National Offender
Management Service

Sex Offender Management and Dynamic Risk:
Pilot evaluation of the Active Risk Management System (ARMS)

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Disclaimer

Acknowledgements

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1.   Summary

Context

This report presents findings from the Active Risk Management System (ARMS) pilot, undertaken by the National Offender Management Service in 2012. Evaluation[1] of an earlier pilot of the Stable and Acute 07 (S & A) dynamic risk assessment suggested that tool was promising, but had several limitations. ARMS aimed to replicate the positive aspects of S & A (such as providing a consistent, informed approach to assessing offenders) and address some of the disadvantages (such as the complex and clinical nature of the S & A assessment process). ARMS is a structured assessment process to assess dynamic risk factors known to be associated with sexual re-offending, and protective factors known to be associated with reduced offending. It is intended to provide Police and Probation with information to plan management of convicted sex offenders in the community. With regard to how ARMS would fit within future plans for a National Probation Service, it is envisaged that it would build on existing risk management tools by providing offender managers with a consistent process to assess and monitor *current* factors and behaviours that are relevant to sex offender management.

The pilot took place in 2012, with 20 officers from three Probation Trusts and two Police Forces using the tool as part of their routine supervision of 37 sexual offenders.

Approach

The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of this small-scale pilot, to inform the development of the next version of ARMS. Aims of the evaluation included: making recommendations about staff training and support; exploring how ARMS was implemented by officers and the perceived value of using ARMS as a shared tool between Police and Probation; the relevance of the risk and protective factors in the tool itself; and, how well ARMS integrates with existing assessments. At the half-way review of the pilot, NOMS developers decided to also measure the consistency of ARMS ratings produced by different officers in the same cases (inter-rater reliability, or IRR).

The evaluation used a case study design, in order to provide a contextualised understanding of the pilot. Each case study site was visited for one or two days and in-depth interviews

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[1] McNaughton Nicholls, C. Callanan, M. Legard, R. Tomaszewski, W. Purdon, S. and Webster, S. (2010). Examining implementation of the Stable and Acute dynamic risk assessment tool pilot in England and Wales. Ministry of Justice Research Series 4/10.

were conducted with nine officers involved in the pilot, conducted across the three pilot areas (Cumbria, Northumbria and Leeds).

NOMS asked officers involved in the pilot to use ARMS to rate risk and protective factors in two hypothetical case studies. ARMS developers were given the same case studies and together agreed a "gold standard" rating for each case, to be compared with ratings produced by officers involved in the pilot. NatCen conducted descriptive analysis on the anonymised data from this exercise to assess inter-rater reliability.

Results

Motivation for involvement and training

- Officers volunteered to participate in the pilot for various reasons, but a common theme was their belief that existing assessments did not incorporate dynamic risk and/or were not sexual offender specific.
- Officers found the training relevant and engaging, with a good balance between theory and practice. They would have welcomed more, and longer, role-play exercises to practice their assessment skills.
- Officers in both Police and Probation found the joint-organisation aspect of training beneficial, reporting that it enhanced their understanding of how the other organisation worked and how ARMS was applied across different settings and roles.
- Officers found the trainers credible and engaging, and felt that it was important that the trainers were ARMS experts drawn from both Police and Probation backgrounds.

Process of implementation

- The ARMS assessment has five stages[2] and officers are expected to use a range of information sources, including interviews, observations and case files. Officers reported that they applied ARMS as directed, although there was variation as to the assessment location and whether it was completed collaboratively with the offender.
- Officers felt that ARMS would be appropriate to use for a range of different types of sexual offenders, but only piloted the tool with a few, compliant cases.
- Officers felt that the ARMS assessment process was clear, but that it could be lengthy to complete. They suggested a more streamlined version of ARMS with fewer factors to rate

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[2] The ARMS assessment involves five stages: gathering and evaluating information about the offender over the last three months; scoring the presence of risk and protective factors; identifying priorities for action; designing action; and reviewing any changes following action.

overall, and had a preference for integrating it with existing assessments such as OASys and Risk Management Plans.

- Officers were not convinced that ARMS would be useful as a regular assessment conducted at set intervals. Instead, they suggested ARMS could be used when offenders are first released, and then annually and/or at 'critical junctures' in their cases where circumstances or the managing officer changed.

- Officers were unclear about 'ownership' of the ARMS assessment between Police and Probation, and how this would be managed in cases where both are involved. They suggested that ARMS would be of most benefit in Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) cases, and when handing over cases from Probation to Police.

Consistency of officers' ARMS ratings

- When using ARMS to rate a hypothetical case study, officers demonstrated greater consistency between each other in lower-risk cases than they did in higher-risk cases. There is little evidence that the way an officer rated a case was influenced by their level of experience or whether they were Police or Probation.

- Officers found protective factors most difficult to rate and promote, especially if they conflicted with actions taken to manage risk factors. For example, having a pro-social network is a protective factor, but could involve having more contact with family members, and if this meant spending time with children, increased opportunity to offend.

Implications

- Training should retain its balance between theory and practice, with consideration given to greater use of role play. Trainers should be drawn from both Police and Probation, and any use of trainers who are not ARMS experts should be closely monitored to ensure that the perceived benefits of expert trainers are not lost.

- The ARMS manual should be updated to include: clearer examples for rating the presence of each risk and protective factor; guidance on the most appropriate location for conducting ARMS interviews with explanations of relative benefits/drawbacks (i.e. in the offender's home, or in the Police/Probation office); guidance on when and with which type of offender ARMS could be completed; and who should hold 'ownership/responsibility' of the ARMS assessment between Probation and Police.

- Consideration should be given to streamlining ARMS to include fewer categories or factors, without compromising its integrity as an evidence-based tool. If possible, ARMS should be integrated with OASys and Risk Management Plans already completed.

- A larger scale pilot of ARMS should be conducted, ensuring representation across diverse geographical areas, offender types, and officer experience and working practices. A second evaluation should include a larger inter-rater reliability (IRR) exercise involving more case studies. Future research would also benefit from tracking cases over time and including a control group of cases where ARMS is not used.

2.   Introduction

2.1   Context

The use of the static risk assessment tool, Risk Matrix 2000 (RM2000)[3], across Police and Probation brought the benefits of a common language and understanding to the management of cases in which both organisations are involved, particularly in the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) arena. The literature concerning sexual and violent offenders' risk has now expanded its focus from static risk prediction (historical factors shown to be statistically predictive of future sexual and violent offending and that are unchanging) to dynamic risk (factors that are potentially changeable, such as alcohol consumption).[4] Hanson, Harris, Scott and Helmus (2007)[5] classify dynamic risk factors as either Stable (learned behaviours and personal skills / self management problems) or Acute (factors that last only hours or days) and are shown to be predictive of imminent sexual offending. Other dynamic risk assessment tools include the Sex Offender Treatment Intervention and Progress Scale (SOTIPS)[6] and the Violence Risk Scale – Sexual Offender Version (VRS-SO)[7]. There are three benefits of adopting the Stable / Acute classification of dynamic risk factors. First, they can help identify targets for intervention that, if changed, will have the effect of reducing the likelihood of reoffending, and second, they can help identify whether a sexual offender is making meaningful progress against set treatment targets. Third, they help supervising officers to monitor the risk presented by sexual offenders in the community.

The value of the use of OASys (Offender Assessment System)[8] for undertaking a general assessment of dynamic risk of serious harm, and of the rich information provided by SARN (Structured Assessment of Risk and Need) reports on sexual offenders who had undertaken Sex Offender Treatment Programmes (SOTP)[9] was recognised by both Police and

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[3]   Thornton, D. (2007) *Scoring guide for the Risk Matrix 2000.9/SVC. February 2007 version*, http://www.bhamlive1.bham.ac.uk/Documents/college-les/psych/RM2000scoringinstructions.pdf.
[4] Thornton, D. (2002). Constructing and Testing a Framework for Dynamic Risk Assessment. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*. 14 (2), pp 139-153
[5] Hanson, R.K., Harris, A.J.R., Scott, T.L. and Helmus, L. (2007). *Assessing the risk of sexual offenders on community supervision: The Dynamic Supervision Project*. Public Safety Canada 2007-05.
[6] McGrath, R. Cumming, G. and Lasher, P. (2012) SOTIPS Sex Offender Treatment Intervention and Progress Scale, www.nij.gov/funding/2012/sotips-manual.pdf
[7] Wong, S. Olver, M. Nicholaichuk, T. and Gordon, A. (undated) The Violence Risk Scale – Sexual Offender Version, https://psynergy.ca/VRS_VRS-SO.html.
[8] Debidin, M. (ed.) (2009) *A compendium of research and analysis on the Offender Assessment System (OASys) 2006 – 2009*, Ministry of Justice Research Series 16/09, London: Ministry of Justice.
[9] Webster, S., Mann, R., Carter, A., Long, J., Milner, R., O'Brien, M., Wakeling, H. and Ray, N. (2006) 'Inter-rater reliability of dynamic risk assessment with sexual offenders', *Psychology, Crime and Law,* vol. 12: 439-452.

Probation, but only used in NOMS. Hence, the search for a system or tool that was specific to the management of sexual offenders and that could be "rolled out" for use with both Police and Probation. In 2008, NOMS began a pilot of the Stable and Acute dynamic risk assessment tool (hereafter S & A) (Hanson *et al*., 2007) in Police and Probation Services across England and Wales. The S & A provided a structured method for identifying and measuring dynamic risk factors, predictive of sexual re-offending.

In 2009/10, McNaughton Nicholls and colleagues conducted an evaluation of S & A[10] and found that the tool offered a number of benefits to Police and Probation Officers managing sexual offenders risk in the community. These included: increased awareness of critical risk issues; a more targeted response to high risk offenders; and improved partnership working based on shared information that emerged from individual assessments. However, the evaluation also presented some clear challenges to the use of S & A. The way in which officers administered the assessment varied widely between areas. Second, some staff reported difficulty in interpreting the meaning of some items and so struggled to rate them effectively. Third, there were concerns about the reliability of the tool. When this was tested by different experts and officers rating the same cases, inconsistent results were achieved. Consequently, these findings had both public safety and ethical implications. NOMS decided not to progress with rolling out the use of S & A. Instead they developed their own dynamic risk assessment tool – the Active Risk Management System (ARMS).

The development of ARMS

Those involved in the development of ARMS considered it should be possible to devise a process, aided by practice tools, to assess the presence of dynamic risk factors, and harness the assessment information, to improve the management of sexual offenders. The starting point for the content of ARMS was to clarify what nature of items would be included in an assessment of an offender's current level of risk. To develop the system that was piloted, items were included based on the following considerations: (i) consideration of what would be the observable evidence of a currently active, psychologically meaningful, risk factor; (ii) consideration of the desistance and protective factors literature; (iii) consideration of other scales for assessing sexual offender and/or violence risk that incorporated active factors or protective factors, particularly the SAPROF, SAVRY and AIM-2 (Griffin *et al*., 2008). By merging items arising from different parts of this process according to their thematic content,

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[10] McNaughton Nicholls, C., Callanan, M., Legard, R., Tomaszewski, W., Purdon, S. and Webster, S. (2010). Examining implementation of the Stable and Acute dynamic risk assessment tool pilot in England and Wales. Ministry of Justice Research Series 4/10.

13 factors (8 risk factors and 5 protective factor) were chosen and brief, non-technical descriptions of each were developed.

A strengths-based model of sexual offender management mirrors developments in sexual offender treatment programmes. That is, evidence has suggested effective treatment programmes focus on the principles of Risk, Need and Responsivity (RNR) (Andrews, Bonta and Hoge, 1990).[11] While the principles of RNR remain in place there has, in recent years been some criticism of the deficit based model these psychosocial approaches represent. In particular, deficit approaches are perceived to highlight the negative aspect of offending behaviour without consideration of how to overcome these challenges with alternative actions (Ward *et al*, 2007).[12] Alternative approaches such as the Good Lives Model (GLM) have been adapted to present a strength based model of sexual offender treatment that adheres to the RNR approach, but adapts it into something more akin to what Worling and Langton (2012)[13] identify as a Risk, Need, Strengths and Responsivity approach (RNSR). Although there has been some criticism of the GLM (Andrews *et al*, 2011)[14] arguing that it offers little that is new and may encourage 'weak assessment' this has in turn been rebuked (Ward, Yates and Willis, 2012)[15] as being based on a misunderstanding of the application of the GLM. These arguments withstanding, it is the recognition of both the risk and protective factors that may be significant indicators of the likelihood of recidivism that currently sets ARMS apart from other dynamic risk assessment processes.

There are 13 risk and protective factors within the ARMS framework:

Risk:
- Opportunity to offend
- Offence related sexual interests
- Sexual pre-occupation
- Emotional congruence (offenders against children only)

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[11] Andrews, D. A., Bonta, J., and Hoge, R. D. (1990). Classification for effective rehabilitation: Rediscovering psychology. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 17*, 19-52.
[12] Ward, T. Mann, R. and Gannon, T. (2007) 'The good lives model of offender rehabilitation: clinical implications' *Aggression and Violent Behaviour,* 12, 87 – 107.
[13] Worling, J. and Langton, C. (2012) 'Assessment and Treatment of Adolescents who Sexually Offend: Clinical Issues and Implications for Secure Settings, *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 39 (814), 814 – 841.
[14] Andrews, D. Bonta, J. and Wormith, J. (2011) 'The risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model: does adding the good lives model contribute to effective crime reduction?' *Criminal Justice and Behaviour,* 38, 735-755 doi:10.1177/0093854811406356
[15] Ward, T. Yates, P. and Willis, G. (2012) 'The good lives model and the Risk Need Responsivity Model: A critical response to Andrews, Bonta and Wormith (2011)' *Criminal Justice and Behaviour,* 39, 94- 110, doi:10.1177/0093854811426085

- Hostile orientation to others
- Poor self management
- Negative orientation to rules
- Anti-social influences.

Protective:
- Pro-social network
- A commitment to desist
- An intimate relationship
- Employment / being busy
- Citizenship / giving something back.

The presence of each risk factor is assessed and given a priority rating for risk management action (high, medium, low), depending on whether there is clear / strong evidence, some evidence or no evidence of the presence of the particular factor. Each protective factor is given a priority rating for risk management action that is the reverse for risk factors: a low priority being given when there is strong evidence of a protective factor being present, medium where there is some evidence and high when there is no or limited evidence.

ARMS process

Designed to be delivered by trained staff, the ARMS assessment is a structured, evidence-based tool with five stages: gathering and evaluating information about the offender over the last three months; scoring the presence of risk and protective factors; identifying priorities for action; designing action; and reviewing any changes following action. The tool comprises a data capture form; a "manual" distributed at the training event containing definitions and rationale for the factors included and information on risk management; and optional aides to making an assessment (a diary exercise, interview questions designed to elicit self-reported information about each risk or protective factor).

Information sources

NOMS specify the essential and desirable information sources to facilitate an ARMS assessment. Essential sources include direct knowledge and observations and encompass the officer's perceptions of the offender's routines, activities and living environment. These data should be collected via Police/Probation visits in the community, or from Prison officers (the pilot however did not cover use in prisons) for those in custody. In addition, there is the option of completing a diary exercise with the offender as part of a supervision interview.

Desirable sources include an interview with the offender and any information from other sources such as a partner, or other professionals working with the individual being assessed.

2.2   The pilot

The ARMS pilot was introduced and managed by NOMS in Cumbria, Northumbria and Leeds. After initial development and corroboration with researchers in the field of sex offender risk assessment, a group of 35 staff in three Probation Trusts and two Police Forces who had expressed an interest in ARMS were trained in the use of a prototype version. Training was delivered by ARMS experts from both organisations, in a joint-agency context over two days. Twenty officers (a mix of both Police and Probation) went on to use the tool as part of their routine supervision of 37 sexual offenders.

2.3   Aims and objectives

This report presents the findings of research commissioned to evaluate the implementation of the pilot of the ARMS assessment tool in three areas in England. The evaluation was intended to inform NOMS' decision-making about the implementation, and to inform development of an updated version of the ARMS tool based on user feedback. The focus of the evaluation was on the process of implementing ARMS and the consistency of dynamic risk ratings between officers using the tool.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Assess the impact of training and other forms of support on officers' effective use of the ARMS assessment.
- Explain how officers were implementing ARMS, including how they select offenders, what sources of information they use to complete the assessment, and the length of time taken to complete an assessment.
- Identify whether or not officers perceived ARMS to be valuable as a shared assessment tool used by Police and Probation.
- Explore whether dynamic risk factors were being rated consistently by different officers using ARMS.
- Provide advice on whether each of the ARMS risk and protective factors tool were perceived to be relevant and applicable to officers' goal of safely managing sexual offenders in the community.

This evaluation, whilst useful, is limited in scope and based on a very small pilot. As such it is difficult to provide definitive findings in terms of how well ARMS can provide value as a

shared assessment tool, the efficacy or value of ARMS as a risk management tool, or the impact on decision making, and the extent to which it is applicable across different offender types and cases. These questions should be explored fully in evaluation of a larger pilot in the future.

2.4   Methods

Our approach to evaluating the ARMS tool included two related phases of work:

- Phase 1: An assessment of the consistency of different officers' ratings of risk using the ARMS tool (inter-rater reliability, or IRR), using descriptive analysis of a sample of ARMS assessments completed by officers in IRR exercises conducted by NOMS;
- Phase 2: In-depth interviews with a sample of officers who used ARMS during the pilot.

Phase 1 of the research involved analysis of data from an IRR exercise conducted by NOMS. The extent to which different officers can consistently assess the level of risk using the ARMS tool was a critical component of the evaluation, since there are ethical and public safety implications associated with unreliable assessments.

NOMS created two hypothetical case studies, with differing types of offending and information,[16] against which to assess the consistency with which officers assessed the level of risk using ARMS. Officers involved in the pilot were invited to one of two events where they were given both the case studies and asked to complete an ARMS assessment for each case study, based on the information provided. The case studies were also given to all four ARMS developers, who individually completed an ARMS assessment for both case studies, and then conferred together to produce a "gold standard" assessment result against which to compare the results produced by officers involved in the pilot. Not all officers were able to complete ARMS assessments for both case studies in the time provided: Case 1 was rated by 10 officers (seven Police and three Probation), and Case 2 was rated by 11 officers (eight Police and three Probation).

NOMS provided NatCen with anonymised completed assessment for analysis. In our earlier evaluation of NOMS' pilot of the S & A tool, we determined IRR through statistical analysis using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC)[17]. For the ARMS pilot, while enough officers participated in the exercise, each officer only assessed one or two cases each, which was

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[16] Available on request from NOMS: MAPPA@noms.gsi.gov.uk and marked "FAO the Sex Offender Team"
[17] Shrout, P, E. and Fleiss, J, L. 'Intraclass correlations: Uses in assessing rater reliability.' *Psychological Bulletin,* 1979, 86, pp 420-428.

insufficient to conduct statistical analysis using ICC.[18] For this reason, simple descriptive analysis was used to describe differences between risk ratings produced by different officers, differences between officers and ARMS developers, and differences between the ARMS developers themselves. Explanation of Phase 1 findings was supported by interviews with officers in Phase 2.

Phase 2 of the research involved in-depth interviews with officers who had been involved in the pilot. This stage used a case study design, involving researchers visiting the pilot sites and conducting interviews. Case studies are ideal for this type of pilot evaluation, where no single perspective can provide a full account or explanation of the implementation of ARMS, and where understanding of the pilot needs to contextualised. Each case study site was visited for one or two days, and in-depth interviews were completed with officers involved in the pilot. Officers attending the IRR exercise were asked by NOMS if they would be willing to take part in an evaluation interview and for the research team to have their details passed to them for this purpose. From those who agreed, the sample was purposively designed so that between two to four assessors from each of the three pilot areas could be invited to an in-depth interview, with variation achieved in relation to level of experience working with sexual offenders and whether the officer was employed by Police or Probation. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with six probation officers and two police officers, and an additional police officer completed a telephone interview. All of the interviewees had completed at least one ARMS assessment with their current caseload. The highest number of assessments completed by any one member of staff was six (covering five offenders on their caseload, with one repeat assessment).The breakdown of the interview sample is presented in the Table below.

Table 2.1: Phase 2 interview sample

Area	Interviews
Area 1 (Probation only)	4
Area 2 (Police only)	2
Area 3 (Police and Probation)	2 (Probation)
	1 (Police)
Total	9

It is important to clarify that this report is based primarily on qualitative investigation. These findings reflect range and diversity of attitudes and behaviours amongst officers participating in the pilot. However, the design of the pilot required that officers volunteer to participate

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[18] STATA 12 was used to calculate sample size requirements using sampicc command alpha=0.05 and beta=0.8.

which may have resulted in officers participating who were particularly engaged with the issue of sexual offender risk assessment. Therefore, their views may not reflect the variety of experiences present across Police and Probation more widely. As is the case with all qualitative research, the numbers of participants expressing particular views or exhibiting particular behaviours is not reported as this has no statistical significance and no numeric conclusions about the wider population could be drawn. The evaluation was designed towards the end of the pilot process and was therefore limited in scope to that of the existing pilot and IRR data that had been collected. As such, whilst the findings indicate ARMS could be useful to officers, we do recommend that further piloting and evaluation of ARMS be undertaken before it is used more widely and acknowledge the small scale of the evaluation and attendant limitations.

Further detail on the interview topic guide, analysis and ethical approval is available in Appendix A.

2.5   Report structure

The findings presented are taken from the analysis of the in-depth interviews with officers involved in the pilot, along with descriptive analysis of the IRR exercise conducted by NOMS. Chapter 3 discusses officers' motivation for involvement, their training and how the pilot was implemented. Chapter 4 discusses similarities and difference in the way officers conducted ARMS assessment, whilst Chapter 5 sets out the results of the IRR exercise. Chapter 6 presents conclusions and recommendations.

3.   Motivation and training

This chapter explores the way in which the ARMS pilot was implemented. This includes consideration of the context of differing working practices between organisations; the motivation for taking part; and an appraisal of the training provided to officers.

3.1   Different roles: Police and Probation

The current financial climate has had a bearing on the operational capacity of Police and Probation staff, in that officers are often required to 'deliver more for less'. Given that ARMS was piloted without additional resources allocated, it is important to understand officers' caseload to place subsequent discussion of capacity in context. Probation officers had generic caseloads of about 35 – 45 offenders, including eight to ten sexual offenders. Two officers had a particularly high number of sexual offenders in their caseload, but were satisfied with this due to their personal interest in working with this group. Police officers were based in Public Protection Units as part of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), with caseloads in the community of approximately 60 offenders.

In our evaluation of the earlier Stable and Acute 07 (S & A) pilot, the differing role and ethos of Police and Probation officers was found to have a bearing on how sexual offender risk assessment was operationalised. In the current research, this distinction in role and ethos was also evident and is important context for understanding findings presented throughout this report. Here participants were clear that the role of Police and Probation officers differed in terms of scope (i.e. how often they see an offender) and focus (i.e. the aim of their work with offenders). This difference also had an impact on how they applied ARMS and the way in which it could be integrated into their day to day work.

For example, Police were viewed by both Police and Probation officers interviewed as focussing on preventing reoffending through the assiduous management of offenders. This management is enhanced by having in-depth and high quality information about offenders' lifestyle and routine. Police officers interviewed appreciated the value of ARMS in providing an additional process for information gathering. In addition, the Police felt that ARMS helped them target the dynamic factors in an offenders' life in order to understand the risk of an individual reoffending. Police interviewed could also see the value of including protective factors to help them have a holistic consideration of offenders' circumstances. For example, the presence of protective factors could influence a reduction in the level at which an

individual was managed if the ARMS assessment indicated the current dynamic risks indicated the individual posed a lower risk than the RM2000 (static) assessment indicated.

ARMS could also bring challenges for the Police. For example, the style of questioning and level of detail required to complete the assessments was felt to be difficult given the nature of their contact and relationship with offenders. That is, the Police did not always feel best placed to gather ARMS information in the broader context of an official Police visit to an individual's home, and given the high level of their caseload and relative infrequency with which they visited some offenders.

Probation was viewed by Police and Probation officers as having a more rehabilitative role (though Probation officers did note that they feel their work has become increasingly focussed on offender risk management in recent years). Here their work was described as helping to prevent reoffending whilst also working closely with the offender to identify areas that help promote their rehabilitation. Probation officers could see how ARMS linked into their work in a 'language they understood'. OASys already provides a detailed assessment of offenders' needs, but ARMS provided a sexual offender specific assessment, which was felt to 'knit' OASys type factors together in a more cohesive and relevant manner for this offender type. As such Probation officers noted that it may have been simpler for them to integrate ARMS into their day to day role than for Police, but it may also have provided less enhancement of their understanding of dynamic risk and protective factors than for Police.

3.2   Motivation for involvement

The nature and extent to which officers were motivated to take part in the pilot is important, since an individual's reasons for taking part could influence the way they engaged with the ARMS assessment process. Officers volunteered to take part in the pilot following a generic email being sent to all officers requesting 'expressions of interest'. To be eligible officers had to have at least four sexual offenders on their caseload at that time.

Three overlapping motivating factors emerged from officers' accounts when they reflected on why they had agreed to take part in the pilot.

- **Reassurance**: it was recognised that working with sexual offenders requires specific skills. However, experienced officers with generic caseloads do not necessarily receive training working specifically with sexual offenders. As such, those officers with less experience welcomed the opportunity to ensure their practice was appropriate and to learn more about sexual offender management.

- **Enhancement**: whilst existing assessment tools such as RM2000 and OASys are important for offender management, some officers felt that an assessment of dynamic risk factors, focussing specifically on sexual offenders, filled an existing gap. These officers were aware of the limits of existing tools, and so wanted an additional option.

- **Pioneering**: some officers also talked about their general interest in new research and approaches to working effectively with offenders. These participants stressed how ARMS focussed on protective factors and incorporated components of the 'good lives' model (Ward, Mann and Gannon, 2007). This was felt to be innovative and an emerging area of sexual offender management. These officers had volunteered for previous pilots and were keen to play a part in informing new practice managing sexual offenders.

Therefore, officers had a range of internal and external motivations for taking part – internally, they sought to improve their own practice and be reassured that they were working with sexual offenders in the 'right' way; externally, they were keen to be involved in the development of practice; making sure the assessment tools used are appropriate and enhance their existing processes.

3.3   Training

In our evaluation of the S & A pilot, some staff expressed dissatisfaction with the training they received and this was found to have directly impacted on the success of the pilot delivery. Those who were dissatisfied with S & A training demonstrated reservations about implementation (for example, feeling that it would take too much time) and a lack of confidence in their own ability to use the tool[19]. This is consistent with the established evidence base that suggests that effective training is key to successful implementation, both for the integrity of the programme being implemented and for generating staff commitment to delivering the programme. Therefore, how officers experienced the ARMS training may also help explain how officers went on to use the ARMS tool. A two day training course was held at the start of the ARMS pilot. This was attended by Police and Probation officers from the three case study pilot areas. Training included: research evidence that informed selection of risk and protective factors, an introduction to the ARMS assessment, and practical role play exercises that involved conducting ARMS assessments.

The training was well received by officers. It was felt to include good coverage of relevant theory and be 'fit for purpose' in terms of ensuring officers were ready to implement ARMS in

their day to day work. The joint-organisation nature of the training was particularly welcomed as it enabled a better shared understanding of each organisation's work and how they could implement ARMS together. However, there were some concerns noted by Probation officers. In particular, they felt there were concepts and ideas familiar to their work that may have been new concepts to Police colleagues. This explains views expressed that ARMS was generally more focussed on the type of assessments Probation officers routinely conduct (for example, the level of detail, type of questions, underpinning theory) than Police.

Officers made a number of suggestions in relation to further development of the training, set out in Table 3.1 below. Officers suggested that trainers should continue to be external experts in ARMS, rather than cascading training delivery to local officers. Officers appreciated that the expert trainers were able to answer all their questions, and perceived external experts as more credible than non-expert trainers. They also felt that ensuring delivery of a consistent message across different implementation areas was important, and that the use of external experts would make this more likely.

Table 3.1: Officers' suggestions for development of training

Practicalities	Content	Dynamics
• Length of course: generally felt to be appropriate. Experienced officers suggested a 1 day course. Longer course may be more beneficial for Police officers 'less experienced' with theory and practice of assessment. • Location: residential or local training was preferred, to prevent long days travelling to and from the training venue. • Room set-up: seating should be arranged in round tables to allow interaction between participants, rather than a 'lecture hall' style.	• Increase the number and length of role plays to embed assessment skills. • For participants already familiar with theory, this component was felt to have less value.	• Continue to have joint organisation training. This enhances understanding of how each organisation works and how they use ARMS. • Explicitly acknowledge the different 'ways of working' between organisations. • Ensure a 'mix' of Police and Probation in group work throughout the training. • Ensure trainers come from both a Police and Probation background so both organisations feel represented and the training is relevant to their organisational context.

[19] McNaughton Nicholls, C. Callanan, M. Legard, R. Tomaszewski, W. Purdon, S. and Webster, S. (2010). Examining implementation of the Stable and Acute dynamic risk assessment tool pilot in England and Wales. Ministry of Justice Research Series 4/10, pp. 8-9.

Overall, ARMS training was felt to be good and that it should broadly remain the same, although obviously changes to the ARMS tool following evaluation of the pilot would have to be taken into account in future training content.

4.   ARMS implementation and value

In this chapter the process of conducting an ARMS assessment is examined. This includes the sources of information used, the selection of cases and the timing and location of assessments.

4.1   Information sources

The nature and extent of information available to officers is a key factor in how effective their assessment of dynamic factors in offender's circumstances can be. In the ARMS pilot, officers used a range of information to complete their assessments. The main source of information tended to be an ARMS interview with the offender. Some officers used the practice tools provided in the ARMS manual to elicit information, for example the diary and/or list of questions to elicit self-reported information. Others preferred to go into the interview with a clear sense of the type of information they required and then ask around this more generally with the offender, rather than follow an interview schedule. Preference for these different methods seemed to depend on the officer's own working style rather than being related to specific factors, for example, how experienced the officer was.

Officers also used observations (e.g. within the offender's accommodation), discussions with other organisations involved in the same case, and existing known information (such as the offender's current employment or relationship status) to help them complete the ARMS assessment. The range of information sources used by officers indicates that they were following the assessment guidelines provided during training and in the ARMS manual.

Whether officers chose to conduct the ARMS assessment in collaboration with the offender depended on the nature of the existing officer/offender relationship. In some cases, consent was sought from the offender to 'try out a new assessment' and the papers were in front of them as they completed ARMS. In other cases, the assessment was completed using case files, prior knowledge of the case and information gleaned from meetings, without a full interview or discussion of the assessment with offenders. While officers appreciated having this flexibility to use their discretion, it should be noted that this does have potential implications both for NOMS 'assessment ethos' with sexual offenders, and for the accuracy and effectiveness of outcomes. As discussed in our evaluation of the Stable and Acute 07 (S & A) pilot, there is clear evidence for the benefits of officer/offender collaboration, including

for example, in assisting offenders to engage with assessment and own the outcomes for action[20]. If ARMS is completed collaboratively, it could be used to encourage and reinforce an offender's work towards their rehabilitative goals. If a collaborative approach is not mandated, then perhaps the key advantage of ARMS is as a rich source of information that feeds into decisions that are made about, as opposed to with, the offender.

However, there is potential for flexibility to be introduced into the information-gathering process in other ways, and officers may benefit from further guidance in this respect. For example, an interview covering each of the ARMS factors may not be necessary in every case, such as when the offender is well known to the officer. Rather than undertaking a discrete 'ARMS interview' covering all of the dynamic factors in ARMS, officers could first consider what they already know about an offender in relation to each ARMS factor. An interview may then be used to complete the gaps. Officers need to ensure that the information they use to complete the assessment is still current however.

4.2   Assessment interviews

To obtain information to complete ARMS, officers tended to conduct interviews based on the ARMS 'interview questions' tool. Issues covered in the ARMS interview were said to be typical to those officers normally had in mind when meeting or assessing sexual offenders. It was seen as a key advantage that ARMS did not require 'new' questions to be asked of their caseload (though the level of detail around particular issues may be new). As such, there appears to be a minimal risk of ARMS questions undermining existing officer / offender rapport.

Officers reported that ARMS interviews took between one and two hours to complete. With a new case (where the officers were not familiar with the offender) some officers split the interviews over two sessions to enable exploration of each factor in the time available. Timing of assessments is discussed in more detail below. Although the interview was felt to enable an in-depth exploration of an offender's circumstances, conducting a full interview was felt to be repetitive in cases already well known to the officer. This indicates that the option to use the interview guide flexibly should be made clear in the guidance. For example, officers queried whether they should ask about each factor systematically, irrespective of the existing quality of supporting information for that factor.

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[20] McNaughton Nicholls, C. Callanan, M. Legard, R. Tomaszewski, W. Purdon, S. and Webster, S. (2010). Examining implementation of the Stable and Acute dynamic risk assessment tool pilot in England and Wales. Ministry of Justice Research Series 4/10, pp. 12-14.

Interviews tended to be completed during home visits with the offender. Flexibility around location was deemed important to some officers – if it was their 'normal' practice to see offenders at their office they completed interviews there. However, others recommended that the interview should be conducted in the home setting. They suggested two specific benefits to this approach. First, the offender's home environment provides additional information on which to base the assessment, such as observations about personal hygiene, presence of pornography, and content of photographs on display. Second, the content of the interview was recognised to be potentially sensitive, in-depth and lengthy. Therefore, completing interviews in the offender's home environment was perceived as making people feel comfortable and enabling greater rapport (and perhaps disclosure) as the assessment questions were discussed:

Guidance for officers on the optimal location of an interview, and reasons for this, could therefore be useful to aid consistency of approach/information when completing an assessment.

The ARMS diary

Asking offenders to complete a 'diary' of day to day tasks is an optional source of information that can be used to support the ARMS assessment. Not all of the officers interviewed had used this tool. Some officers felt that the diary provided unnecessary detail, and were not sure if it was to be completed between the officer and offender in an interview situation or left with an offender to complete. Officers also expressed scepticism that the offender may disclose socially desirable activities, rather than the diary being an accurate record of their routine. However, officers who had completed the diary with offenders found it useful for focusing on the offender's life – for example, indicating just how 'empty' it might be, and therefore highlighting the need to prioritise developing meaningful activities with them. There was a consensus amongst officers that the diary should remain as an optional tool to aide the assessment, and that the officer should determine how and if it was completed.

Joint assessments

Joint assessments completed with both Police and Probation officers present were rarely conducted as part of the pilot[21]. Where they did occur, the officer involved in the pilot led, and their colleague (who was not actively involved in the pilot or aware of ARMS) sat in on the

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[21] Only one area of the pilot involved both Police and Probation. In other areas officers informed other agencies about the pilot but these agencies were not explicitly involved.

exercise. The process was reported to 'have not been particularly different' from other shared assessments. As such, officers who had not completed assessments using ARMS with colleagues from other organisations said they would be comfortable doing so. The shared language the assessment tool provided was perceived by officers to aid communication between officers when discussing a case. However, officers also noted that in areas where information sharing and joint working was already limited, a shared assessment tool may not be enough to bridge the gap.

4.3   Offender selection

The officers interviewed had completed an ARMS assessment with between one and four offenders each. There was good variation of offenders selected in terms of offence type (contact/non-contact, adult or child victim, first or repeat offences) and RM2000 risk category (very high, high, medium, and low). Officers made decisions about selecting cases for the pilot based on potential implications for resourcing the assessment, or because they felt the case would be useful in assessing ARMS efficacy.

Officers also reported that the offender's level of compliance was a key reason for selecting cases. Understandably, given the resource pressure facing officers, alongside their desire to assist with the pilot, they selected offenders whose circumstances they were familiar with and/or those they knew were compliant and would be willing to provide detailed information.

It is not clear from the pilot the extent to which ARMS would be useful with non-compliant cases where offenders refuse to discuss their circumstances with officers. However, Police officers in particular noted the challenges of trying to gain information from offenders that are unwilling to communicate:

> 'Some of these people, once we are in, that is the end of their requirements, they've complied with legislation [..] you are not offered a seat, they just stare at you and say "ask your questions and go"; so to then pull out a sheet of paper and say "well actually I'd like to go through all this with you" it would be like "I'll grunt at you for as long as this takes"'.

When the issue of conducting ARMS assessment interviews with non-compliant cases was raised, officers felt that it would be challenging and result in poor quality information. However, it was felt that ARMS could still be valuable with these cases, with other information sources used to complete the assessment. In fact, some officers noted that it can

be the areas offenders are *least* willing to talk about that become the most significant in their management:

'I think ARMS gives you the platform for formulating what you need to cover. It's the unknowns that give you the work you need to do with a person. If they are not forthcoming then that's what you need to focus on; it's what they don't tell you. So yeah I think it would work with non-compliant [offenders] as well'.

4.4   Assessment timing

First ARMS assessment

Some officers felt it was easier to conduct an ARMS assessment with offenders already well known to them, however they acknowledged that this could tend not to 'reveal anything new'. Conversely, some officers piloted ARMS on relatively new cases to gather more information than would usually come out of an induction meeting. Officers felt that it was not appropriate to complete an ARMS assessment on the first or second meeting with an offender, given the in-depth nature of the questioning and volume of paperwork already required to be completed at introductory meetings. However, once some rapport existed between the officer and offender, officers found ARMS useful for obtaining more information and a better understanding of new cases.

Officers did suggest, however, that it would be tenable to introduce ARMS within the first few meetings if it replaced some of their existing paperwork. For example, it was suggested that ARMS could be completed as part of the sentence planning process, when Police and Probation are beginning to work together on a new case following release on licence. Officers felt that the ideal scenario would be to integrate ARMS into existing processes so that it replaced rather than duplicated existing assessments. For example, some Police officers felt that ARMS could replace existing Risk Management Plans completed by some Police forces. Amongst Probation officers there was view that ARMS could provide an additional set of questions within OASys when sexual offenders are assessed. Without this integration, officers did not feel it was realistic to complete ARMS assessments as part of their current workload without a corresponding increase in resources to reduce their caseload.

Subsequent assessment frequency

Officers were clear that there should not be prescriptive guidance about how often ARMS assessments should be conducted with an individual, and they offered three different

suggestions for assessment frequency they felt would be appropriate. Firstly, if ARMS was to replace existing assessments, officers felt that ARMS should be completed with the same frequency as current assessments[22]. Secondly, officers suggested that ARMS could be targeted at high RM2000 cases, but conducted no more than annually. Discretionary use was also supported, for example, to inform case management decisions following a significant change in an offender's circumstances. Third, ARMS could be completed with higher risk cases where joint agencies are involved such as prior to a MAPPA meeting, so that evidence gathered during assessment can be used to support MAPPA decision making.

Officers felt that ARMS could be valuable in providing up-to-date information about dynamic risk or protective factors which could inform decisions at key stages of case management, such as when considering relaxing reporting instructions, defending Sexual Offender Prevention Orders (SOPO), or reviewing regularity of visits. Officers also felt that information elicited through ARMS assessments complemented other sources of intelligence they would have when decisions need to be made about complex or high risk cases.

The overarching view was that ARMS should not just become a 'tick box' exercise, but an assessment applied only when relevant and when the information will actually be used.

4.5   Completing the ARMS assessment

Overall, officers felt that ARMS was a fairly simple and structured process. Officers felt there was clear value in obtaining as much information as possible from offenders, and that placing this information within a framework of risk and protective factors helped them to better understand the dynamics of the offender's situation.

However, finding the time to type notes and complete the actual risk management plan following the basic written ARMS assessment was found to be very challenging. There were very few examples of officers having time to complete or transfer an assessment from their own written notes into a more structured or considered plan.

Officers also reported concerns relating to a lack of resources or referral options to support offenders develop protective factors – they may have used ARMS to identify priority areas where offenders should develop protective factors, but felt they had no practical recourse to actually support this development.

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[22] For example, in Probation this would be at the first, and then subsequent, sentence planning processes.

Design of the ARMS materials

Officers felt that the version of ARMS piloted was 'paper heavy'. While the interview with offenders could be completed in a one or two hour visit, writing the notes then took an additional two to three hours. Some of the officers explained they simply had not had time to do this, meaning that they had completed an assessment but had not actually transferred this to the ARMS form.

Officers made a number of suggestions for streamlining the ARMS process, some of which have now been implemented:

- Create a one page summary matrix of the risk and protective factors which can be rated by officers during or following the interview, rather than having one page per factor.
- Reduce the space available to write down observations.
- Collapse some of the factors, leading to a reduced number of risk and protective factors to be assessed overall.

Assessment administration and data sharing

It was not possible to develop processes for recording, storing and sharing ARMS assessments within the scope of the pilot. However officers were asked to reflect on how this process could be implemented in the future. Officers felt that integrating ARMS into existing systems was the only viable way it would be widely adopted. They suggested adding a section to OASys covering the ARMS factors and having a space on ViSOR (the national confidential database that supports MAPPA) to enter the ARMS assessment. The limitation of this, however, is that Police and Probation cannot both access these sources.

Integrating ARMS with existing assessment and information systems was felt by officers to be a potentially useful development if ARMS was rolled out in the future. Both Police and Probation noted that a system for recording and storing ARMS would have to be developed if it was to be rolled out. However, the challenge remains that without a shared information system between Police and Probation, both services would need to rely on each other to share the results of the ARMS assessment. Officers raised concerns that two separate ARMS (with different results) could be completed on the same offender, in cases where there was no close communication between organisations.

This indicates that there was a lack of clarity of information about which organisation should 'own' ARMS with each offender, since in the version of the ARMS manual used for the pilot, guidance states that the organisation that sees the offender most regularly should 'own' the

ARMS assessment. This would usually be Probation, who would then pass ARMS onto Police when they took over the case at the end of any statutory involvement from Probation.

4.6   Value of ARMS

To assess the impact of ARMS on officers' day to day role managing sexual offenders, participants were asked to describe the overall value of the tool and the different ways that it could enhance (or potentially inhibit) their work. Benefits and limitations of ARMS emerged from officers' accounts which included: enhanced knowledge and information gathering; managing sexual offenders at the appropriate 'risk management level'; sharing information across Police and Probation; and resource implications.

4.7   Enhanced knowledge and understanding

Officers felt that there was an existing practice gap in accurately assessing dynamic risk and protective factors for sexual offenders, and both Police and Probation officers felt that ARMS added to their practice by addressing this gap. For officers that felt they did not have expertise working with sexual offenders, ARMS reassured them that they were focussing on the correct assessment areas, and the experience of being trained in and using ARMS was felt to provide greater understanding of different factors that may indicate increased or decreased risk of recidivism.

4.8   Level of offender management

A tangible benefit of ARMS was that it could provide evidence upon which to allocate an appropriate level of management for sexual offenders, based on the dynamics of their circumstances and not solely the static risk level denoted by RM2000. Police officers spoke of conducting ARMS with cases that were either very high or low risk on RM2000. There was particular value in cases where officers felt these risk ratings were not an accurate reflection of the offender's current circumstances or behaviour. As such, ARMS was used as an evidence-based model to challenge static risk assumptions. For example, ARMS could help provide evidence which reassured officers that they could reduce the number of visits:

> 'I lowered one person's risk actually, one guy was very high [on RM2000], his
> sexual offence was many years ago. He's been in prison for various other things
> but he's come out of prison, found himself a flat, he's in a stable relationship, he
> has a job now, he goes to all his Probation appointments, Probation are very
> happy with him. Everything seems to be ticking on quite nicely for him and that's
> why I chose him to see. When I read his [ARMS], I decided to reduce his visits to

once every three months instead of once every month, unless there's something
to suggest otherwise'.

Conversely, ARMS was also applied to cases where officers had some unspecified concerns about an offender. Here, the detailed breaking down of different risk and protective factors could help isolate the nature of these concerns, and if founded, officers were confident about putting in place further measures to manage current risk, above the resourcing level suggested by the RM2000 score alone.

MAPPA

One of the recommendations made by participants was that ARMS could have particular value in high risk MAPPA cases. This would enable information-sharing; evidence upon which to base decisions on the case; and an examination of potential progress made by the offender (if their dynamic factors changed). It was also felt this would help ensure that resources are being properly directed in these cases (which have a high level of input from different organisations and potential high level of risk to public protection).

'Because you're looking at priorities, aren't you, and MAPPA is about resource.
So if you had resourcing issues for example around looking at employment,
being busy, perhaps MAPPA could feed into this - these are the significant risk
areas, these are the protective factors'.

Treatment

Officers felt that ARMS could potentially add value as an assessment tool that could be completed collaboratively with offenders before, during and after different types of interventions, such as being in a Circle of Support. However, the structured and accredited nature of the Sex Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP) meant ARMS may be less helpful as an assessment in this context. However, it could still have value in assisting offenders to collaboratively identify their risk and protective factors with a practitioner. Officers also noted that offenders who had completed the SOTP may be familiar with the concepts within ARMS.

Therefore, there was felt to be definite value in conducting ARMS to inform the sentence and offender management planning process with sexual offenders. A concern, however, was whether these benefits justified how time consuming and labour intensive ARMS could be.

4.9   Resourcing

As noted above, a perceived benefit of ARMS is how it supports an appropriate level of offender management. However, there were concerns that ARMS itself took up a great deal of resource. It was felt to be time consuming to complete and officers noted they rarely had the opportunity to develop the assessment into a management plan or even type up their assessment notes.

Doing it already?

A strong theme to emerge from the evaluation was that ARMS essentially represented what officers were already doing when they conducted assessments. For Probation officers, most of the factors were seen to map onto OASys. For Police already completing Risk Management Plans, the content was felt to be very similar. For both organisations, they stated they already shared information to feed into MAPPA and sentence planning. In many ways this is reassuring – indicating that current practice mirrors ARMS, and that the factors in focus are relevant.

The implication for future practice, therefore, is the need to maximise the way in which ARMS can enhance officer's knowledge base and information sharing, and reduce duplication with existing assessment tools.

5.   Validity and reliability of ARMS

To be credible as an assessment tool, ARMS must be proven to be both valid and reliable. In order to be valid, the ARMS assessment must accurately cover risk and protective factors pertinent to sexual offenders. In order to be reliable, different people using ARMS to assess the same case should produce the same rating. This chapter discusses the validity and reliability of ARMS, based on analysis of both the inter-rater reliability (IRR) exercise conducted by NOMS and in-depth interviews with officers involved in the pilot.

5.1   Reliability

As described in Chapter 1, officers involved in the pilot were invited to an IRR exercise conducted by NOMS, at which they rated two hypothetical cases using the ARMS assessment tool. The two cases rated by officers represented different types of offending, and information available to officers varied between cases.

- **Case one** involved two counts of rape and the indecent assault of a child under 14. There were two victims. One was the offender's partner at the time of the offence, and the other her teenage daughter with whom he also lived. The offender had a previous conviction for indecent exposure.
- **Case two** involved two counts of sexual assault against boys aged under 16, and another conviction for three counts of indecent assault of boys under 16 at an earlier date.

Overview

The IRR exercise demonstrated considerable disagreement between officers in how they rated the two hypothetical cases. In general, officers seemed to be in more agreement in rating Case 2 than they were in rating Case 1, and in fact, even the ARMS developers themselves disagreed when rating Case 1. For Case 1, there were no factors amongst the 13 risk and protective factors for which all officers produced the same rating. For Case 2, all officers produced the same rating for just three of the eight risk factors and for none of the five protective factors [23]

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[23] The ARMS manual contains a fourth "priority category" (in addition to high, medium and low priority for action) – 'unable to rate' or 'not applicable' – which due to an oversight was **not** included in the assessment form issued to officers in the exercise. This likely explains why officers were unable to give the "correct" rating for some of the factors that the developers rated as "unable to rate" or "not applicable", knowing the data capture form should have contained this option.

The value of divergence?

These differences make clear that agreeing on a single rating for a single case can be difficult. Interestingly, some of the officers interviewed did not feel the main aim should be for each assessor to be in agreement. Instead, some officers felt the value of shared assessments can be found in different views being taken into account, providing a multi-faceted and ultimately more effective assessment and Sentence Plan for the offender.

Another issue to consider, that officers raised, was how the information gained from an ARMS assessment is used and how consistently it is applied. They felt it may be less important whether an offender is rated as low or medium for a particular factor by different officers than whether they would put in place the same Risk Management Plan following the assessment. When considering the value and effectiveness of ARMS, achieving consistency in recommended actions may be more significant than consistency of rating for specific factors.

However, if information is being interpreted differently by different officers this undermines ARMS effectiveness, especially if it is used to make decisions affecting public protection or offender rehabilitation.

Rating consistency within different cases

Overall, officers seemed to be in more agreement about rating risk and protective factors in Case 2 than they were in Case 1. This may be due to the offending in Case 1 being against both an adult and young person. In this case, at least one officer rated Case 1 as high for all but one (negative orientation to rules) of the risk factors, compared to Case 2 where only three of the eight risk factors were rated as high. This suggests that Case 2 was a lower risk offender and that raters (both officers and the ARMS developers) were more likely to be in agreement when risk factors were low.

Although the ARMS tool is not designed to produce numerical scores for the priority ratings around risk and protective factors, for the purpose of analysis we assigned the following numerical scores: 3 for High, 2 for Medium and 1 for low priority. The average officer rating for each risk item was combined and an overall average score produced to create a 'Risk Indicator', with the same method being used to create a 'Protective Indicator'. An average of the ARMS developers' ratings was also calculated to create overall 'developers' risk and protective scores. Table 5.1 below summarises the findings from this analysis.

Table 5.1: Comparison of ratings produced by officers and ARMS developers

Case 1	Case 2
• No factors for which all raters agreed. • One quarter of individual factor ratings produced by officers were the same as those produced by the ARMS developers. • Officers and developers agreed on the overall Protective Indicator, but disagreed on the Risk Indicator. • Two fifths of average scores varied by one rating only.[24]	• Good level of agreement amongst raters. • Two thirds of individual factor ratings produced by officers were the same as those produced by the ARMS developers. • Officers and developers agreed in both the overall Risk Indicator and the Protective Indicator. • All officers agreed on their scoring for risk factors 5, 6, and 7 (hostile orientation to others, poor self management, negative orientation to rules). • Two thirds of average scores varied by one rating only.

In both Case 1 and Case 2, the standard deviation for the Risk Indicator was smaller than for the Protective Indicator. This indicates that there was greater agreement between officers on risk factors than there was on protective factors.

Consistency between organisations and the impact of officers' experience
Comparing Police and Probation
Probation officers seemed able to score Case 1 more consistently than the Police, which may suggest that Probation officers have greater awareness of these risk and protective factors than Police officers. Given the difference in their roles, this is to be expected.

Overall, Probation tended to score factors as being higher priorities across the risk and protective factors than the Police, with this being particularly true for protective factors in Case 1, although the difference was marginal. This may reflect the finding from the interviews with Police, where they noted they were not always clear about the actions they could take regarding promoting protective factors identified as priorities and therefore may have been reluctant to rate these as high. They were also unclear if they had scope for this promotion of protective factors to be part of their role given their caseload, and length of time they spent with offenders.

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[24] The scales were low, high and medium so this means that raters used low/medium or medium/high – their variation in priorities did not span the whole scale

5.2   Validity

In order to be considered a 'valid' tool, ARMS must accurately cover risk and protective factors pertinent to sexual offenders. The following section discusses the risk and protective factors in the ARMS tool piloted, including analysis of both the IRR exercise data and interviews with officers.

Risk factors

The ARMS tool contains eight risk factors (see Chapter 1), all of which were felt to be relevant by officers who were interviewed. Views on each factor are summarised below.

Officers felt that **opportunity to offend** was a significant factor that should always be considered in risk management plans, although they also explained its apparent contradiction with some protective factors. For example, officers spoke of being unsure whether they should encourage offenders to develop their social networks or interests in the community because by coming into contact with different groups of people (i.e. children, older people, young men) they may be more likely to come into contact with those similar in profile to their victims, increasing their opportunity to offend. They also highlighted the importance of independent information that they could use to verify their rating of this factor, noting that offenders who were creating opportunities to offend were unlikely to disclose this, and therefore this factor requires external information in order to be rated effectively.

Officers felt that **offence-related sexual interest** and **sexual preoccupation** were issues they would ordinarily consider when managing a sexual offender, regardless of ARMS. Officers noted that offenders who had completed SOTP were used to speaking about their sexual interests or behaviour (such as regularity of masturbation) and therefore obtaining information to prioritise these factors would be straightforward. Observations on a home visit were also considered important, such as observing evidence of pornography. However, officers felt that for offenders who had not attended SOTP and whose index offence may be their first contact with the Criminal Justice System, being asked personal information about their sexual activity could be very difficult. Officers felt that the ARMS tool assisted with this and provided helpful ways to frame questions about these issues with offenders. However, as noted earlier, officers felt that the timing and setting of the interview needed to be carefully planned to take account of the sensitive nature of the discussion.

Finally, officers expressed concern about how to prioritise these factors if the offender reported that they had no sexual interest at all. The officers felt that they could take this at

face value and, therefore, rate the factor as a low priority, or that this may indicate a need to obtain information from other sources to verify the claim - it could, for example, be an attempt to 'cover up' sexual preoccupation.

In ARMS **emotional congruence** with children is intended to only be rated where the sexual offence(s) have been committed against children. Officers recognised value in this factor, but also found it quite "conceptual" and difficult to rate. They also noted that it could only be rated if the offender was honest with them, or if there was some evidence to indicate their actual level of congruence such as a disclosure they watch children's television programmes.

However, explicitly focussing on this complex factor was felt to have some value for offender management. In one example, an officer found that the offender's honesty around their emotional congruence with children (which emerged as part of their ARMS assessment) meant this could be better managed and focussed on in their risk management plan.

Officers felt there was a conceptual overlap between **hostile orientation to others** and **negative orientation to rules**, and whilst they recognised the distinction between the two, they felt this distinction was marginal. If the ARMS categories were to be collapsed and streamlined (as discussed in Chapter 3) it was felt that these two could potentially be integrated. More broadly, officers recognised these factors as important and felt they were areas they would normally try to assess when they met with offenders.

Officers felt that **poor self-management** was relevant and straightforward to assess, especially with observations on a home visit. However, they suggested it would be useful to have more clarity around exactly what type of behaviour to include in this factor, or to include a separate factor on alcohol or other drug use. It was noted that people can be alcohol dependent and yet still appear to be 'self-managing'. Increased alcohol use (especially if it played a role in prior offending) may indicate increased risk however. Alcohol use is a dynamic risk factor supported by research (Hanson and Morton-Bourgon, 2005) and this finding indicates that further clarity is required about the range of information that may be included as 'poor self-management' factor, or that a separate factor on substance misuse may be required.

Officers felt that the **anti-social influences** factor was particularly difficult to assess, especially because the first protective factor also focussed on social networks (albeit pro-social ones). Whilst officers understood that the two factors refer to different types of social influence, they found it very difficult to judge the extent of influence that anti-social or pro-social networks may have. For example, if an offender's only friend is another offender, this

could be viewed as anti-social. Conversely, they may spend time with each other because they understand each others' circumstances when other people are reluctant to do so due to their offending history. If there was no evidence of actual anti-social behaviour when spending time together, officers were unclear as to whether this was a positive network (in terms of someone to spend time with and reduce social isolation) or an anti-social influence due to the offending history and the character of the other person. Officers felt that these two factors could be more efficiently collapsed into a single 'social networks' factor, weighting the extent of anti- or pro-social networks overall.

Protective factors

The ARMS tool contains five protective factors. Officers felt this was one of the explicit benefits of ARMS. These factors, alongside the risk factors, enable them to consider the offender holistically and support their strengths, as well as attending to their deficits. However, officers also found protective factors the most problematic to rate. This may partly be because some protective factors seem to be the 'flip side' of a risk factor, which, if encouraged, may also increase risk.

As noted above, officers found that the **pro-social network** factor overlapped with the anti-social influences risk factor, and they felt the two could be collapsed into one 'social networks' factor.

There was some confusion between officers on the definition of **an intimate relationship**, with some officers recognising that this related to 'marriage like' partnerships, while others being unsure if this referred to a new romantic relationship, or more established relationships, and where the distinction should be drawn. There was also a sense, from Police officers in particular, that some of the questioning around this factor went into excessive detail. Officers felt that a relatively stable relationship for an offender should not necessarily be viewed as a protective factor, without exploring the nature of the relationship in detail. Indeed, some officers noted that an offender could be in a relatively stable relationship, but the partnership may have some negative components such as a risk of domestic violence. Consequently, some officers felt that it was sometimes difficult to rate some 'intimate relationships' as a fully 'protective' factor. Finally, officers also felt it was difficult to identify what action should be taken if an offender was not in an intimate relationship, with some officers feeling unsure about how appropriate it would be for them to encourage offenders to develop a relationship, given their offending history.

Depending on the type of information available about an offender, some officers felt that **a commitment to desist** could be challenging to assess. They felt that most offenders would discuss their commitment to avoid offending, or at least avoid returning to prison, without this necessarily indicating a genuine commitment to desist. Those who had completed the SOTP were also felt to be better equipped to make this commitment, and understand how they could do so. So, while officers recognised this as an important factor for assessment, there was some scepticism about how reliably it could be rated with different types of offenders.

Officers often discussed **employment / being busy** and **citizenship / giving back** at the same time. The key feature influencing officers' views of these factors was that a conviction for a sexual offence restricts the extent to which the protective factors could be achieved. Employment or having a meaningful occupation was recognised by officers as being a significant protective factor that they would always explore with offenders. However, officers noted that this was rarely a clear-cut issue. For example, despite encouraging sexual offenders to seek employment, they were mindful that in reality it may be very difficult for them to obtain, due to the nature of their conviction and the restrictions that this could entail. Some sexual offenders were also described as having additional health issues that impinged on the potential to apply for a job. Meaningful occupation was felt to be the more significant protective factor in this context, and officers noted that for some offenders this may involve solitary activities or hobbies such as making models or listening to music. Provided the activity was not felt to increase risk, such as watching pornography, then these individual activities could be positive ways in which sexual offenders used their time. However, this did not help with other protective factors such as developing 'social networks'. Consequently, one protective issue could be developed to the detriment of another.

Citizenship was felt to be the most problematic of all of the ARMS factors. Officers noted how it could be virtually impossible to encourage offenders to engage in community activities such as volunteering due to restrictions of their licence, Sex Offender Protection Orders and so on. It was, therefore, felt to be difficult to assess offenders on this basis.

There was also some confusion amongst officers about the concept of citizenship and what it really meant. Here some offenders used examples of lending money to a friend as an example of 'giving back'. Officers were unsure how realistic it was to expect people they managed to be engaged in 'giving back' when a broad section of the population may not be involved these activities (such as volunteering) either. This factor was felt also to cover fairly similar issues to others, such as 'meaningful occupation', and, therefore, officers felt it was unnecessary as a standalone item.

Coverage of relevant factors

Encouragingly, officers felt that the ARMS factors covered relevant points, with the exception of the issues noted above regarding overlap and clarity for some items and assessment length. In particular, officers from both Police and Probation felt a streamlined, shorter version of ARMS would be better received.

Officers did feel that most of the issues they assessed when completing ARMS were those they would have routinely considered without the tool. For example, Probation Officers felt the majority of ARMS factors mirrored those in OASys, whilst Police officers felt that Risk Management Plans and Sentence Plans included similar considerations. However, officers felt that ARMS produced greater detail to manage sexual offenders' risk than existing tools and a clear framework for identifying priority issues.

Additional factors

Officers made three suggestions for additional factors and amendments to the tool, while recognising that these would have to be supported by research in order to be included in ARMS, since existing factors are all grounded in evidence about which dynamic risk factors are of most significance.

- Rather than Citizenship, officers would prefer a factor focused on self actualisation, self esteem or the identity of the offender. In particular, this would consider how the individual offender sees themselves.
- Officers would like to include a risk factor that focuses on views towards victims, such as the extent to which the offender seeks to punish their victims or has any victim empathy. However, it is important to note that the extent of an offender's empathy for their victim(s) is not a factor that has been found to predict future risk (Mann, 2012[25]).
- Officers would like space included to record the nature and extent of any substance use, and whether domestic violence is evident in offenders' intimate relationships.

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[25] Mann, R. (2012) Victim empathy interventions with sexual offenders, *Sex Abuse*, August 22, http://sax.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/08/20/1079063212455669.full.pdf

Implementing actions

A perceived limitation of ARMS was the extent to which officers were able to react to the assessment. This was particularly in relation to protective factors and what officers could realistically do to encourage offenders to develop these.

> '"Poor self-management" I would say your house is looking a bit dirty, what's going on? "Oh, well you know, I'm losing interest in everything". What would I then go on and do? What could I then do? This is the question. Who would I refer to? He's not involved with Probation, it hasn't triggered a mental health referral, I couldn't bump him up to Level two, there's no justification for that. Would I just visit him a bit more? I don't know. I'm not saying that we deliberately don't ask the questions but I just think we need to be very clear what path this is taking us down, what are we going to do then?'

While ARMS' coverage of both risk and protective factors enables officers to view the offender holistically, officers felt that for some sexual offenders the very activities that could help develop their protective factors could also be seen as increasing their risk factors (such as opportunity to offend).

6.   Conclusion and recommendations

The previous chapters have presented our findings of a small scale pilot of the ARMS tool with Police and Probation officers. Key findings and recommendations are provided in this concluding chapter. The small scope of the pilot also raises a number of issues for consideration in a future larger pilot.

6.1   Training and guidance for officers

Officers' discussion of their motivation for volunteering to be involved suggests that the pilot may have included some of the most engaged or experienced officers within the three areas, and that they may have been those particularly responsive to new approaches. While these officers were very positive about the training and guidance they received, prior to conducting a wider pilot consideration would need to be given to whether strategies are required to engage a wider spectrum of officers. Officers found the ARMS manual they received useful, however both the inter-rater reliability (IRR) exercise and interviews highlighted areas in which officers may benefit from receiving further guidance.

Recommendations:

- The balance between theory and practice in the current training should be retained, although consideration should be given to introducing more, and longer, role plays.
- Where possible, training should continue to be delivered by ARMS experts from both Police and Probation.
- Training sessions should continue to include both Police and Probation officers learning together.
- The ARMS manual should be updated to include additional guidance on the following points:
  - The optimum location for ARMS interviews and relative benefits/drawbacks (i.e. the offender's home or in the office).
  - The extent of information required about the offender's domestic environment (e.g. using information gathered from colleagues' home visits, rather than requiring a discrete home visit for each ARMS assessment).
  - Which type of offenders to assess and when/how often to complete an ARMS assessment.
  - Whether assessments should be conducted collaboratively with the offender and implications for practice if it is not.

- How to rate offenders in circumstances where protective factors contradict risk factors (e.g. *pro-social network* and *opportunity to offend*).
- Ownership and succession of the ARMS assessment between Police and Probation.

6.2 Content and structure of ARMS

ARMS covered the issues relevant to dynamic risk assessment of sexual offenders and there was appreciation from officers that the tool was evidence-based, however they found the process 'paper heavy' and were supportive of a more streamlined tool. It is important to note that the existing factors are all supported by research as being distinct, relevant issues with which to assess dynamic risk. As such, developers would have to be careful that they did not compromise the validity of ARMS with a streamlined version. Balancing officers' desire for streamlining with comprehensive coverage of the relevant risk factors will be a key consideration going forward.

Recommendations:

- Revise ARMS to make it shorter and more user-friendly, whilst retaining its validity. Particular consideration may be given to the following options:
  - *Hostile orientation to others* and *Negative orientation to rules* to be collapsed into one risk factor.
  - *Poor self-management* to include guidance on how to include substance use, or substance use to be added as a separate risk factor.
  - *Anti-social influences* and *pro-social network* to be collapsed into one factor called 'social networks.
  - Replace or remove the factor, *Citizenship / Giving back*.
- Use of the ARMS diary should remain optional, with officers determining how it is completed (i.e. face-to-face, or left with the offender to complete alone and then discussed);

6.3 Integration

A key concern for officers was the length of time taken to complete ARMS assessments, and its duplication of work they were already doing. Officers felt it was important, therefore, that in further piloting or national roll-out, ARMS was integrated with existing assessments.

Recommendations:

- ARMS should be integrated into existing assessments. For example, after an OASys assessment has been completed by Probation these officers should be able to assess

each of the ARMS factors and complete them in an integrated set of questions. For Police, an ARMS assessment would usefully inform decisions about "level of management" of Registered Sexual Offenders (RSOs) and/or provide evidence for Sex Offender Protection Order (SOPO) applications.

- Alongside general guidance on when to complete ARMS (recommended above), clear justification should be set out for completing assessments at times of change in offenders circumstances, and the need for periodic systematic reassessment to ensure the changes to offenders needs or risk levels are taken into account. Periodic reassessment should also inform adjustments to intervention plans of higher risk individuals if there is no reduction in their risk level.

6.4   Joint-organisation working

Officers were clear that they valued the joint-organisation approach to ARMS, although they weren't convinced that ARMS would promote better partnership working if this wasn't already well established. As only one area was involved in piloting ARMS as a shared assessment tool for this pilot, it is not possible to evidence the benefits of this approach and it should be thoroughly investigated in a wider pilot in the future.

6.5   Reliability and validity

The inter-rater reliability (IRR) exercise found considerable disagreement between officers' ratings of two hypothetical case studies. There was some indication of more reliable ratings on lower risk cases, and rating risk factors compared to protective factors. Officers did also question the extent to which agreeing a single rating for one case was the most valuable use of ARMS, or whether it instead provided a systematic framework for identifying dynamic risk factors. Provided the actions then taken by officers were consistent, the specific rating they gave each factor was felt to be potentially less significant.

Each factor was felt to be valid, and issues that officers would usually assess. As outlined in the section above, there were suggestions that some factors were less relevant than others and could be collapsed into one category or removed altogether to provide a more streamlined tool.

Recommendations:

- Additional guidance could be provided to officers about how to rate each factor, especially focussing on high risk cases and rating protective factors.

- Another IRR exercise, much larger in scope, should be conducted in the future to further assess the reliability of ARMS (see below).

6.6 Considerations for a further pilot

The size of the pilot and subsequent evaluation was too limited in scope to draw conclusions on several key questions, which remain to be explored. ARMS should be comprehensively piloted to encompass greater diversity of geographical areas, shared assessments between agencies, offender types and officer experience/working practice. This should then be evaluated, with a second, larger IRR exercise also included. Further research and development should include a diverse range of offender types, and could involve tracking cases over time, to be able to map the influence of ARMS in decision making and planning. It would also benefit from a control group of cases where ARMS is not being used. This would lay a strong foundation for potential national roll out, and ensure that ARMS is valid, reliable and fully integrated into existing sexual offender management processes.

Recommendations:

- ARMS training and guidance was provided to officers who were likely to be particularly engaged and motivated. A wider pilot must consider whether less engaged officers need different or additional training and support.
- Officers felt it was important that the training continued to be delivered by ARMS experts. If this model is changed in a wider pilot, the effectiveness of non-expert trainers should be investigated.
- So far, ARMS has been piloted with a few, compliant offenders. The effectiveness of ARMS with a range of offender types, especially those that are non-compliant, should be assessed.
- A repeated IRR exercise should include a larger number of cases to further examine the reliability of ARMS, including whether lower risk cases are more consistently rated than higher risk cases, and whether differences between organisations or level of experience affects ARMS assessments.
- Officers felt that integrating ARMS into existing assessment processes would be crucial to its success. Since integration was not piloted at this time, it should be included in a wider pilot and evaluation to assure the effectiveness of process and practice.
- ARMS was only used as a shared assessment tool between Police and Probation in one area for this pilot, this should be a key component of a future pilot, with evaluation focusing specifically on the nature and extent of value added for Police and/or Probation officers.

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Appendix A: Methodology details

Officer interviews

Topic guide

Face to face interviews lasted between 50 to 100 minutes and were conducted at the officer's place of work. Each interview was digitally recorded on an encrypted device and transcribed verbatim. A topic guide, developed in collaboration with NOMS, was used for each interview and covered the following broad themes:

- Assessor context:
  - professional route to assessing sexual offenders
  - previous assessment experience and training (for sexual and non sexual offenders).

- ARMS training:
  - content
  - delivery style
  - materials
  - unmet needs.

- Organisational support:
  - capacity to assess
  - supervision.

- The ARMS assessment:
  - supporting documents
  - risk / protective item appraisal.

- Process of delivery:
  - time to deliver and complete
  - adequacy of information sources
  - role of partnership working
  - alternative information sources.

- Outcomes:
  - confidence in the tool
  - contribution to public safety
  - contribution to day to day role.

- Reflections:
  - lessons from the pilot to inform roll-out.

Analysis

The transcripts were analysed using the Framework approach (Ritchie *et al*, 2014[26]), whereby each transcript was thematically coded. A case and theme based analysis facilitated systematic between case (looking at what different people said on the same issue) and within case (looking at how a person's opinion on one topic relates to their views on another) investigation of the data. Consequently, the full range of attitudes and behaviour could be systematically mapped, and the accounts of participants compared and contrasted.

When reporting the findings from the stakeholder interviews, the term 'officer' is used where issues cut across both Police and Probation officers experiences. If the issue was raised only by one organisation the specific term (Police Officer or Probation Officer) is used.

Ethical approval

NatCen ethics governance procedures are in line with the requirements of the ESRC and GSRU Research Ethics Frameworks. As such, the ARMS evaluation was subject to approval from the NatCen Research Ethics Committee (REC), with members from senior NatCen staff, external research experts, and external professional experts ('lay people').

All of the stakeholders interviewed were fully informed of the aim and purpose of the research, how that data would be stored and used, and that their participation was voluntary. They were asked to provide signed confirmation of their agreement to take part.

It was made clear to participants that their contribution would be anonymous and confidential. However, given the very low number of officers involved in the pilot it was also highlighted that the identities of those who took part in an interview may be known by senior NOMS staff, in particular those involved in setting up the pilot. In terms of protecting anonymity the following measures were taken:

- using codes to identify officers
- storing all personal-protect material (such as audio files, transcripts and IRR data) within encrypted password protected restricted access folders
- only transferring protect-personal data on encrypted devices or via the secure email addresses of CJSM

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[26] Ritchie, J. Spencer, L. O'Conner, W. Morrell, G. and Ormston, R. (2014) 'Analysis in Practice' in Ritchie, J. Lewis, J. McNaughton Nicholls, C. and Ormston, R. *Qualitative Research Practice,* 2nd Edition, London: Sage.

- Further, although quotes are used to illustrate points throughout the report, these have intentionally been left without any identifiers (such as role or case study area) to protect anonymity.