

Researchers launch study about losses and gains associated with life events

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A new research study from Purdue's Department of Educational Studies in the College of Education aims to determine how life events affect people by asking about the gains and losses associated with those life events.

The Perceived Impact of Life Event Scale survey, or PILES, will survey adults ages 18 and older and ask questions relating to a personal life event they choose to evaluate. The study began in September and will continue until May.

"When you experience any event in life, you will have gains and losses," said Heather Servaty-Seib, assistant professor of educational counseling and the study's lead researcher. "This research will call attention to losses associated with 'good' events and gains associated with 'bad' events."

Servaty-Seib and her team want to know how people honestly and uniquely view their own significant life events. One of the challenges in such a study is the uniqueness that people have in viewing the impact of life events, she said. For example, two people may experience the same event but have strikingly different perceptions of how that event affected their lives.

Individuals responding to the survey choose a significant life event and then indicate the gains and losses they attribute to that event. The completed survey places the impact of a person's life event on a scale with a score determined by the combination of the gains and losses

experienced. This score is accompanied by a brief explanation.

Servaty-Seib believes the overall results will help counseling psychologists determine what areas of life are affected by significant events and how the impact of events may vary depending on factors including cultural differences, personality traits and family environment.

"'Positive' events can be offset by feelings of loss that stem from a variety of changes associated with those events," Servaty-Seib said. "Conversely, when someone goes through a 'negative' event, there can eventually be gains that are connected with the experience.

"These gains and losses connected to life events vary for everyone and are frequently overlooked by individuals and by society. Instead of looking at life events as black and white or negative and positive, we are looking at them as a combination of gains and losses and more in terms of shades of gray."

The team of researchers working with Servaty-Seib includes graduate students working on separate studies that focus on specific life experiences, including sexual abuse, unemployment, divorce, alcoholism and drug recovery, grandparents raising grandchildren, and acquired disabilities.

To participate in the Perceived Impact of Life Event Scale survey, go [online](#).

Source: Purdue University

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