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, upheavals in living arrangements, sickness or death of people close to the child, sickness or injury experienced by the child, school changes, legal problems in the child’s family, the 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 (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 also 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
Paper and pencil or computerized form.

rev. 07/09

167
Time Required
10-15 minutes

Administration Method
Interviewer-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

Respondent
Primary maternal 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. 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 subject child’s life that might have an impact on development or functioning.

Administration and Scoring Notes

Care must be taken in scoring items 26 and 29. In Item 26 the life event is represented by either "began new school" or "changed schools". In Item 29, if household finances got worse or better, the item is scored as a life event.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows mean scores by race and by site for life events reported at the Age 6 interview. The mean number of life events experienced by LONGSCAN children during the preceding year was slightly less than 5. According to Table 2, the ten most common events experienced by all LONGSCAN children, in descending order of frequency were: starting school or changing schools (48.4%), household finance change (42.8%), witnessing of long, loud arguments (40.3%), family member accomplishment/achievement (34.5%), moving residence with family (29.5%), other event affecting child (27.1%), accident/illness of someone close (21.0%), someone moving out of the home for reasons other than a change in marital status.
(17.5%), witnessing someone being physically harmed (17.1%), someone close dying (17.1%),
and new sibling (16.2%). Of the families that experienced a financial change, the financial
situation improved for 61%, while for 39% it worsened.

There were race and site differences, with Black children experiencing on average just
over 4 events, while White and Multiracial children experienced more than 5. The EA and SO
sites, where the great majority of Black study children are located, had similarly low means (4.18
and 3.91, respectively), whereas the mean was higher at sites with fewer Black children. For
example, the mean at the SW site was over 4 and the mean at the NW site was over 6. According
to Table 2, there were some events that White and Multiracial children were more likely to
experience than Black children, such as caregiver/partner separations, someone new moving into
the household, moving with family to new house, school change, accident/illness,
accomplishment/ achievement, property crime victimization, and witnessing someone being
beaten. Conversely some events were more common for Black children: new sibling, new baby
in home, someone arrested or jailed, witnessed stabbing or shooting, and witnessed murder.

Table 1 about here

Table 2 about here

Validity

Family stress has typically been measured by examining family life events and or daily
stressors or hassles. While the constructs differ, daily stressors and life events have been linked
theoretically and empirically. Life events and daily stressors/hassles have been shown to be
significantly associated; life events may operate by affecting the pattern of daily hassles (Kanner,
Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981). For LONGSCAN data, the Pearson correlation coefficient
between mean total scores for the Age 6 child life events measure and the Age 6 daily stressors
measure (Everyday Stressors Index) was .23 (p < .0001, n=1166).

References and Bibliography
Coddington, R. D. (1972). The significance of life events as etiologic factors in the
diseases of children–II: A study of a normal population. Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 16,
205-213.

Psychology Review, 7, 75-302.

Dubow, E. F., & Tisak, J. (1989). The relation between stressful life events and
adjustment in elementary school children: the role of social support and social problem skills.
Child Development, 60, 1412-1423.

Holmes, T. H., & Rahe, R. H. (1967). The social readjustment rating scale. Journal of
Psychosomatic Research, 11, 213-218.

Kanner, A. D., Coyne, J. C., Schaefer, C., & Lazarus, R. S. (1981). Comparisons of two
modes of stress measurement: Daily hassles and uplifts versus major life events. Journal of
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symptoms in middle childhood. Journal of Clinical Psychology, 16, 201-211.
### Table 1. Mean Scores of the Child's Life Events Scale by Race and Study Site. Age 6 Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1223</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>(3.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>(3.32)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>(2.86)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>(3.28)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>(3.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>(2.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>EA</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>(2.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>(3.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>(2.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>(3.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>(2.94)</td>
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*Source.* Based on data received at the LONGSCAN Coordinating Center through 08/24/01.
Table 2. Frequency of Children Exposed to Life Events by Race and Study Site. Age 6 Interview

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Percentage of Children Exposed to Life Events</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>Race</td>
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<tr>
<td>Site</td>
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<tr>
<td>SW</td>
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<td>NW</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on data received at the LONGSCAN Coordinating Center by 08/24/01.

Note: Table includes only those life events in which more than 10% of the entire sample experienced.