

Offender Reintegration ScaleTM Administrator's Guide



Directions for Administering and Interpreting the *ORS*

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Introduction

The *Offender Reintegration Scale (ORS)* is a self-report assessment designed to measure the concerns and potential barriers faced by offenders and ex-offenders with regards to reentry. It is intended to be self-scored and self-interpreted without the use of any other materials, thus providing immediate results for the respondent and/or administrator. This brief guide is designed to assist counselors, administrators, and corrections personnel in administering the *ORS*.

Theoretical Background

Prisoner reentry has been defined as the use of programs designed to help offenders reintegrate into the community upon release. Waul and Travis (2002) provide a more comprehensive definition of prisoner reentry, including its effects on the person and his or her community:

Prisoner reentry is the process of leaving prison and returning to society. All prisoners experience reentry irrespective of their method of release or form of supervision. So both prisoners who are released on parole and those who are released to no supervision in the community experience reentry. If the reentry process is successful, there are benefits in terms of improved public safety and the long-term reintegration of the

former prisoner. Public safety gains are typically measured in terms of reduced recidivism. Other reintegration outcomes would include increased participation in social institutions such as the labor force, families, communities, schools and religious organizations. Both financial and social benefits are associated with successful reentry (p. 2).

The need to assist offenders in the transition from prison to the community is not new. Most prisoners are released back into society and face the challenges of adjusting to the freedom, responsibilities, and struggles that go with living and working in their community. What has changed is the rate at which prisoners are being released. More people are being released from prison to return to their communities now than at any other time in history. Waul and Travis (2002) cite the following statistics about offender release and reintegration:

- Nationally, over 600,000 individuals were released from state and federal prisons in 2000, a fourfold increase over the past two decades.
- Approximately 1,700 individuals are released from prisons each day.
- Prisoners are spending longer periods of time incarcerated and have less access to education and training programs that could help them upon release.

- Two-thirds of the people released from prison are rearrested within three years of release.

Other researchers have outlined the challenges faced by individuals making the transition from prison to the community. Petersilia (2003) found that over the past decade, a greater proportion of prisoners have been released without the benefit of post-prison supervision and without services to assist them in finding jobs, locating housing, reintegrating back into their family, and other support services. Lynch & Sabol (2001) found that disproportionately large numbers of prisoners are being released to a small number of communities that have existing problems such as high unemployment rates, high poverty rates, few job opportunities, high crime, and above-average gang activity.

The result of these circumstances is that more and more offenders are being released without the training, support, or resources they need to make a successful reentry. They simply aren't prepared for the barriers they will face. Solomon, Johnson, Travis, & McBride (2004) conclude that "individuals are released from prison with the need to reestablish themselves in the community, but are often released into environments that are ill-prepared to support a positive transition and are full of risks and challenges" (p. 1).

Waul & Travis (2002) suggest that how well people do when they are released from prison has received renewed attention and "not only are more prisoners returning home than ever before, but they are also returning less prepared for life on the outside" (p. 2). They claim that ex-offenders are having trouble managing the most basic ingredients of successful reintegration such as reconnecting with families, finding employment, managing career, finding housing, and accessing needed health care and other resources. Other researchers (Petersilia, 2000; Piehl, 1998; Wilkinson, 2002) found that offenders who are returning to communities having served their time are ill-equipped, ill-prepared, and have limited support to make the transition successfully.

Offender Reentry Programs

Given these trends, it is no wonder that there is increased attention being paid to the need for programming geared toward making a successful transition and reducing recidivism. Wilkinson (2002) suggests that "there is a growing recognition by correctional leaders, prominent academicians, and influential public policy makers that the success of the reentry transition depends largely on integrating a continuum of services and programmatic interventions starting at the point of sentencing and admission to prison through confinement and carrying through to discharge from parole or post-release control" (p. 2). He concludes that the way in which these linkages are formed must support the maintenance of the inmates' community and social ties even during incarceration.

The United States Department of Justice (2006) states that reentry programming, which often utilizes a case management approach, is intended to assist offenders in acquiring the life skills needed to succeed in the community and become law-abiding citizens. Because they see reentry as a critical factor in the rehabilitation of offenders, the U.S. Department of Justice has recently created a new approach

to reentry in the form of reentry courts. This new program calls for more extensive management and treatment of offenders beginning at the sentencing phase and ending with community-based long-term treatment programs. In this program offenders are encouraged to develop a reentry plan that addresses issues they will confront as they return to the community, such as education, job training and job search skills, career planning, life skills training, substance abuse training, and family relations training.

Wilkinson (2002) suggests that the field of corrections has embarked on a major reexamination of offender reentry strategies and programs. He concludes that a reentry plan must address concerns offenders have about being released from prison and that such a plan be enacted before the offender is released rather than as an after-the-fact intervention. Many other experts are calling for a structured approach that addresses offender concerns and deficits prior to being released from prison (Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Rhine, 2001).

Such reentry plans need to be exhaustive, however, and address the major barriers that offenders are most likely to face upon reentry. Andrews and Bonta (1994) claimed that the development of a comprehensive reentry plan requires prison administrators to consider a number of factors to help offenders meet their personal and career rehabilitative needs. Some of these factors include substance abuse counseling, life skills training, educational and career planning, employability, family issues, and the development of resources in the community. Because each offender is likely to experience barriers to different degrees, a crucial step to supporting reintegration efforts must be to identify which barriers pose the greatest concern for each offender so that the right resources can be allocated to assist him or her while incarcerated and upon and after release.

Need for the *ORS*

As can be seen from this short review of the literature, there is tremendous need for an assessment that helps correctional administrators and staff identify offenders' concerns about their reentry. Many reentry programs and initiatives use a wide variety of assessment procedures to help profile an offender's needs, including psychological batteries and aptitude tests. However there has never been an assessment that helps offenders begin thinking about reentry when they are first admitted to prison, nor one that helps offenders in a pre-release status develop an individualized reentry plan. That is the main purpose of the *ORS*.

The *ORS* is designed to meet the need for a brief assessment instrument to help offenders and ex-offenders identify the needs, barriers, and skills deficits they must overcome in order to successfully reintegrate into society. Some of the assumptions underlying the development of the *ORS* include:

- Correctional programming should be designed to remove barriers to successful community reintegration.
- Offenders need to develop competencies for independent living upon release from prison.
- Reentry programs should be designed to help ex-offenders

live independently, find steady employment, secure and maintain housing, meet basic needs, maintain physical and mental health, use leisure-time effectively, and assume family responsibilities.

- As is advocated by the United States Department of Justice, pre-release planning and reentry programming should start the first day of incarceration and should include an assessment of each offender's needs and concerns.

The *ORS* is intended for use by correctional treatment specialists, correctional counselors, pre-trial services officers, probation officers, parole officers, juvenile court counselors, correctional facility administrators, rehabilitation counselors, pre-release counselors, residential placement counselors, and residential re-entry center counselors. No special training is required to administer or interpret the assessment.

Description of the ORS

The *ORS* has been designed for ease-of-use. It is simple to take and can be easily scored and interpreted. Each *ORS* inventory booklet contains 60 statements that represent concerns about being released from prison and reentering society in general and the working world specifically. The *ORS* also includes scoring directions, a profile guide, an interpretation guide, and a success planning guide for easy administration. Each of the items has been grouped into scales that represent a broad range of offender concerns. The scales on the *ORS* include:

Scale 1—Basic Needs: High scores on this scale indicate that test takers need help meeting their basic needs. They may need assistance in finding a place to live after they are released, being able to afford food for themselves and their family, purchasing clothes for work, identifying affordable medical and dental care, making enough money to survive, and finding or affording reliable transportation. They may not be aware of government agencies available to help them meet their basic needs and the needs of their family.

Scale 2—Job Search: High scores on this scale indicate that test takers need help planning their job search. They need help organizing an effective job search campaign, learning more about how to network for employment, learning how to talk about their prison experience in interviews, exploring occupations of interest, using technology and the Internet in their job search, and learning how to market themselves effectively despite their prison record.

Scale 3—Family Concerns: High scores on this scale indicate that test takers are concerned about being dependable and reliable family members. They are concerned about how their family and friends will view them and about making up for lost time. They may need to learn how to communicate more effectively with friends and family, how to resolve conflicts, and how to be supportive when necessary. They may also need to become aware of psychological support services that can help them and their family.

Scale 4—Life Skills: High scores on this scale indicate that test takers are concerned about functioning effectively in society after their incarceration. They are concerned about managing their time, managing stress effectively, being able to make effective decisions, taking responsibility for how their life turns out, overcoming substance abuse problems, and maintaining their confidence and a positive attitude despite being incarcerated. They may not be aware of the government agencies and services available to help them.

Scale 5—Career Development: High scores on this scale indicate that test takers are concerned about how to develop their career after being incarcerated. They may not have defined a clear career path or started to investigate potential careers. They may also not know much about occupations that match their interests, skills, and personality. They may need to set career goals and identify ways to meet those goals.

The *ORS* can be administered to individuals or to groups. Since none of the items is gender-specific, the *ORS* is appropriate for all juvenile and adult offenders currently in prison or housed in community corrections programs or in post-corrections assistance programs.

Administration and Interpretation

The *ORS* is self-administered, and inventory booklets are consumable. A pencil or pen is the only other item necessary for administering, scoring, and interpreting the inventory. It is highly recommended that administrators take the assessment themselves ahead of time to better understand how to complete and score it.

The first page of the inventory contains spaces for normative data including Name, Date, Gender, and Age. Specific instructions for answering items on the *ORS* are also included on the front page. Read the directions on the first page while all respondents follow along. Test administrators should ensure that each respondent clearly understands all of the instructions and the response format. Respondents should be instructed to mark all of their responses directly on the inventory booklet. The *ORS* requires approximately 20 minutes to complete.

The *ORS* uses a series of steps to guide the respondent. Responses are marked in Step 1. Respondents are asked to read each statement and then circle the numerical response that represents how concerned they are about the particular statement. Responses range from Great Concern (4) to No Concern (1). Step 2 provides instructions for scoring the assessment. Respondents simply add the total of the numbers they circled for each of the five color-coded sections. Step 3 helps respondents to profile and better understand their scores. Step 4 allows respondents to further interpret their scores on the *ORS* and provides activities that can be used to help offenders overcome their barriers on each of the five scales. Step 5 helps respondents develop an action plan to ensure their success upon release.

Calculating and Profiling Scores for the *ORS*

The *ORS* was designed to be scored by hand. All scoring is completed in the consumable inventory booklet. No other materials are needed to score or interpret the instrument.

Respondents are asked to total the numbers they circled for each of the five sections in Step 1. These scores will range from 12 to 48. Respondents then will put that number in the box marked "Total" for each section. In Step 3, respondents transfer their scores from the five sections to the profile by marking an X along each of the five corresponding numbered lines. This will allow respondents to easily compare their scores.

Interpreting *ORS* Scores

The *ORS* yields content-referenced scores in the form of raw scores. A raw score, in this case, is the total score of responses to each of the statements. The performance of individual respondents or groups of respondents can only be evaluated in terms of the mean scores on each of the scales.

For the *ORS*, scores between 12 and 23 are **LOW** and indicate that the respondent is not very concerned about the items on that scale. If this is the case, the administrator may want to address issues related to these scales last. Scores between 24 and 36 are **AVERAGE** and indicate that the respondent is somewhat concerned about the items on that scale. Scores between 37 and 48 are **HIGH** and indicate that the respondent is very concerned about the items on that scale.

Respondents generally have one or more areas in which they score in the high or high-average categories. These are the areas that the respondent should begin gaining additional skills and getting the most assistance. In Step 4, respondents should complete the activities in those sections on which they scored the highest. Step 5 will help reinforce those actions respondents need to engage in to be successful as they develop a personal plan for reentry.

The *ORS* and its interpretations are based on self-reported data. The accuracy and usefulness of the information provided is dependent on the honest information that participants provide about themselves. Based on the interpretation of the *ORS*, participants may verify some information that they already know or may uncover new information that might be keeping them from successfully reintegrating. Whatever the results of the assessment, encourage participants to talk about their results.

When counselors and administrators make initial contact with their clients, the client's greatest concerns should largely determine the focus and course of counseling. Assessment through the use of the *ORS* will encourage the identification and verification of individual characteristics and attitudes. Then the results can be used to look beyond the participant's profile in order to facilitate meaningful learning experiences that will enhance self-awareness and lead to a more successful reentry.

The *ORS* should be used to determine which barriers the participant is most motivated to overcome. Participants who recognize their most pressing concerns are likely to participate actively in all phases of preparing for release. Participants will feel like a part of the reintegration planning process, will be more motivated, and will feel better about achieving the desired results.

Illustrative Case Using the *ORS*

James is a 41-year-old male who is finishing a five-year sentence in a state prison and is nervous about his release. His scores on the *ORS* can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Profile Results for James

Scale I: Basic Needs	41
Scale II: Job Search	37
Scale III: Family Concerns	31
Scale IV: Life Skills	31
Scale V: Career Development	36

As can be seen from his results James scored in the "High" range for the Basic Needs (41) and Family Concerns (37) scales. These are the areas in which James has the most concern. This is where his counselor, case worker, or parole officer would begin working with James.

Looking at Step 5 of the *ORS*, for Basic Needs, James wrote that he needed a job that had benefits so that he could stay healthy and get help for his depression. He also said that his family was living in low-income housing, and he would like to purchase a home. He said that he needed to learn how to manage money better and that he wanted to join a church upon release.

The counselor helped James to identify agencies in his community that he could contact after being released. The counselor also helped James develop better budgeting and money management skills and provided him with information about first-time home ownership, credit reports, and mortgages. James also said that he was nervous about having to search for a job. The counselor helped James start to think about organizing a job search for when he leaves prison. The counselor also helped James with some instruction in effective interviewing skills and self-marketing techniques.

James scored in the average range in the other three areas on the *ORS*. The counselor decided to initially help James in the areas he had the most concern and then move to the three areas where James had less concern.

When to Use the *ORS*

The problem with many current pre-release programs is that the identification of barriers to reintegration and the need for assistance with these barriers comes too late in the process, often only 30 or 90 days before release. The notion of pre-release programming

beginning the day offenders are admitted to prison is a relatively new one. However, it is important that offenders be allowed the time and resources necessary to prepare for a successful transition.

Thus the *ORS* should ideally be completed when offenders are first admitted in the intake process. By completing the *ORS*, counselors will be better able to develop an individualized release plan for each offender. This release plan can then be used during the offender's incarceration to help in the rehabilitation process. It can help counselors identify the programming that would be most helpful to each individual offender. In a more traditional pre-release program (conducted just before the offender is released), the results of the assessment can be used to help offenders confront their most pressing concerns. Therefore, rather than treating all offenders systematically, instruction can be individualized to meet each offender's needs.

Offenders in work release programs may find the assessment especially useful as they can practice some of the skills emphasized by the *ORS*. The *ORS* can be administered upon the offender's admission to the work release facility, and the results can be used by counselors to help offenders overcome their concerns and barriers in "real-life" situations. Work release programs provide an opportunity for offenders to overcome some of their barriers as they interact with community members. Again, the barriers that offenders are most concerned with should be the first that are addressed.

For offenders on probation or parole, the *ORS* can be used to track an offender's progress in attempts to reintegrate. Probation and parole officers can monitor an offender's progress in overcoming barriers on the *ORS*, or they can administer it and use it as an individualized post-release plan.

Finally, offenders in post-release status can use the results of the *ORS* as a method for monitoring their own progress toward successful integration back into society. They can use the results to ensure that they are taking the steps necessary to be successful.

Research and Development

This section outlines the stages involved in the development of the *ORS*. It includes guidelines for development, item construction, item selection, item standardization, and norm development and testing.

Guidelines for Development

The *ORS* was developed to fill the need for a quick, reliable instrument to help offenders and ex-offenders identify their concerns about being released from prison and reintegrating into society. The inventory consists of five scales, each containing 12 items that might be of concern after being released from prison. It also provides counselors, correctional treatment specialists, prison administrators, and rehabilitation specialists with information that they can use to help offenders develop a comprehensive reentry plan upon release. The *ORS* was developed to meet the following guidelines:

- **The instrument should measure a wide range of concerns.**
To help offenders and ex-offenders identify their concerns

about reentry, five scales were developed that were representative of the concerns offenders have about transitioning from prison back into society identified from the literature related to offenders and ex-offenders.

- **The instrument should be easy to use.** The *ORS* uses a four-point Likert question-answer format that allows respondents to quickly determine how concerned they are about a particular item. The format makes it easy to complete, score, and interpret the assessment.
- **The instrument should be easy to administer, score, and interpret.** The *ORS* utilizes a consumable format that guides the test-takers through the five steps necessary to complete the *ORS*, identify scores for the five scales, learn more about their concerns about reentering society, and develop a comprehensive reentry plan for success in life and career.
- **The instrument should contain items that are applicable to offenders and ex-offenders of all ages.** Norms developed for the *ORS* show an age range from 21–65. They reflect testing of individuals in both a pre-release and post-release status.

Scale Development

The author's primary goal was to develop an inventory that measures and identifies an offender's concerns about his or her release and reintegration to be used as a means of developing an effective reentry plan. In order to ensure that the inventory content was valid, the author conducted a thorough review of the literature related to the topics of offenders, reentry, offender reintegration programs, and barriers to offender success. A variety of both academic and professional sources were used to identify the five areas of concern that make up the scales on the *ORS*. Figure 2 shows a comparison of the *ORS* scales and of one of the research studies used.

Figure 2: Five Areas of Offender Concern

<i>ORS</i> Scales	Andrews & Banta (1994)
Basic Needs	Community Resources
Job Search	Employability
Family Concerns	Family Issues
Life Skills	Life Skills
Career Development	Career Planning

Item Selection

A large pool of items that were representative of the five major scales on the *ORS* was developed and later revised. This enabled the elimination of items that did not correlate well. In developing items for the *ORS*, the author used language that is currently being used in the literature written about offender rehabilitation, reintegration, and programming. After the items were developed, they were reviewed and edited for clarity, style, and appropriateness for identifying concerns of offenders and ex-offenders. Items were additionally screened to eliminate any reference to sex, race, culture, or ethnic origin.

Item Standardization

The author identified adult prison populations to complete the *ORS*. These populations completed drafts of the *ORS* to gather data concerning the statistical characteristics on each of the items. From this research, a final pool of 12 concerns was chosen that best represented each of the five scales on the *ORS*.

This initial research yielded information about the appropriateness of items for each of the *ORS* scales, reactions of respondents concerning the inventory format and content, and reactions of respondents concerning the ease of administration, scoring, and profiling of the *ORS*. Experts in the field of corrections were used to eliminate items that were too similar to one another. The data collected was then subjected to split-half correlation coefficients to identify the items that best represented the five scales on the *ORS*. The items accepted for the final form of the *ORS* were again reviewed for content, clarity, and style. Careful examination was conducted to eliminate any possible gender or racial bias.

Reliability

Reliability is often defined as the consistency with which a test measures what it purports to measure. Evidence of the reliability of the *ORS* is presented in terms of reliability coefficients and interscale correlations. Tables 1 and 2 present both types of information. As can be seen in Table 1, the *ORS* showed very strong internal consistency validity with split-half correlations ranging from .87 to .94.

Table 2 shows the correlations among the *ORS* scales. The *ORS* showed very strong interscale correlations with the largest correlation being between the Job Search and Career Development scales (.564). This was expected because both of these scales deal with employability. The other interscale correlations were smaller, adding to the independence of each of the scales on the *ORS*.

Validity

Validity is often defined as the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure. Evidence of validity for the *ORS* is presented in the form of means and standard deviations for three different groups of offenders: those currently incarcerated, those in work release programs, and those recently released from prison. Table 3 shows the scale means and standard deviations for offenders currently incarcerated who completed the *ORS*. Current offenders showed a great deal of concern in each of the five areas; all of their scores were in the “High Concern” range. They tend to be most concerned about Family Concerns ($M = 43.28$), followed by Life Skills ($M = 40.92$) and Basic Needs (40.29). While incarcerated, offenders are less concerned about career development and job search issues.

For comparison, Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations for offenders currently enrolled in work release programs. They had similar concerns as the offenders who were currently incarcerated, but they tended to be more concerned with Career Development ($M = 45.36$), and then Life Skills ($M = 43.46$) and Family Concerns ($M = 42.58$). It could be generalized that since they were now in the workforce, career development issues came to the forefront. However, since they were currently engaged in a job-release program, job search was their least concern.

Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations of offenders who had been recently released from prison. This population tended to have the least amount of concern among the three groups. Their area of greatest concern was in the Job Search area ($M = 37.81$). This follows logically as these individuals are working to find steady employment in their communities.

The means and standard deviations for all offenders and ex-offenders taking the *ORS* can be seen in Table 6. Scores for all five scales were in the “High” concern range. The two highest areas of concern for offenders are Family Concerns ($M = 40.69$) and Career Development ($M = 40.67$). The lowest area of concern for offenders was in Job Search ($M = 37.85$).

Table 1: Internal Consistency (Split-Half Correlations)*

Scales	Correlation Coefficients
Basic Needs	.87**
Job Search	.94**
Family Concerns	.93**
Life Skills	.91**
Career Development	.88**

* N = 48 Adults

** Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level

Table 2: ORS Interscale Correlations (N = 48)

ORS Scales	Basic Needs	Job Search	Family Concerns	Life Skills	Career Development
Basic Needs	1	.386**	.063	.336*	.465**
Job Search		1	.392**	.116	.564**
Family Concerns			1	.501**	.277
Life Skills				1	.059
Career Development					1

* Correlation was significant at the 0.05 level

** Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations for Offenders Currently in Prison (N = 78)

Scales	Mean	SD
Basic Needs	40.29	6.5
Job Search	39.26	8.5
Family Concerns	43.28	4.5
Life Skills	40.92	7.2
Career Development	39.94	6.7

Table 4: Means and Standard Deviations for Offenders Currently in Work Release (N = 50)

Scales	Mean	SD
Basic Needs	37.50	5.8
Job Search	35.68	6.3
Family Concerns	42.58	4.0
Life Skills	43.46	4.5
Career Development	45.36	3.5

Table 5: Means and Standard Deviations for Offenders Recently Released (N = 43)

Scales	Mean	SD
Basic Needs	36.26	6.2
Job Search	37.81	5.9
Family Concerns	33.79	7.1
Life Skills	34.11	6.5
Career Development	36.56	3.6

Table 6: Means and Standard Deviations for All Offenders (N = 171)

Scales	Mean	SD
Basic Needs	38.46	6.4
Job Search	37.85	7.4
Family Concerns	40.69	6.5
Life Skills	39.95	7.3
Career Development	40.67	6.1

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About the Author

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Dr. Liptak started working in 1990 at the Federal Correctional Institution in Lexington, Kentucky, as a counselor. In this position, he helped offenders develop release plans and counseled them on career planning and job search issues related to their release. After five years of service he began working in Delaware as the statewide director of their LifeSkills program. There he developed curricula, trained counselors, gathered release statistics, and coordinated services among five state prisons in Delaware. After three years there he accepted a position as the Educational Director of Delaware Correctional Center, a medium-maximum level state prison for violent offenders, where he coordinated all aspects of educational programming including prerelease services.