

STRESS: RAHE ET AL. (1970)
LIFE CHANGES & STRESS

Aim: to investigate whether scores on the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SSRS) were correlated with the subsequent onset of illness

Procedures:

- ❑ 2,500 male American sailors were given the SSRS to assess how many life events they had experienced in the previous six months
- ❑ The total score on the SSRS was recorded for each participant
- ❑ Then over the following six-month tour of duty, detailed records were kept of each sailor's health status.
- ❑ The recorded number of Life Change Units were correlated with the sailors' illness scores

Findings:

- ❑ There was a positive correlation of +0.118 between Life Change scores and illness scores
- ❑ Although the positive correlation was small, it did indicate that there was a meaningful relationship between Life Change Units and health
- ❑ As Life Change Units increased, so did the frequency of illness

Conclusions:

- ❑ The researchers concluded that as Life Change Units were positively correlated with illness scores, experiencing life events increased the chances of stress-related health breakdown
- ❑ As the correlation was not perfect, life events cannot be the only factor in contributing to illness

Criticisms:

- ❑ The study does not take into account individual differences in reactions to stress
- ❑ A correlation does not imply causality nor the direction of any effect; depression or anxiety may not be caused by life events, since depressed and anxious people may bring about life events such as separation or divorce
- ❑ The sample is restricted to US male Navy personnel; ethnocentric and androcentric. This reduces validity & generalisability of study