Child’s Life Events
LONGSCAN
1992

Description of Measure

Purpose
To document significant events in a child’s life in the past year.

Conceptual Organization
The instrument contains 31 items covering events including changes in family composition and in living arrangements, illness or death of people close to the child, illness or injury experienced by the child, school changes, legal problems in the child’s family, child’s exposure to violence, and family accomplishments. The respondent answers yes/no to whether each event occurred. For most events, a “yes” response leads to a few follow-up questions about the event.

Item Origin/Selection Process
Coddington (1972) developed a set of instruments called Life Event Records for preschool, elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school-aged children for the purpose of quantifying events requiring a readjustment on the part of the individual. Because children’s lives are largely affected by the actions of family members, many of the items selected focus on caregiver or family events.

LONGSCAN added items representing events more common in low-income samples (e.g., homelessness, eviction) and items capturing the child’s exposure to violent events. In addition, care was taken to include only items that represent events that occurred independent of the child’s functioning (e.g., we did not include items describing school failure, relationship problems, etc.). To address the concern that the questionnaire was heavily weighted toward negative events, the form concludes with some positive or neutral items. It was observed that caregivers may perceive being able to answer “no” to negative items as a more positive experience than answering “yes” to positive items.

Materials
LONGSCAN utilized an A-CASI administration.

Time Required
4-5 minutes

Administration Method
A-CASI administered

Training
Minimal

Scoring

Score Types
Events can be summed in different ways, depending on the objective of the analysis. For example, the total number of life events can be obtained by summing all responses.
Alternatively, items can be summed separately for life events deemed positive and negative, with ambiguous items excluded.

Sandler and Block (1979), using a modified version of Coddington’s Life Events Scale for children, tested various scoring methods (including a simple count of all events experienced, separate scores for positive and negative, and weighted sum scores) and found that the simple count correlated highly with the weighted sum score, and was the strongest predictor of adjustment.

**Score Interpretation**
The higher the score, the more life events experienced in the past year.

**LONGSCAN Use**

**Data Points**
Age 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14

**Respondent**
Caregiver

**Mnemonic and Version**
LECA: Age 6, 7.

LEB: Age 8, 9, 10, and 11. No modifications. Form version changed due to change in data entry system.

LECC: Age 12 and 14. A number of follow-up questions asking for more detail about particular events were eliminated.

**Rationale**
Holmes and Rahe (1967) postulated that any change (positive or negative) requires readjustment and thus produces some stress. Children who experience multiple major life events, especially within a short time frame, are at risk for behavioral and academic difficulties (Compas, 1987; Dubow & Tisak, 1989; Wertlieb, Weigel, & Feldstein, 1987). Many life events (e.g., births, deaths, marriages, divorces, accidents, illnesses, moves, school changes, financial changes, jailing or imprisonment, etc.) overlap with other life events (Coddington, 1972). Life events are tracked each year to account for significant experiences in the participant child’s life that might have an impact on development or functioning.

**Administration and Scoring Notes**
In Item 28, a life event is scored if the child began new school or changed schools. In Item 30, if household finances got worse or better, the item is scored as a life event.

**Results**

**Descriptive Statistics**

For descriptive statistics of the earlier life events scores/items, please refer to the 1st and 2nd volumes of the measures manuals (Hunter et al., 2003). Table 1 shows mean scores and frequencies for life events reported at the Age 12 interview, by gender and study site. The mean
number of life events experienced by LONGSCAN children during the preceding year was three. The ten most common events experienced by all LONGSCAN children, in descending order of frequency were: starting school or changing schools (45%), moving to a new place (23%), the death of someone in household besides a parent (15%), someone besides a parent moving out (12%), someone besides a parent moving in (10%), child had some kind of accident (9%), sibling was born (9%), child’s family was victim of property crime (8%), and someone besides parents got separated (7%).

Table 1. Age 12 Life Events by Gender and Study Site

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<td>956</td>
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<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>11.9</td>
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Source. Based on data received at the Coordinating Center through October ’08.

Table 2 shows mean scores and frequencies for life events reported at the Age 14 interview, by gender and study site. Similar to Age 12, at Age 14 the mean number of life events experienced by LONGSCAN children during the preceding year was three. The ten most common events experienced by all LONGSCAN children in the year preceding the Age 14 interview, in descending order of frequency were: starting school or changing schools (40%), moving to a new place (21%), the death of someone in household besides a parent (19%), child had some kind of accident (13%), someone besides a parent moving out (12%), someone besides a parent moving in (10%), child’s family was victim of property crime (8%), someone besides parents got separated (6%), and sibling was born (5%).
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References and Bibliography


