Life Experiences Survey
Sarason, I., Johnson, J., and Siegel J. 1978

Description of Measure

Purpose
To obtain a self-report of positive and negative events experienced over the previous year, and the perceived stress associated with those events.

Conceptual Organization
The original instrument includes 60 items divided into two sections. Section 1 contains 50 life changes that are common to individuals in a wide variety of situations (e.g., In the last year, did you get married?). Section 2 contains 10 items that are for students only.

Item Origin/Selection Process
The items were chosen to represent life changes frequently experienced by individuals in the general population. Most of the items were based on existing life stress measures, in particular the Social Readjustment Rating Scale developed by Holmes and Rahe (1967).

Materials
See Sarason, Johnson, & Siegel, 1978 for the original instrument.

Time Required
10 minutes

Administration Method
Self- or interviewer-administered

Training
Minimal

Scoring
Score Types
Respondents rate each life event experienced on a 7-point scale ranging from -3 (extremely negative) to +3 (extremely positive). If an event did not occur, the item is coded as 0. Every event that occurred is coded as one “life change unit.” These units can then be summed for a total score of recent life events. Positive and negative events can be summed separately, or they can be scored on the same scale using positive and negative numbers.

Score Interpretation

The authors’ research (Sarason, Johnson, & Siegel, 1978) found that positive and negative life change scores exhibit different patterns of relationships with other measures (e.g., anxiety, depression).

Norms and/or Comparative Data

The original measure was normed on college students at the University of Washington. The mean total score for women was 16.61 (SD = 10.23), and for men was 15.97 (SD = 11.08) (Sarason, Johnson, & Siegel, 1978).

Psychometric Support

Reliability

The authors conducted two test-retest reliability studies on two groups of undergraduate psychology students (N = 34 and N = 58 respectively). Test-retest correlations for the positive change scores were .19 and .53 (p < .001), for the negative change scores were .56 and .88 (p < .001), and for the total change scores were .63 and .64 (p < .001). The authors note that the findings may have varied because of the small sample sizes. Also the 5-6 week test-retest interval may underestimate reliability because subjects may have experienced new events during the intervening period. (Sarason, Johnson, & Siegel, 1978).

Validity

The negative life change score significantly correlated with stress-related and self-rated depression measures. See Sarason, Johnson, and Siegel (1978) for details.
LONGSCAN Use

Data Points

Pre-Age 4: MW & NW sites only
Age 4: All sites

Respondent

Primary maternal caregiver

Mnemonic and Version

LESB

Rationale

Clearly, child outcomes are affected by family life experiences. The Life Experiences Survey was selected and adapted for use at the Pre-Age 4 interview because it is one of the most widely used measure of life events and because the SO site had used this measure prior to the Age 4 interview.

Administration and Scoring Notes

LONGSCAN shortened and modified Sarason’s first 50 life events (including eliminating the student only section) to increase its utility and relevance for a less educated population. The revised instrument has 30 items, 25 of which overlap substantially with items from the original instrument. In some cases, LONGSCAN combined items to create one (e.g., death of close friend, family member, and spouse constitute 3 items in the original version, but only one in the LONGSCAN version). In other cases, two items were created out of one of Sarason’s items (e.g., “Gained new family member through birth, adoption, or someone moving in,” was separated for LONGSCAN purposes into “new baby,” and “someone else moved into the household”). LONGSCAN added the following inquiries: “entered a new school or training program” (from Sarason’s student only section), “dropped out of school,” “homeless for a period of time,” and “victim of crime.”

To facilitate administration, the vocabulary of the instrument was simplified (e.g., “change of residence,” became “moved to a new place”; and “minor law violation” became
“trouble with the law.”), and the response set was shortened from seven to five possible responses ranging from +2 (“Very Good”) to -2 (“Extremely Bad”).

Results

Table 1 displays the mean number of total life events, negative life events only (somewhat or extremely bad), and positive life events only (somewhat or very good), as reported by the 1147 maternal caregivers completing the instrument at the time of the Age 4 interview.

Out of the 30 life events queried, caregivers reported an average of about 4.5 events in the year preceding the Age 4 interview. The Hispanic caregivers, on average, reported fewer events, while the Multiracial caregivers reported more. Black and White caregivers had virtually the same mean number of total, positive, and negative events. NW caregivers reported a higher number of total events and negative events than those at the other four sites.

Table 1 about here

References and Bibliography


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Number of Life Events M (SD)</th>
<th>Number of Negative Life Events M (SD)</th>
<th>Number of Positive Life Events M (SD)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1147</td>
<td>4.43 (3.04)</td>
<td>1.76 (1.84)</td>
<td>2.32 (1.87)</td>
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<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>4.38 (2.99)</td>
<td>1.74 (1.82)</td>
<td>2.32 (1.84)</td>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>4.48 (3.06)</td>
<td>1.82 (1.87)</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>3.85 (2.63)</td>
<td>1.32 (1.47)</td>
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<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5.10 (3.97)</td>
<td>2.18 (2.41)</td>
<td>2.48 (2.31)</td>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.75 (3.10)</td>
<td>1.68 (1.72)</td>
<td>2.61 (1.91)</td>
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<td>EA</td>
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<td>4.38 (2.87)</td>
<td>1.74 (1.86)</td>
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<td>MW</td>
<td>123</td>
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<td>1.59 (1.45)</td>
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<td>SO</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>4.48 (2.94)</td>
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<td>SW</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>3.84 (3.02)</td>
<td>1.42 (1.74)</td>
<td>2.04 (1.90)</td>
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<td>NW</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>5.13 (3.33)</td>
<td>2.24 (2.15)</td>
<td>2.56 (1.83)</td>
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</table>

*Source.* Based on data received at the LONGSCAN Coordinating Center by 7/8/97.

*Note:* Positive and negative events don't add to total because events that are rated as "neither good nor bad" are included in total.