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Development of the Urban Hassles Index

The UHI is the product of Dr. Miller's extensive experience and previous research with adolescents living in urban areas. Its development was a multi-step process. It began with a list of "hassles" thought to represent common events in the lives of urban adolescents that might induce stress. This initial list was then expanded with the help of a group of adolescents who suggested additional items and

THE URBAN HASSLES SCALE – SAMPLE FREQUENCIES
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Following preliminary development and testing of the UHI, the scale was expanded from the original nine items to 32 items, based on input both from complementary research on urban environments and input from professionals working with adolescents in urban areas. Additionally, principle components analysis was used to identify different types of stressors present within the UHI resulting in four subscales: environmental conditions, interpersonal interactions/surveillance, safety concerns, and anticipatory victimization .

URBAN HASSLES AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The research being conducted by Dr. David Miller illustrates the importance of assessing the stressors affecting adolescents using context-relevant concepts and experiences. The study demonstrates the contribution of urban hassles to adolescent stress and, ultimately, the effects of stress on adolescent mental health and well-being. The UHI provides a new tool for researchers to assess stress among urban adolescents, and provides an alternative or complementary measure to traditional life events indexes. This tool may be utilized by practitioners working with youth in community-based and level interventions, by schools, in policy initiatives, and in future research studies.

Practitioners and school personnel: Understanding the impact of urban social and physical environments on adolescent mental health and well-being is crucial to designing and implementing targeted programming to prevent the negative effects of stress on adolescent health and well-being. Practitioners must consider the contextual circumstances confronted by youth in urban environments and the manner in which these youth adapt to and cope with them. Especially in urban environments, assessment should include discussion of chronic stress with an understanding about its potential impact on neglectful or dysfunctional behaviors and physical and psychological symptoms. The UHI could be used by practitioners as a rapid assessment instrument for this purpose.

Policymakers and stakeholders at all levels must understand the relationship between the environment in which children live and their well being. Policies and initiatives should focus on prevention by working to change the conditions of neighborhoods through efforts at community and environmental revitalization and community building strategies. Efforts must also include

education about, and early intervention and treatment of the negative effects associated with chronic exposure to stress.

Next steps for research: Dr. Miller's research has demonstrated the utility of the Urban Hassles Index in identifying the stressors that adolescents living in urban environments face and understanding the ways those stressors impact their lives. However, a deeper understanding of the context in which youth live and their perception of it and reaction to it will provide valuable information to practitioners and policy makers working or concerned with youth. To this end, Dr. Miller and colleagues plan to continue to work refining the UHI, including for use in measuring the perceived severity of stressors and the level of risk or danger youth feel are posed by stressors. They also plan to continue to examine the relationship between scores on the UHI and other health indicators and coping strategies.

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