision. Fourteen different clinicians comprised the evaluator sample. Four doctoral-level psychologists conducted 11.3% of the assessments, with 11 advanced clinical psychology graduate students under supervision conducting the remaining 88.7%.

The practicum students and the psychologists participated in a yearly intensive training process in which a detailed didactic training session was provided for the students on the use of the HCR-20 and the PCL-R, followed by group practice by the students and all the staff psychologists. Everyone worked through one case individually based on a chart review and then all discussed their scoring and the manualized instructions until everyone was in agreement about how the measures should be scored in that case. Then, the same process occurred for a second case in which both a chart review and a group interview with the patient occurred. The practicum students (and new staff psychologists) were then required to observe and shadow code assessments in five in-vivo assessments conducted by doctoral-level clinicians. If the ratings on the HCR-20 and PCL-R were in reasonable agreement (85% was the benchmark), then students and new psychologists were allowed to begin conducting assessments under supervision.

An important note is that after the trainings, only a single evaluator (i.e., one of the doctoral-level clinical staff or else an advanced practicum student under the supervision of one of the doctoral-level clinical staff) conducted the “real” assessments – the assessments that represent the sample in the current paper. Thus, the interrater reliability of the instruments as used in routine practice in this sample is not known and intraclass correlation coefficients cannot be calculated.

We obtained violence recidivism data from two sources: by searching the state’s criminal record system for any new violent arrests of each discharged patient (at least 18 months post-discharge), and by searching the hospital’s record system for information about patients who had been re-admitted due to violence after discharge. We used the definition of violence provided by the HCR-20 in coding our data: “actual, attempted, or threatened harm to a person or persons” (Webster & Douglas, 2001, *p.* 24). We collected follow-up outcome data in July 2011. By the time of the follow-up data collection, 88.3% of the patients in the sample had been released from the hospital. Of those who had been released, 15.7% had returned to the forensic hospital. Time-at-risk varied for people who were released ( $M = 38.11$  months,  $SD = 23.14$  months, Range = 22 days to 7.75 years). To control for time at risk in the analyses, we calculated rate of violence by dividing the number of violent acts after release from the hospital by the number of days a person was at risk in the community (see e.g., Douglas, Ogloff, Nicholls, & Grant, 1999).<sup>5</sup>

Violence as a reason for return was present in 11.7% of cases (e.g., threats to kill, physical assaults, sexual assaults, domestic violence). Other reasons for return included substance abuse, non-violent legal infractions, eloping from the step-down treatment facility, and medication noncompliance. New legal charges included both violent offenses (e.g., domestic violence, arson, sodomy, rape, sexual assault, hijacking, aggravated stalking) and non-violent offenses (e.g.,

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<sup>5</sup> This variable was calculated to reflect time in the community. If the person remained in the community throughout the duration of the follow up-period, their time “counted” until the day we gathered the follow-up data (in July 2011). If the person returned to the hospital, their time “stopped” on the day of their return.

escape, breaking and entering, burglary, obstruction of justice, possession of or receiving controlled substances, public intoxication, driving offenses, false report, disorderly conduct, violation of conditional release, theft of a motor vehicle, community notification violation).

### **Measures**

**Hare Psychopathy Checklist—Revised: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (PCL-R).** The PCL-R is an index of psychopathy, a personality disorder consisting of behavioral (e.g., manipulateness, impulsivity), interpersonal (e.g., superficial charm, deceitfulness), and affective (e.g., callousness, lack of remorse, shallow affect) traits (Hare, 2003). The measure consists of a four-facet model containing Interpersonal (Facet 1) and Affective (Facet 2) components of Factor 1, and Lifestyle (Facet 3) and Antisocial (Facet 4) components of Factor 2. The clinician is asked to consider and rate the presence and degree of 20 psychopathic personality traits in a given evaluatee when completing the PCL-R, and scores are summed for a total. Interrater reliabilities reported in the manual range from ICCs of .41 to .94 for individual items, .67 to .94 for Facet scores, and .87 to .93 for Total scores.

**Historical-Clinical-Risk Management–20 (HCR-20).** The HCR-20 is a 20-item structured guide to assist clinicians in considering empirically-supported factors associated with future violence (Webster & Douglas, 2001). The measure uses historical risk factors (static factors) as well as current, future-oriented, and potentially changeable risk factors (dynamic factors). The HCR-20 has been studied in a variety of civil psychiatric, forensic psychiatric, and correctional populations, and there is a wealth of data supporting its reliability and predictive validity for violence outcomes (see Douglas, Blanchard, Guy, Reeves, & Weir, 2010). Version 3 was recently published (Douglas et al., 2013), but the current study was based on archived risk assessments conducted using on Version 2.

**Schedule of Imagined Violence (SIV).** The SIV is an eight-item interview-based instrument with coded response categories designed to assess the quantity and quality of thoughts about harming others (Grisso et al., 2000). The full measure is administered only if the evaluatee endorses the first item, which asks whether they have fantasies of hurting other people. As part of the MacArthur Violence Risk Assessment Study, Grisso and colleagues (2000) found 30% of participants from the clinical sample endorsed violent fantasies within the past two months (i.e., were SIV positive) at the baseline interview. Patients with higher symptom severity were significantly more likely to be SIV positive, as were patients who also had a substance abuse disorder. The MacArthur study found that violent thoughts as measured by the SIV was predictive of engaging in violent acts and was positively related to measures of psychopathy, anger, and impulsivity (Grisso et al., 2000). Based on those findings, the forensic hospital highlighted in the current paper adopted the SIV into their violence risk assessment protocol. Thus, we opted to analyze the SIV data along with the available PCL-R, HCR-20, and NAS-PI data.

Four percent of the 230 patients in our sample ( $n = 9$ ) were SIV positive during the assessment (that is, they reported active thoughts or fantasies about violent acts). This number is significantly lower than the 30% rate reported by Grisso and colleagues (2000) in their sample of civil (non-forensic) psychiatric inpatients. Likely reasons for these differences are presented in the discussion below.

**Novaco Anger Scale and Provocation Inventory (NAS-PI).** The NAS-PI is a two-part, 85-item instrument that includes an assessment of the cognitive, physical, and behavioral experience of anger, as well as anger regulation and types of situations that may stimulate anger. The NAS-PI measures trait as opposed to state anger. That is, it is not intended to measure current angry affect; rather, it measures a person's propensity to experience anger in everyday life. The

NAS-PI includes a response style validity indicator and employs a paper-and-pencil self-report methodology (at a fourth grade reading level). Internal reliability estimates in the NAS-PI standardization sample were .94 for the NAS Total Score and .95 for the PI, with estimates ranging between .76 and .89 for the subscales (Novaco, 2003). The measure took on average between 30 and 45 minutes to complete for each patient in this sample.

Although the NAS-PI was built into the violence risk assessment battery conducted by the clinicians at this forensic hospital, it was not always completed. In the six-year period from which this data is drawn, NAS-PI was completed in 65.6% of the evaluations ( $n = 151$ ).<sup>6</sup> Of the 151 completed NAS-PI protocols, 126 were valid (83.4%). That is, the inconsistency index was 4 or higher (Novaco, 2003) on 25 (16.6%) of the completed protocols, rendering them uninterpretable. In the analyses that include the NAS-PI, we only included the subsample of valid protocols.

### **Results**

We used SPSS version 22.0 for all analyses. Please refer to Table 2 for descriptive statistics for the measures and for internal consistency reliability values for the PCL-R and HCR-20. Note that, consistent with our expectation, both measures evidenced somewhat lower reliability values in this “real world” sample than is typically reported in research reports. We were able to calculate these values for the PCL-R and HCR-20 because we had access to individual item values. However, we had only scaled scores for the NAS-PI and thus could not report on its internal consistency reliability in this sample.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

### **Patterns of Correlations**

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<sup>6</sup> Reasons for non-attempts or invalid attempts at administering the NAS-PI included descriptions of evaluatees with cognitive or communication disabilities that interfered with the task, evaluatees who responded in a fixed manner to virtually all of the items, and evaluatees who were distracted or otherwise unable to concentrate on the task.

We set out to examine the relations between established measures of violence risk (HCR-20, PCL-R, SIV) and the NAS-PI. We used Cohen's (1988) conventions to interpret effect sizes, where correlations of .10 indicated a weak association, .30 indicated a moderate association, and .50 indicated a strong or large association. The patterns of correlations revealed that the NAS-PI had moderately weak associations with the HCR-20 ( $r = .16$ ) and PCL-R total scores ( $r = .20$ ). One subscale of the NAS-PI (Anger Regulation) was moderately correlated with the SIV in a negative direction ( $r = -.26$ ). Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Douglas, Vincent, & Edens, 2006), the HCR-20 and the PCL-R demonstrated a strong association ( $r = .61$ ; see Table 3).

[Insert Table 3 about here]

One subscale each from the HCR-20 and the PCL-R demonstrated stronger relations with the NAS-PI than the other subscales. Specifically, the Clinical scale of the HCR-20, which includes items assessing lack of insight, negative attitudes, active symptoms of mental illness, impulsivity, and unresponsiveness to treatment, demonstrated moderate associations with four of the NAS-PI scales: the NAS Total score ( $r = .28$ ), the Arousal scale ( $r = .28$ ), the Behavior scale ( $r = .32$ ), and the Regulation scale ( $r = -.29$ ). The negative correlation between the Clinical HCR-20 scale and the NAS Anger Regulation scale suggests that as clinical symptoms increase, a person's ability to regulate their anger effectively decreases (and vice-versa). The HCR-20 Historical and Risk Management scales were generally weakly correlated with the NAS-PI ( $r$ 's from .03 to .21).

Factor 2 of the PCL-R, which indexes socially deviant behaviors, demonstrated some association ( $r$ 's between .20 and .24) with the NAS Total, Arousal, and Behavior scales. The other factors and facets of the PCL-R were generally weakly correlated, at best, with the NAS-PI ( $r$ 's from -.13 to .19). We thought Factor 1, comprised of interpersonal and affective items, would be more highly associated with the NAS-PI than it was ( $r$ 's from -.03 to .15).

The SIV demonstrated a weak association with the HCR-20 Total score ( $r = .08$ ) and the PCL-R Total score ( $r = .12$ ). We expected these associations would be higher. The highest correlation that emerged for the SIV was a negative relation with the NAS Anger Regulation scale ( $r = -.26$ ). This negative relation indicates that people who have good anger regulation skills and can calm themselves down are less likely to engage in violent fantasies of harming and killing people who anger them. And this relationship also works in the reverse; people who are less able to regulate their anger experiences are more likely to imagine harming and killing other people.

Our results show large correlations between the HCR-20 and the PCL-R. The Total scores for the measures were correlated at .61 and every single subscale correlated to some degree with one another; that is, none of the subscales were unrelated to one another (see Table 3). One of the HCR-20 subscales in particular demonstrated especially strong associations across the PCL-R subscales.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, the Historical scale demonstrated large correlations ( $r$ 's from .50 to .64) with the PCL-R Total score, Factor 2 (Social Deviance), Facet 1 (Interpersonal), Facet 3 (Lifestyle), and Facet 4 (Antisocial). The Historical scale includes static items from a person's history that are similarly measured by the PCL-R, such as relationship instability, violence at a young age, and prior supervision or conditional release failure. Thus, it might be expected that the Historical scale would demonstrate the strongest associations with the PCL-R.

### **Predictive Validity of the Measures for Recidivism**

Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve analyses were undertaken before investigating the incremental validity of the measures. ROC analyses have a number of advantages as an index of predictive validity, including being less influenced than other kinds of analyses by low base rates (Mossman, 1994a, b). ROC analyses provide a value called an Area

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<sup>7</sup> Although this is a strong correlation, the measures are still providing unique, non-overlapping information. With a correlation of .61, their shared variance is 37%.

Under the Curve (AUC), which is a standard metric that permits comparing various predictors. AUC values range from 0 (perfect negative prediction) to .50 (chance prediction) to 1.00 (perfect positive prediction; Douglas, Ogloff, Nicholls, & Grant, 1999). Swets (1988) suggested general guidelines for interpreting AUC values of .5 to .7 as no to low discriminatory power, .7 to .9 as moderate discriminatory power, and greater than .9 as high discriminatory power.

We conducted ROC analyses for three different dependent variables: “Contact and Threat Violence,” which corresponds to the HCR-20 definition of violence; “Contact Violence” that excludes threats and includes only actual violence; and “Any Reason for Hospital Return” that includes all people who had their conditional releases revoked, whether for violent or nonviolent behavior. Unexpectedly, the AUC values indicate that none of the scales or subscales predict recidivism better than chance for any of the three ways of conceptualizing the dependent variable (see Table 4). That is, the NAS-PI, the HCR-20, the PCL-R, nor the SIV demonstrated significant predictive validity for recidivism in this “real world” sample.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

### **Incremental Validity of NAS-PI in Violence Risk Assessment Battery**

Although we know based on the ROC analyses that no *individual* tool or subscale predicted recidivism, we examined whether the *whole battery together* had some predictive validity. In particular, we wanted to know whether the NAS-PI could account for a significant portion of unique variance in violence recidivism, above and beyond a group of other established predictors of violence risk, namely the HCR-20, the PCL-R, and the SIV. We used hierarchical multiple regression with rate of violent acts in the community as the dependent variable. For this analysis, we removed the psychopathy item (H7) from the HCR-20 and its subscales to avoid conflation



with the PCL-R. We included in the model only those cases in which the patient had been discharged, as violence after discharge could only occur if the person had been discharged.

Results demonstrated that neither battery (the one with established measures nor the one with the NAS-PI) produced results that were significantly related to violence recidivism (see Table 5). The first block, which included the HCR-20 Total score, PCL-R Total score, and the SIV, was not able to account for a significant amount of variance,  $F(3, 114) = 0.39, p = .76$ . The  $R^2$  was 0.01, indicating that the first block accounted for 1% of the variability in rate of violence after discharge. Although the addition of the NAS-PI in the second step slightly increased the  $R^2$  (.03, or 3%), the model still did not account for significant variance,  $F(6, 114) = 0.62, p = .72$ . The  $R^2$  change was not significant,  $F(3, 108) = 0.85, p = .47$ . These results extend the ROC analyses by showing that even grouping together these established measures of violence risk (HCR-20, PCL-R, SIV) with the NAS-PI could not account for violent recidivism in this sample.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

### **Discussion**

This study set out to examine the performance of various violence risk assessment tools in the field. Our data came from actual assessment instruments rated by real-world clinicians in real-world circumstances over a 6-year period. We also wanted to add to the literature regarding the measurement of anger in violence risk assessments and to identify the incremental validity of the NAS-PI as one part of a violence risk assessment battery. We thought the addition of the NAS-PI would yield incremental validity because it measured a different trait (anger) and relied on a different method (self-report by paper-and-pencil) than other instruments used in this hospital's violence risk assessment battery (see Campbell & Fiske, 1959).

We wanted to determine whether including the NAS-PI in the battery was worth the time and effort expended. The answer is not clear due to the broad null predictive validity findings. We expected the established violence risk tools (the HCR-20, the PCL-R, and the SIV) would have predictive validity for violent reoffending, and set out to determine whether the NAS-PI could be useful on top of those effects. However, we found that none of the tools had predictive validity in this field sample. Thus, before we make any conclusions about whether including the NAS-PI as part of a pre-release risk assessment battery is empirically justified, further research is needed, particularly in field samples. We now turn to three potential explanations for our null findings, including 1) timing of the assessments, 2) research versus field studies, and 3) recidivism base rates.

### **Timing**

Perhaps the most likely reason for the null findings is the fact that these assessments were conducted by clinicians *before release* to inform the release decision and identify high-risk patients in need of risk management services. That is, the results of the risk assessment likely created a pre- and post-release management effect. The clinical task of risk assessment is to use the tools to manage and prevent risk – not just to predict it (Douglas & Skeem, 2005; Hart, 1998). Thus, patients assessed as being at higher risk for violence would be less likely to be released or subjected to more intensive and assertive community interventions, paradoxically rendering the clinical judgments successful from a clinical (risk management) perspective while simultaneously inaccurate from a research (or violence prediction) perspective (see Hart, 1998).

A related explanation for the null findings is the timing of the evaluations after a period of treatment, with the potential of the evaluation to end the hospitalization period. These violence risk assessments were conducted when patients were being considered for release after having

been treated in the hospital for varying lengths of time. Patients knew they were being considered for release and many may have realized that if their true reports were damaging, it could interfere with a swift discharge process. The self-report measures in particular (the NAS-PI and the SIV) may have been sensitive to a guarded response bias, and the clinical and risk management items could have been affected (especially if the clinician doing the assessment knew the patient over time, such as hearing about him in regular staff rounds or interacting with him in group therapy settings). Nevertheless, pre-release assessments are one of the times these assessments actually occur; thus, considering how the instruments function at this time-point is relevant to discussions about their validity.

Indeed, only 4% of the people in our sample disclosed recent violent fantasies compared to 30% reported by Grisso et al. (2000) in the SIV standardization sample. Grisso and colleagues noted their participants were informed that the researchers asking the SIV questions had no role in decisions about their treatment or discharge. People were told the opposite in the present sample.

Although it would be interesting to compare our sample's NAS-PI scores to other clinical-forensic samples, our study appears to be the first to provide such detailed information with this population. Novaco and Renwick (1998) studied the NAS-PI with a clinical-forensic sample; however, they did not provide NAS-PI descriptive statistics. The NAS-PI scores in the present study are similar to those obtained in the non-clinical standardization sample (Novaco, 2003) and to those obtained in an adult correctional sample described by Mills, Kroner, and Forth (1998), but they appear to be somewhat lower than those reported by Baker, Van Hasselt, and Sellers (2008) in their adult incarcerated offender sample. Thus, it is not clear the degree to which our NAS-PI scores were influenced by the temporal proximity to discharge and the potential implications of the pre-release violence risk assessment findings.

### **Research versus Field Studies**

This study used archival data from actual cases, as the risk assessments analyzed were conducted as part of routine clinical practice. There are both strengths and limitations of this approach. Strengths include that this is how the instruments functioned and how the risk evaluations were used in the “real world.” This kind of real world information is important for researchers to consider as they continue to develop and refine risk assessment instruments and for clinicians to be aware of in practice.

Despite our method’s strength in terms of realism, there were limitations of our method too. We could not control for any extraneous variables and thus none of our findings can be interpreted in a causal manner. We could not calculate inter-rater reliability statistics because the evaluations in this sample were completed by individual evaluators. It would have been ideal to be able to calculate inter-rater reliabilities to compare to other recent field research that has suggested poor inter-rater reliability of risk assessment tools (particularly the PCL-R) in clinical settings (e.g., Boccaccini, Turner, & Murrie, 2008; DeMatteo, et al., 2014; Edens, Boccaccini, & Johnson, 2010). Given those recent findings, there is reason to be concerned about the inter-rater reliability between clinicians in the present sample. Nevertheless, the strengths of our study stand: this is how these assessments were actually conducted, affecting real patients and real legal cases. They are thus worthy of examination.

Often when research tools are used in real world settings, decrements in reliability and validity scores are observed. Indeed, this appears to have happened in our current field sample. The internal consistency reliability values shown in Table 2 reveal that none of the HCR-20 subscales and only one PCL-R facet and one factor score had acceptable alpha levels (both the HCR-20 and the PCL-R total scores had alphas above .70). These values are lower than the values

typically reported in research studies using these instruments. Of course, lower internal reliability values indicate more error, more “noise” in the data, and correspondingly make it more difficult to detect actual relations in data. Therefore, the lower reliability ratings of the scales in this field sample may also have contributed to our null findings. Nevertheless, given that these tools are designed to be used in field settings just like the one we examined, these data are important.

### **Recidivism Base Rate**

The accuracy of our recidivism data is limited by reliance on available archival data in official sources. First, searching the state criminal record system posed challenges in identifying sought individuals – a problem not unique to our study. Missing birthdates, incorrect spellings of names, inconsistent use of middle initials, inconsistent use of nicknames, and so forth in the criminal record system likely affected the accuracy of the criminal recidivism data. Second, although we searched two sources for recidivism information (criminal record and the hospital’s readmission records), violent behavior not captured in these official records was missed. Furthermore, arrests that occurred in other states and psychiatric admissions to other hospitals also were not captured.

Studies modeled after the MacArthur Violence Risk Assessment Study have included more sources of information about violent recidivism, such as self-report and interviews with collateral sources. In those studies (e.g., Doyle et al., 2012; Grisso et al., 2000; Steadman et al., 2000), using the additional sources of information modestly increased the measured base rate of violence and increased the statistical power of their analyses. Although we did not have the resources to obtain these additional sources of information for our study, the base rate of violence after discharge in our sample was 15.4% – similar to the 18.7% base rate reported in the MacArthur Study (Steadman et al., 2000). Studying a low-base rate event with our sample size ( $N=230$ ) may have

posed statistical power challenges for detecting relations. Future studies should employ larger samples and use varied or additional methods of collecting follow-up violence recidivism data.

### **Conclusion**

This study adds to the literature by providing data about how various tools used in violence risk assessments perform in the real world. It also adds to the growing body of literature about the NAS-PI, contributing information about how the measure functions in a clinical-forensic sample. This information is particularly useful given that we examined it in routine clinical practice as opposed to in a structured research paradigm. Although the patterns of correlations emerged in ways that were generally consistent with expectations, the predictive validity analyses failed, suggesting that none of these tools, separately or together as part of a battery, could predict recidivism better than chance in our field sample. These null findings stand in contrast to a large body of literature documenting the reliability and validity of the HCR-20, PCL-R, and SIV in violence risk assessments. Thus, our results must be interpreted within the context of this larger body of research.

We provided three possible explanations for our findings. First, the risk assessments were conducted as a clinical risk-management evaluation rather than for research and risk prediction, and thus higher-risk patients may have received additional treatment to reduce their risk. In addition, our field study had lower internal consistency reliability ratings for the tools than typical research studies, a common problem when tools are used in the “real world” as compared to in highly controlled research studies. We also think the timing of the assessments is especially relevant. These evaluations were conducted just prior to release for these patients, who *knew* they were about to be released, especially if their assessments went well. This circumstance is typical in clinical settings, but different than what typically occurs in controlled research studies

examining the performance of these tools. We conclude that additional examination of the field validity of established violence risk assessment measures in pre-release assessment contexts is needed.

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Table 1

*Participant Descriptive Information*

	Mean	Standard Deviation	%
<b>Race</b>			
African-American			63.0
Caucasian			34.3
Asian			0.9
Latino			0.4
Age	44.47	12.74	
<b>Diagnosis</b>			
Psychotic Disorders			70.3
Affective Disorders			9.6
Cognitive Disorders			7.8
Substance Use Disorders			7.0
Personality Disorders			2.2
Anxiety Disorders			1.3
<b>Legal History</b>			
Total number of prior offenses	9.40	10.05	
Number of prior violent offenses	2.89	2.76	
<b>Psychiatric History</b>			
Number of prior inpatient hospitalizations	8.68	7.01	
Violent acts during current hospitalization	2.58	9.79	
Current length of stay (years)	2.98	3.76	

Table 2

*Scale Descriptive Statistics*

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max	$\alpha$	AI-IC
<b>Novaco Anger Scale and Provocation Inventory</b>						
NAS Total T-score	45.54	13.52	0	81	--	--
PI Total T-score	45.56	13.95	19	90	--	--
NAS Cognitive Subscale T-score	48.48	12.20	19	81	--	--
NAS Arousal Subscale T-score	44.99	11.67	21	81	--	--
NAS Behavior Subscale T-score	48.79	10.45	29	82	--	--
NAS Anger Regulation Subscale T-score	55.52	13.74	21	98	--	--
<b>Historical-Clinical-Risk Management-20</b>						
Historical Factors Total	11.23	3.71	3	27	.63	.14
Clinical Factors Total	3.68	2.50	0	15	.62	.24
Risk Management Factors Total	4.83	2.45	0	15	.58	.23
HCR-20 Total	18.92	5.57	4	33	.72	.11
Clinician's Summary Risk Judgment	2.41	1.07	1	5	--	--
<b>Psychopathy Checklist—Revised: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition</b>						
Facet 1 (Interpersonal)	1.38	1.52	0	6	.61	.29
Facet 2 (Affective)	3.36	2.05	0	8	.73	.41
Facet 3 (Lifestyle)	3.76	2.06	0	9	.58	.22
Facet 4 (Antisocial)	4.02	2.07	0	9	.40	.12
Factor1 (Interpersonal/Affective)	4.75	3.05	0	14	.75	.28
Factor2 (Social Deviance)	7.77	3.44	0	17	.63	.15
PCL-R Total Raw Score	13.41	5.65	0	31	.75	.14

*Note.*  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's coefficient alpha, a measure of internal consistency reliability. According to Cronbach (1951), acceptable reliability for a measure is when  $\alpha > .70$ . AI-IC = Average inter-item correlation, another measure of internal consistency reliability, is more robust than  $\alpha$  (i.e., less affected by number of items and intercorrelations between items; Clark & Watson, 1995; Cortina, 1993). AI-IC recommended benchmarks are between .15 and .50 (Clark & Watson, 1995). The summary risk judgment provided by the clinician on the HCR-20 were coded as 1=low, 2=moderately low, 3=moderate, 4=moderately high, to 5=high. We could not calculate internal consistency reliability values because there was only one summary rating per evaluation – this was not a scale.

Table 3

*Bivariate Correlations Within and Between Measures*

	PI		NAS			HCR-20			PCL-R				SIV				
	Total	Cog	Aro	Beh	Reg	Total	H	C	R	Total	Factor 1	Factor 2	Facet 1	Facet 2	Facet 3	Facet 4	Pos
NAS Total	.49	.73	.75	.68	-.10	.16	.10	.28	.16	.20	.06	.20	-.02	.11	.18	.11	.06
PI Total		.57	.56	.57	-.07	.08	.11	.13	.06	.19	.15	.13	.08	.16	.03	.13	.07
Cog			.79	.79	-.12	.20	.09	.18	.21	.19	.07	.19	.05	.10	.15	.11	.02
Aro				.80	-.18	.20	.15	.28	.17	.20	.03	.24	.06	.08	.17	.17	.08
Beh					-.15	.19	.18	.32	.14	.23	.13	.20	.09	.19	.19	.12	.03
Reg						.01	.04	-.29	.03	-.02	-.03	-.04	.07	-.13	-.07	.08	-.26
HCR-20 Total							.39	.22	.65	.61	.42	.55	.46	.29	.45	.45	.08
H								.43	.21	.63	.40	.64	.50	.23	.51	.54	.04
C									.29	.31	.30	.27	.12	.36	.27	.17	.02
R										.35	.22	.35	.22	.17	.37	.20	.03
PCL-R Total											.78	.84	.74	.62	.63	.75	.12
Factor 1												.37	.78	.90	.22	.38	.02
Factor 2													.46	.21	.82	.82	.15
Facet 1														.45	.28	.48	.10
Facet 2															.12	.22	-.04
Facet 3																.34	.15
Facet 4																	.10

*Note.* NAS=Novaco Anger Scale, PI=Provocation Inventory, Cog=Cognitive subscale, Aro=Arousal subscale, Beh=Behavior subscale, Reg=Regulation subscale. H=Historical section of the HCR-20, C=Clinical section, R=Risk Management section. Pos=positive endorsement of Scheduled of Imagined Violence.



Table 4

*ROC Analyses for Three Dependent Variables*

	Contact and Threat Violence <i>n</i> = 19			Contact Violence <i>n</i> = 11			Any Reason for Hospital Return <i>n</i> = 35		
	AUC	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	AUC	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	AUC	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
NAS Total	.45	.06	.33 - .58	.43	.09	.25 - .62	.44	.05	.34 - .55
PI Total	.50	.07	.37 - .63	.42	.09	.24 - .60	.47	.06	.35 - .58
Cog	.42	.07	.29 - .54	.41	.09	.23 - .59	.49	.06	.37 - .61
Aro	.41	.07	.28 - .53	.39	.09	.20 - .57	.43	.06	.32 - .55
Beh	.46	.06	.34 - .59	.43	.09	.25 - .61	.43	.06	.31 - .54
Reg	.45	.07	.31 - .59	.40	.09	.22 - .58	.40	.06	.29 - .52
HCR-20 Total	.43	.06	.31 - .54	.44	.07	.31 - .57	.52	.05	.42 - .62
H	.46	.06	.34 - .57	.48	.07	.34 - .63	.53	.05	.43 - .63
C	.42	.06	.30 - .55	.41	.07	.27 - .54	.42	.05	.33 - .51
R	.38	.05	.28 - .48	.43	.07	.30 - .57	.49	.05	.39 - .58
Summary	.44	.07	.31 - .58	.47	.09	.28 - .65	.51	.05	.42 - .62
PCL-R Total	.47	.06	.34 - .59	.48	.07	.33 - .62	.49	.05	.39 - .60
Factor 1	.45	.07	.32 - .59	.49	.08	.32 - .65	.46	.06	.35 - .57
Factor 2	.45	.06	.33 - .57	.42	.07	.28 - .55	.50	.05	.40 - .61
Facet 1	.49	.06	.37 - .62	.50	.08	.34 - .66	.51	.05	.41 - .61
Facet 2	.42	.07	.29 - .56	.48	.08	.32 - .64	.44	.06	.33 - .55
Facet 3	.39	.06	.27 - .51	.38	.07	.24 - .52	.46	.05	.36 - .56
Facet 4	.56	.06	.44 - .68	.56	.08	.40 - .71	.57	.05	.47 - .67
SIV+	.55	.07	.42 - .68	.52	.09	.35 - .70	.49	.05	.39 - .56

*Note.* AUC = Area Under the Curve. *SE* = Standard Error. CI = confidence interval. NAS=Novaco Anger Scale, PI=Provocation Inventory, Cog=Cognitive subscale, Aro=Arousal subscale, Beh=Behavior subscale, Reg=Regulation subscale. H=Historical section of the HCR-20, C=Clinical section, R=Risk Management section. SIV+ = positive endorsement of Scheduled of Imagined Violence. "Summary" refers to the summary risk judgment provided by the clinician on the HCR-20. These values were coded as 1=low, 2=moderately low, 3=moderate, 4=moderately high, and 5=high.

Table 5

*Hierarchical Multiple Linear Regression for Rate of Violence Recidivism*

Step 1	<i>r</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	--	--	1.55	0.13
HCR-20 Total	-0.09	-0.07	-0.52	0.60
PCL-R Total	-0.08	-0.04	-0.27	0.79
SIV Positive	-0.03	-0.03	-0.35	0.73
Step 2				
Constant	--	--	0.26	0.80
HCR-20 Total <sup>a</sup>	-0.09	-0.04	-0.31	0.76
PCL-R Total	-0.08	-0.05	-0.36	0.72
SIV Positive	-0.03	-0.01	-0.04	0.97
NAS Total	-0.09	-0.12	-0.93	0.35
NAS Regulation	0.12	0.10	1.04	0.30
PI Total	0.02	0.12	0.98	0.33

*Note.* All reported beta weights are standardized coefficients. The *rs* represent zero-order correlations.

<sup>a</sup> Does not include item 7.