Gilliam Autism Rating Scale-Second Edition  
(GARS-2)

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• PRO-ED, 8700 Shoal Creek Blvd., Austin, TX 78757-6897. Published, 2006.

Purpose:
• Individually-administered, norm-referenced screening measure in rating scale-format designed to assist in the identification of children (ages 3-22) with autism from other severe behavioral problems.

Provides:
• The scale provides an overall score (Autism Index), and is comprised individual subscales, including Stereotyped Behaviors, Communication, and Social Interaction.

Standardization Issues:
• The normative sample was based on 1,107 individuals ages 3-22, who were already-identified with autism. Demographics were approximately-matched to 2001 US Census data to geographic region and three racial categories (“White,” “Black,” and “Other”). Gender was divided to 81% male, 19% female (following the trend that autism is more prominently identified in males). The sample by age is unevenly-distributed with ages 3-8 comprising 54% of the total sample.

Reliability and Validity Issues:
• Three subscales showed adequate internal consistency, as did the total score, with estimates ranging from .84-.94. The manual reports acceptable test-retest stability, however, this was based on an extremely small study (n=37 individuals) over only a 1-week interval. The manual addresses various forms of validity, including content-, criterion-, and construct-forms. As with the GADS, additional validity studies may be warranted. For instance, the basis for item selection could be better-supported by stronger theoretical and empirical methods. The factor structure (and some items’ loading on their assigned subscales) may not be particularly compelling. Overall, the test does show improvements from its predecessor(s) and there does appear to be support for the Autism Index’s discriminative power.

Additional Points:
• A companion resource entitled Instructional Objectives for Children Who Have Autism is available, providing instructional objectives to identified areas of need. Performance criteria for the objectives can be used to
assist in measuring growth. The manual also devotes a chapter to linking GARS-2 items with corresponding Applied Behavior Analysis information.

- Normative scores are not available for the Parent Interview section. This section supplies important developmental milestone information and anomalies from the child’s first 3 years of life and is an important aspect to identification of autism.

- The Developmental Disturbances subscale has only weak-to-moderate correlations (.34) with the total quotient, and the subscale does not correlate well with the other individual subscales.

- Reliability coefficient for the Communication subscale—while still acceptable—was only “moderate,” and care should be used when interpreting its results. The GARS-2 can be scored without this subscale and regardless, further communication evaluation/alternative communication system assessment, should be completed.

- The Autism Index cut-off was lowered from that of the original test, due to criticism of too many “false-negatives.”

- The Autism Index should be considered the most valuable and reliable score available on the measure. The measure should be considered a screener to help identify individuals who “may” fit criteria for Autism or another PDD, and another tool as part of a comprehensive battery/evaluation system.