

LIFE EXPERIENCE TIMELINE (LET) INTERVIEW

The Life Experience Timeline (LET) Interview is comprised of a timeline and multiple response cards. The LET is designed to get a complete picture of the drug use history of the respondent as well as other important behaviors and events that may be associated with the respondent's drug use. The interview collects longitudinal data on drug and alcohol use, crime and delinquency, incarcerations, drug treatment episodes, and medical and psychiatric treatment. Like its precursor, the Natural History Interview (NHI), the LET is based on the position that other events and behaviors can illuminate specific patterns and progressions of drugs use and addiction. Unlike the NHI, the LET provides for an analysis of not only aggregate data, but allows the researcher to examine behaviors and events along with drug use in their naturally occurring, time-anchored patterns.

The Rationale Behind Timeline Methods of Collecting Respondent Information:

The following is a brief explanation of the rationale behind the development and administration of the LET:

It is often difficult to collect reliable lifetime drug use data, especially over long periods of use, but people can better recall overall drug use and related behavior within time segments marked by major life changes, such as arrests, incarcerations, marriages, treatment episodes, etc. These data can be used as prompts to reconstruct long-term drug use and other behaviors. Obtaining a natural history of drug use and other behavioral data will illuminate the antecedents and consequences of a multitude of potentially related behaviors and events. Additionally, the use of a timeline may identify important facets of the progression from drug use to abuse to dependence, and distinguish drug use patterns. Efforts to understand the effects and effectiveness of treatment episodes may be impeded without knowledge of how the respondents' recent drug use fits into their longer trajectories of drug use, abstinence, natural recovery, and treatment assisted recovery.

Overview of the LET interview procedure:

Interviewers begin with the timeline by establishing exact or approximate dates of initiation into drug use and later changes in use, criminal behavior, arrests, incarcerations, drug treatment episodes, medical treatment and psychiatric treatment. These dates are recorded on the LET timeline, which provides a simple, visual record by which behavior and status changes are segmented on a month-by-month basis. Events marked on the timeline are used as aids to recall during the interview. The occurrence of drug use and other behaviors/events are recorded beginning with age 14, or the age when the behavior actually started, if older than age 14. (Although the respondent is asked at what age a specific event first began, detailed information is only collected as outlined above.) By providing a time-anchored history of drug use and other events, the respondent is better able to provide detailed information about these behaviors/events.