The Life Events Inventory (LEI)

A brief history

The LEI was adapted, developed, updated and simplified by Spurgeon et al. [1] from earlier work from the original Schedule of Recent Experiences Checklist by Holmes and Rahe (1967) and modified and renamed as the LEI by Cochrane and Robertson (1973). Both of the previous versions of this scale were validated for use with limited populations of students, psychiatrists and psychiatric inpatients and as such had limited applicability to general working populations.

Description

Results obtained from assessments of psychological well-being can be useful in understanding various sources of distress for workers, as well as any predisposing factors. It is recommended that results of such assessments are not used in isolation, but rather in combination with other information which is indicative of distress or psychological problems such as sickness absence, poor productivity or increased turnover. There are many simple-to-complete assessments of mental well-being that almost any worker can complete by themselves. The Life Events Inventory (LEI) is a checklist of potential stressful events for individuals to self-complete by serially scanning and ticking (true positive) if any of the 55 listed events occurred to them in the previous 6 months. An advantage of the LEI is that it focuses on potentially distressing events from both the domestic and occupational spheres and does not limit the assessment to solely occupational sources—which makes the LEI useful in gathering a distress profile of the ‘whole person’. There are no recommended optimum conditions for the completion of this scale, although it’s brevity does mean that it can be completed equally well in clinical settings or in ‘working time’. The LEI can be scored in a variety of ways which is also useful in providing multiple outcome measures.

Items

Examples of some of the listed events (and their weighting scores out of 100 for males and females, respectively) include:

- Change in hours or conditions in present job (27, 35)
- Getting into debt beyond means of repayment (82, 86)
- Trouble with superiors at work (52, 54).

Individuals are then scored thus: they receive (i) a ‘severity rating’, based on the sum of the weights attached to each of those events confirmed and (ii) an event frequency rating, based on the number of events that occurred in the previous 6 months. The total weighting score is then divided by the number of events to provide an aggregate distress score—making fairer comparisons between individuals with differing numbers of stressful events that may have occurred.

Validity

Weightings for each of the stressful events listed had been established separately for the sexes, ranging from 1 to 100, and this was established from a working population by Spurgeon et al. [1].

Key research

The LEI is simple to administer, easy to complete and score and used in many studies of (occupational) well-being. Although the current version of the LEI is in its infancy compared to the widely used General Health Questionnaire, the former versions of the LEI have been used widely in many clinical and survey studies.

Craig A. Jackson
Senior Lecturer in Occupational Psychology,
Birmingham City University
e-mail: craig.jackson@bcu.ac.uk

References