

Name of Tool	Structured Assessment of Risk and Needs (SARN)
Category	Sexual Offending (Awaiting Validation)
Author / Publisher	Thornton
Year	2002

Description

- The SARN is a standardised treatment planning tool used within the HM Prison Service (Hogue, 2009). It seeks to identify the long-term psychological risk factors relevant to individuals who have committed sexual offences ([Smid et al., 2014](#)).
- The tool contains 16 items that assess risk, treatment needs and progress in those convicted of sexual offences. Each risk factor is scored either 0 (not present), 1 (present but not a central characteristic), 2 (a central characteristic). For instances when information is poor or inconsistent, it is not possible to score factors ([Webster et al., 2006](#)).
- The items are subdivided into four domains; (1) sexual interest: sexual preoccupation, sexual preference for children, sexualised violence preference and other offence-related sexual interests; (2) distorted attitudes: adversarial sexual entitlement beliefs, rape supportive beliefs, viewing women as deceitful; (3) social and emotional functioning: feelings of personal inadequacy, distorted intimacy balance, grievance thinking towards others, a lack of emotional intimacy with adults; (4) self-management: impulsiveness, poor problem-solving, poor management of emotion.
- The SARN is administered in conjunction with the RM2000. Utilising the RM2000 to assess the static factors, the SARN follows on thereafter to determine the dynamic and treatment factors.
- SARN can be completed by HPC Registered forensic psychologists and experienced probation officers.

Age Appropriateness

18+

Assessor Qualifications

Assessors should have the relevant training offered by the HM Prison and Probation Service and experience in risk assessment and risk management and SARN can be completed by HCPC Registered forensic psychologists.

Tool Development

- The SARN is based on the Structured Anchored Clinical Judgement-Minimum (SACJ-Min) which itself has been updated and refined into RM2000 ([Thornton, 2002](#)).
- The tool is a derivative of the Structured Risk Assessment ([Thornton, 2002](#)).
- [Webster et al. \(2006\)](#) obtained a mean inter-rater agreement of 84.3% in a pilot study with a small sample of trained professionals. In the four cases rated by the professionals, the Kappa values ranged from .61 to .84.

- [Webster and colleagues \(2006\)](#) carried out two studies: one with seven experienced raters; the other with clinicians with differing levels of experience who had been trained in the SARN. The first study demonstrated strong support for the inter-rater reliability of the SARN; although this can perhaps be expected given the raters were highly experienced in rating and dealing with those who have committed sexual offending. The second study gave acceptable to good levels of support for inter-rater reliability.
- [Tully, Browne and Craig \(2015\)](#) tested another version of the tool commonly used by the National Offender Management Service in England and Wales, focusing on 'treatment needs assessment' based on the risk factors applicable to each individual assessed (SARN-TNA). This tool was applied to 496 adult males over two and four year follow up periods. ROC was found not to be significant at 2 years (AUC .59 in a sample of 304) or 4 years (AUC .57 in a sample of 161). It is, therefore, recommended that the SARN-TNA is not relied upon as a predictor of sexual reoffending.

General Notes

- The instrument itself is only normed on adult males with a previous offence history and is deemed inappropriate for the use with females and juveniles.
- [Webster et al. \(2006\)](#) circumscribed a number of provisions for use of the SARN: it should be applied by experienced psychologists; its use should be carefully monitored and evaluated; users should have demonstrated reasonable inter-rater reliability before using the tool without supervision.
- [Beech et al. \(2003\)](#) reported on the use of the SARN in conjunction with the Sex Offender Treatment Programme in English prisons. While facilitators welcomed the tool, they found the outcome reports that were generated were too complex and lengthy for less literate individuals.
- [Hocken and colleagues \(2013\)](#) carried out thematic analysis on the transcript from a discussion group of sexual offending management experts. It was found that the SARN was not appropriate to be used with individuals with learning disabilities.