TEST REVIEW:
Barriers to Employment Success Inventory
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Acronym: BESI

Author: John J. Liptak, Ed.D.

Publication Date: 1996

Publisher: JIST Works, Inc.

Publishers Address: 720 North Park Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46202

Price: $37.50/package of 25 test booklets. 15% off when five or more packages are purchased.

Computer Scoring Software Available: None.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Primary Construct Assessed: Individual barriers to employment

Test Purpose: 'The BESI is designed to help individuals identify major barriers to obtaining a job or succeeding in their employment. It is not a test, but rather a counseling tool intended to initiate a dialogue concerning the person’s barriers to successful employment and ways in which those barriers can be overcome" (Liptak, 1996, p. 2). The BESI has aided unemployed workers by identifying their potential barriers to employment, showing them where they are in relation to other adults, providing recommendations on overcoming these barriers and allowing them to begin a plan to be successful in obtaining employment.

Administration Type: The BESI can be administered to individuals and/ or groups.

Population/Rane: Unemployed workers.

Time Required to Administer/Score and Interpret: "The average administration time for the BESI is approximately 20 minutes, depending on such factors as age and reading ability"(Liptak, 1996, P. 6).

Interpretive Scores Derived: Depending upon the total score for each category the examinee fell into one of three classifications: 10-20 - fewer barriers than most adults, 20-30 - same level of barriers as most adults, 30-40 - more barriers than most adults.

Sub-test Format. The BESI was divided into five categories of potential barriers. These were: 1. Personal and Financial (P); 2. Emotional and Physical (E); 3. Career Decision-
Making and Planning (C); 4. Job-Seeking Knowledge (J); and 5. Training and Education M.

Item/Scoring Format: The SESI used a Likert scale to record responses in degrees of concern over a specific barrier: I = None, 2 Little, 3 = Some, 4 = Great.

Qualifications of Examiners: None provided, but the BESI appears to be a level A test.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Attractiveness of Test Materials: The layout of the BESI was well organized and clearly marked.

Durability of Test Materials: Since the test was constructed out of paper, it was easily susceptible to rips, tears and folds. However, the durability is acceptable for the intended single use.

User-Friendly Format: Test takers are easily led and directed from one section to the next.

Ease of Administration: Simple.

Clarity of Administration and Scoring Procedures: The BESI had directions for each section and provided examples where appropriate. The author needed to state more clearly in the first section how the examinee should interpret concern. In the fourth and fifth sections it was unclear when the author asked the examinee to list additional barriers if he was referring only to the barriers identified in the BESI, or to any other barriers the examinee could think of on his or her own.

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION AND SCORING PROCEDES

Each examinee should be provided with a booklet and a pencil or erasable pen. The examinee should be instructed to write her/his name on the front and write responses to all questions in the booklet. The examinee should be told that the BESI is not a test and, therefore, he or she should not be concerned about right or wrong answers. The directions and scoring procedures should be explained and any questions answered. There were five steps to the BESI. The first step was ranking the degree of concern for each of 50 barriers. Each barrier fell into one of the five categories; P. E. C. J. & T The questions were arranged so that each row consisted of two barriers from the same category. There were five rows for each category. The second step was to subtotal the scores for each category. There were five subtotals for each category. In the third step all subtotals from the same category were totaled. The examinee would then mark where on a scale from 10-40 he or she fell in relation to other adults. This indicated which category consisted of the largest number of barriers preventing the examinee from obtaining employment. In the fourth step the examinee would identify which category needed the most work and would be given some recommendations for overcoming those.
barriers. In the fifth step the examinee would identify which barriers within a given category were the most troublesome and begin to create a plan for overcoming them.

NORMATIVE INFORMATION

Type of Norms: Not applicable. Interpretation is criterion-referenced.

Age of Participants: Not available.

Sex of Participants: 83 males and 67 females.

Number of Participants: 150 Normalization

Technique: Not applicable.

Sample Characteristics: None reported.

Availability of Subgroup Norms: None reported.

RELIABILITY

Internal Consistency: Sub-test results were reported as alpha coefficients with n = 135: Personal and Financial = .88; Emotional and Physical = .91; Career Decision-Making and Planning = .95; Job-Seeking Knowledge = .87; Training and Education = .92; Total Test = .899.

Test-Retest: Sub-test results were reported with an n = 95, and collected up to six months after original testing. Test-retest correlations were: Personal and Financial = .86; Emotional and Physical = .90; Career Decision-Making and Planning = .85; Job-Seeking Knowledge = .79; Training and Education = .82.

Alternate-Form: Not applicable.

Scorer Reliability: Not reported.

VALIDITY

Content Validity. The author reported high content validity because the items were representative of the research that he conducted and because counselors serving as judges were able to recognize them as barriers and place them into five different categories.

Criterion-Related Validity

Concurrent: No correlations with other tests were reported. The author incorrectly reported inter-scale correlations as evidence of concurrent validity.
Predictive: Not reported.

Construct Validity: Not reported.

STRENGTHS

The BESI gives unemployed individuals a start to understanding their situation and what might be preventing them from obtaining employment. The user-friendly format of the BESI lends itself well to self-administration and scoring. Individuals filling out the BESI are introduced to various potential barriers to employment and are provided with recommendations for overcoming these barriers. This is helpful to the examinee when, in the last section, he or she begins to develop a plan of action for employment. In terms of "usefulness to the individual "the BESI is a good initial tool for a career counselor to use. Based upon a decision making model, it identifies the problem, provides possible ways to alleviate the problem and then encourages the participant to carry out the identified corrective procedures. An individual's motivation will most likely increase by doing these three things because each initiates hope and direction for change in those who may not have known how to deal with their situation previously.

WEAKNESSES

The author developed the SESI out of research from eight different journal articles. Despite the majority of them stating or alluding to the notion that unemployment is multidimensional, Liptak contended that "in reality, most people looking for employment need assistance in one dimension of life that ultimately affects their transition and adjustment to work" (p. 5). The SESI was designed to ascertain which set of barriers present the most difficulties for the individual. Unfortunately, when means and standard deviations were obtained, the differences between categories were so minuscule, that they were essentially insignificant. Due to the close proximity of scores between categories, it would be very difficult for someone to identify which area truly presented the most barriers. Rather, the close proximity indicates, in agreement with the research, that unemployment is multidimensional.

Not only did the author not use the research appropriately when designing the BESI, but he also confused his findings by citing research that specifically pertained to different populations of unemployed persons, all with different needs. This would have been fine if he incorporated the needs and barriers faced by individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds and reasons for unemployment, such as being the victim of a corporate downsizing. But instead, he developed the BESI solely from the barriers identified by Miller and Oetting (1977). Their article dealt specifically with impoverished and vocationally disadvantage persons in the Denver area. According to Miller and Oetting, barriers to employment are problems that do not stem from personal skills and attitudes or from requirements of a job, but almost always prevent successful employment. Barriers to employment are not poor work skills or attitudes, problems associated with the work environment including prejudice and job requirements, or expectations that are unrealistic. Out of 37 barriers that fell into 11 categories, Miller and Oetting identified four clusters. These were job qualifications,
social and interpersonal conflict, legal and financial problems, and emotional-personal problems. There were also other barriers that did not fall into any cluster. These included childcare or other family responsibilities, transportation, drinking, drug abuse, and health-related problems. When Liptak developed the SESI he mixed and matched barriers from different clusters to form new categories and included some that originally stood on their own. This calls the content validity of the BESI into question.

Once Liptak (1996) chose five categories in which to classify barriers, he developed a list of one hundred concerns an individual might have when looking for employment. He then asked an unspecified number of career counselors to put each concern into its most appropriate category. This was done to ensure the tests content validity. However, "barriers to employment" is essentially a construct. What the author has shown is face validity. Liptak also attempted to show concurrent validity in the form of inter-scale correlations. However, this procedure is inappropriate. It would have been far more useful if the author provided correlations with other tests purporting to measure similar constructs or other important employment-related criteria. Three types of reliability for this test were calculated; internal consistency, split-half, and test-retest. For internal consistency he reports the results in terms of Alpha Coefficients. The results were strong. However, they are misleading. The author obtained the results for internal consistency from a test consisting of 75 questions, not the 50 questions that are present in the current test. The 75 items were the original questions derived and categorized by other counselors. After internal consistency was calculated, all of the items that made any reference to race, gender, culture or ethnic origin were eliminated.

Liptak (1996) also consistently used different numbers of participants from the same pool of 150 to obtain reliability scores. For internal consistency, he only used 135. What happened to the other 15 that were not reported? Were they not used or were their scores thrown out? There is no explanation for this. For test-retest he indicated n = 95. It is unclear as to whether or not there were 95 participants for each administration or if it was n = 135, or n = 150 for the first administration and n = 95 for the second. With a time frame in-between administrations of up to six months the latter is most likely what occurred. If indeed there were more participants for the first administration, what happened to them between then and the second administration? To enhance our understanding of the temporal stability of the BESI the author should have administered the BESI for the second time within two to four weeks after the first administration.

The "concerns" that the scales purported to rate were not clear "Concern" to one could mean something totally different than to another. There were no directions on the SESI on how to interpret concern, and as such there most likely will be a variety of answers to several of the questions. Concerns are closely related to values and needs. For example question 2 in the BESI is "Maintaining a positive attitude" One could say "I have a positive attitude and I value it, so yes it is a great concern to me" However one could also say, "I don't have a positive attitude, but I value it and want one, so yes it is a great concern to me." Now one could also say, "I don't have a positive attitude, I don't care if I do because I don't value it and so it is of no concern to me." On the flip side is questions 22, "Dealing with an alcohol or drug dependency problem." For this question one could
say, "I don't have a problem (and really not have one), so it is of no 'concern' or "I have a problem and it is a concern "or "I don't have a problem (but they really do), so it is no concern " There is definitely a difference in the first example between the two individuals who rated having great concern for maintaining a positive attitude and between the two individuals in the second example who had no concern for the drinking problem. For one individual in each case it will be a barrier while for the other it will not. The majority of questions on the BESI suffered from the very same dilemma of having multiple answers from multiple viewpoints, each of which may or may not be a barrier regardless of how much of a concern is indicated. In a related topic, a lot of the concerns are geared more directly to a specific population. For example, question 15 is "Completing my High School GED, question 30 is "Learning basic math and English skills," and question 36 is "Learning more about low-income in my community" These questions most likely can only be answered by individuals who are in the lower socioeconomic class and have little education. With only a total of 50 questions, too many of these types of questions severely restrict the use of the SESI for this population. This population of interest is never mentioned in any of the literature provided by the author and publisher.

Perhaps Liptak (1996) stated it best when he said that the BESI, "is not a test, but rather a counseling tool intended to initiate a dialogue concerning the person's barriers to successful employment and ways in which those barriers can be overcome" (p.2). If the SESI is only used as a tool to initiate dialogue and not a test, then it does have some merit. However, the BESI then can no longer be self-administered, scored and interpreted, but should be used as an interview. If this were the case then the counselor would really need a thorough understanding of barriers to employment and all the different ways that a situation could be a positive or a negative to different individuals. As it is now though, the SESI has provided little meaningful evidence of validity and reliability. Such evidence is important even if the BESI is used as a structured interview.

References

Liptak, J. J. (I 996). User's guide to the Barriers to Employment Success Inventory. Indianapolis, IN: JIST Works, Inc.