


**MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
DIVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES**

<b>MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES</b>	
<b>Subject: Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY)</b>	<b>Policy Number:</b> 43
<b>Number of Pages:</b> 8	<b>Section:</b> XIV
<b>Attachments:</b>  A. Social History Interview Form B. SAVRY Tracking Form C. SAVRY Case Audit Form	<b>Related Standards &amp; References:</b>
<b>Effective Date:</b>  Revised: April 15, 2018 Revised: March 1, 2019	<b>Approved:</b>   <b>James Maccarone, Director</b>

**PURPOSE**

It is the policy of the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Division of Youth Services to use the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY); a validated risk assessment tool. The SAVRY is an evidence-based assessment designed to assist professionals in making judgments about a youth's risk for future general re-offending and violence and to identify a youth's needs in order to inform case planning. This assessment comprises 24 risk/need items that were identified from a review of existing research on adolescent development and on delinquency and aggression in youth. Six protective factors are included in the SAVRY that also have been identified by current research as potentially mitigating the risk of future violence and delinquent activity. The SAVRY utilizes a structured professional judgment method of assessment. The individual completing the assessment rates the youth on a number of evidence-based factors and then considers all the information to make a final judgment that the youth has a relatively low, moderate, or high risk for future violence and/or general recidivism.

The SAVRY is intended for pre-adjudication, disposition recommendations, and post-disposition case planning.

SAVRY is **not** intended for assessing risk for future sexual offending. It can be useful for assessing risk for future violence and general delinquency in youth.

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## DEFINITIONS

- A. Criminogenic Need — Needs of an individual that can lead to crime or delinquency.
- B. Youth Services Counselor — A Counselor employed by the State whose duties include preparing social history reports to the court and supervising youth under the court's jurisdiction.
- C. Protective Factors — Factors that exist within an individual's situation/circumstances that may mitigate a youth's overall risk.
- D. Social History Report — A written report that is a thorough description and assessment of the youth, family and the events surrounding the offense, including recommendations for services and disposition. It is derived from multiple sources and is designed to assist the court in making a final disposition.
- E. Quality Assurance — The systematic monitoring and evaluation of staff completion of the SAVRY and the completeness and accuracy of assessments conducted to ensure that standards are being met. This process will identify any areas in need of improvement and minimize errors.

## PROCEDURE

The following guidelines shall be followed when using the SAVRY with youths to be handled formally for delinquent offenses.

### Time of Initial Assessment

The SAVRY must be administered within twenty business days (4 weeks) following case assignment to the Youth Services Counselor. It shall be administered within the following time frames under the following circumstances:

- Pre-adjudication (within 20 business days of the counselor being assigned the case, in jurisdictions where cases are assigned to counselors with sufficient time prior to adjudication); however, if the adjudication hearing does not occur in a timely manner, the SAVRY must be re-administered within 90 days of the previous assessment or with a significant event change in the life of youth)
- Post or adjudication/ Pre-disposition (for disposition recommendations and case management planning in courts or circumstances where the Youth Service Counselor may not be assigned the case prior to adjudication) within 20 business days following adjudication. (The SAVRY must be re-administered within 90 days of the previous assessment with a significant event change in life of the youth)
- Post-disposition (within 20 business days (one month) following disposition for case-management in cases where no Social History Report is completed but the youth is placed on probation).

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The Regional Director will monitor cases to ensure the SAVRY is being completed on all youth within the time frames described above.

The Social History Interview Form must be completed prior to rating the SAVRY. (See attachment A).

In order to guard against the risk of pre-adjudication self-incrimination by youth being assessed with the SAVRY, Youth Services Counselors shall not discuss the details of the offense the youth is charged with when they are conducting the evaluation. The social history and the results of the evaluation may not be discussed pre-adjudication with the court, prosecuting attorney, or anyone other than the youth's attorney, without the express written consent of the youth's attorney.

### **Time of Reassessment**

The purpose of the reassessment is to monitor changes in risk and service/supervision needs of the youth. As a general guideline, each youth will be re-assessed with the SAVRY no later than 180 days after disposition and no later than every 180 days thereafter until the probation period is concluded. A reassessment may be conducted every 90 days on high risk youth if the counselor deems it necessary. When a counselor's review of the SAVRY scoring items indicates that only a few items will change on a reassessment, an addendum to the initial assessment may be completed instead of completing a new form. In addition, the SAVRY must be administered before any changes in the type of out-of-home placement.

The SAVRY also will be administered when a major life-changing event occurs (e.g., commission of re-offense; major traumatic experience; drug overdose). In such circumstances, the SAVRY would not be required again until six months following the most recent assessment.

### **Responsible Party**

The person responsible for administering the SAVRY is the Youth Services Counselor who is assigned to the case. Should said counselor be on extended leave, another counselor will be assigned by the regional director to cover the case and will be responsible for performing all case related duties, including administering the SAVRY.

### **Training Requirements and Qualifications for Use**

Each Regional Director shall designate at least two master trainers who receive extensive training on use of the SAVRY in the form of a two-day workshop with a SAVRY training expert. Master trainers also shall complete a minimum of two additional standardized practice cases. More master trainers may be needed depending on the size of the region. More than one is essential due to potential turnover of master trainers.

Youth Services Counselors shall only administer the SAVRY after completion of formal training in use of the instrument. Training shall be provided by an author of the SAVRY, or a

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designated master trainer. Generally, initial training involves a one to two day workshop that covers some of the research on delinquency (e.g., trajectories of offending, risk factors, need factors) and at least two practice scoring cases.

Staff will complete ratings for a minimum of two additional standardized practice cases following the initial training and a trainer will provide feedback on their ratings. This shall occur prior to staff using the tool for clients. Master trainers shall provide additional feedback to staff with more "incorrect" responses than average. The acceptable number of "incorrect" item ratings will be at the discretion of the master trainer.

The Regional Director or a SAVRY master trainer will provide staff who are responsible for completing a SAVRY assessment with additional training about the following: 1) the agency's policy regarding when and for what cases the initial assessment and subsequent re-assessments are to be conducted, 2) how the results of the assessment are to be communicated in pre-adjudication, disposition recommendations and post-disposition reports, and 3) how the results of the assessment will be used to select appropriate service referrals, level of supervision for case planning, and ongoing case management.

Master trainers will conduct booster trainings in the region twice a year (generally every six months). Booster trainings can be accomplished in two ways: 1) using another standardized practice case that all staff complete and then receive feedback from the master trainers, or 2) making a presentation based on a case handled in the office and then having all staff rate the case and discuss the most appropriate ratings. Following the case presentation and discussion, the booster training will include a discussion about how the results of the assessment should be used for case management, including the disposition recommendation, service referrals in the case supervision plan, and appropriate level of probation supervision.

The master trainer who is responsible for a booster training will provide individual feedback to any staff member who has more than the acceptable number of "incorrect" item ratings. The master trainer will ensure that the staff member completes an additional case to discern whether there has been improvement. The acceptable number of "incorrect" item ratings will be at the discretion of the master trainer.

### **Method of Implementation**

The Youth Services Counselor administering the SAVRY must follow the guidelines as described in the SAVRY Professional Manual. This includes determining ratings on a review of file information, face-to-face interview with the youth, usually an interview with the parent/guardian and collateral contacts. In the event that the parents/guardians cannot be interviewed, documentation of the circumstances must be provided. If a face to face interview cannot be scheduled, staff shall conduct a telephone interview if the supervisor approves. The Youth Services Counselor must utilize the Social History Interview Form to guide the interview and ensure that all the proper information is gathered. The youth will be interviewed **separately** from the parent/guardian to gather at least some of this information (particularly regarding the home life and past aggressive behavior).

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The Youth Services Counselor must review the youth's record and other available documents prior to interviewing the youth, and document the sources of information. Examples of useful sources of collateral data include information from professionals, prior reports (school records, employment, legal history, youth welfare records, mental health), and other records with information pertinent to the SAVRY assessment. **Every effort must be made to complete the SAVRY with more information than the youth's interview only.** A thorough review of all available information, verification of self-reported information (including that pertaining to residence, school and/or training, and employment) and frequent reference to the scoring instructions will help ensure rating accuracy. Staff will consider the evidence both "for" and "against" each item before assigning a rating.

In circumstances where a Youth Services Counselor is not able to obtain all of the information to accurately rate the SAVRY during the initial assessment, it must be corrected within 30 to 60 days after the initial assessment, as new information accumulates. It is important to reassess the original SAVRY rating if it may have been incorrect due to lack of information. This will involve conducting a new SAVRY assessment, or addendum as appropriate, and notifying the court if the overall risk rating changes in light of the new information, if the youth has already been adjudicated.

#### Use of Information

**Social History:** Results of the SAVRY must be included in the Social History Report, if ordered, or in oral dispositional recommendations in the absence of a written report. This shall include the Youth Services Counselor's structured professional judgment (reflected in SAVRY assessment results) as to whether the youth is at relatively low, moderate, or high risk for serious or violent re-offending. Reports also shall include a summary of the youth's primary criminogenic need factors that contribute to his or her risk for re-offending. These are the factors that shall be addressed in disposition and service planning.

Items that shall not be included in social histories or other communications to the court include any specific SAVRY item ratings. Social histories completed pre-adjudication shall not be shared with the court and/or prosecuting attorney until after the adjudication hearing. Post adjudication documents submitted to the court may vary from court to court, but may include completed social histories, which may include a SAVRY summary risk rating and appropriate recommendation for disposition. Attached documents may include school records, drug test results, restitution information, or other documents requested by the court.

**Case Supervision Plan:** The Case Supervision Plan is to be completed after the disposition of each case and updated as the status of the case changes (see Policy 44 with attachment). The youth's level of risk and need in those areas shall be considered in the assignment of services. High risk youths should generally receive intensive services, as indicated and whenever possible. Lower risk youths often do not require services.

**Reassessments:** If a reassessment indicates needs have changed (e.g., some initially high risk needs have improved or new need areas have appeared), the probation case supervision plan shall be adjusted accordingly (e.g., once a particular service is completed and that need has

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been addressed, a referral to new service to address a different need area could be made).

### **Supervision per Risk Level**

The minimum number of face-to-face contacts required for the three risk levels as assessed by the SAVRY is as follows (to be consistent with the Case Contact Standards Policy #41):

- Low: One face-to-face contact a minimum of every 60 days, one contact with parent/guardian every 60 days, and one collateral contact with school (when in session) and relevant service providers every 60 days when necessary.
- Moderate: One face-to-face contact at least every 30 days, one contact with parent/guardian every 30 days, and one collateral contact with school (when in session) and relevant service providers every 30 days when necessary.
- High: One face-to-face contact every two weeks, or one per month if there is documentation that the youth is in intensive services, one contact with a parent/guardian per month, and at least one collateral contact with the school (when in session) and other relevant service providers per month when necessary.

Minimum requirements do not relieve the Youth Services Counselor from the responsibility of responding to the youth's needs as they arise.

Supervision levels may be adjusted either up or down based on the progress of the case and a SAVRY reassessment.

### **Quality Assurance: Regional Director**

A comprehensive Quality Assurance (QA) process will be implemented by Youth Services to assure the proper use of the SAVRY tool. This process will ensure the accountability of the established policy and procedure.

Regional Directors shall complete the same training on the SAVRY with the staff in order to supervise the quality of their staff's assessments.

Staff members are responsible for notifying the Regional Director of all completed SAVRY assessments notated on the SAVRY tracking form. Regional Directors shall check sample cases to ensure that the SAVRY has been completed accurately and these cases shall be documented on the SAVRY audit form.

Regional Directors will review the forms and ensure the assessment meets a sufficient level of quality before signing off on the assessment. This review will include ensuring that staff made efforts to obtain appropriate collateral data and considered all available information when rating the SAVRY. At a minimum, this should include **all** existing file information and an interview with the youth. Should staff decide to assign a risk rating that deviates substantially from what might be

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expected based on what is indicated by the item ratings, the Regional Director shall ensure the staff member's written justification for the deviation is appropriate. Regional Directors will also look for consistency among documents in a file. The SAVRY ratings should be consistent with documentation available at the time of the assessment. If an error is found, the Regional Director will ensure that a correction is made. If it changes the risk level, then the Youth Services Counselor shall request a post-dispositional review hearing, document the request, and report the correction to the court.

Regional Directors will periodically check a sample of youth or generate an aggregate data print out to see whether youth are receiving the appropriate level of supervision given their overall risk rating.

Regional Directors will periodically check the ratings for a sample of youth to see if they actually received the appropriate service referrals from staff according to the facility's/agency's service matrix.

The following guidelines shall be followed when implementing SAVRY QA:

- A. SAVRY Tracking Form — Each Youth Services Counselor shall complete and submit a SAVRY Tracking Form to the regional director by the 3rd of each month (see attachment B).
- B. SAVRY Case Audit Form will be utilized by the regional directors during the monthly site visits to ensure SAVRY compliance (see attachment C). Each Regional Director is responsible to audit at least two cases per month.

Regional Directors shall incorporate the results of QA activities in their assessments of Youth Services Counselor performance.

### **Quality Assurance and Data Checks**

Staff may be identified and assigned within the region by the Regional Director to assist with quality assurance and data tracking. The duties of such identified staff will include:

- Checking the data periodically (e.g., every 6 months) to ensure that the correct classes of youth are being assessed with the SAVRY (e.g., all youth for whom a Social History Report is required, and all youth placed on probation when no Social History Report is completed).
- Obtaining a print out of assessment ratings by Youth Services Counselors and providing Regional Directors data of staff who are routinely assigning a single risk category (e.g., most or all of their youths are rated as "low risk," most or all youths are rated as "moderate risk," or most or all youths are rated as "high risk," to the point where the results seem improperly skewed in favor of a particular rating).

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### **Feedback Loop**

Establishment of a feedback mechanism between the Master Trainers and Regional Directors and any quality assurance personnel is essential. Master Trainers or staff assigned by the Regional Director shall notify the Regional Director about any staff members who require individual feedback for a number of “incorrect” ratings, so that the Regional Director can adjust his or her monitoring of those staff accordingly. Likewise, the Master Trainer or designated staff shall provide Regional Directors QA reports that they have prepared.