

## Impact of Locus of Control on Mental Health among College Students

Rajesh Kumar Jha<sup>1\*</sup>, Twinkle Sharma<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The research aims to examine the effect of locus of control on mental health among college students. An individual's "locus" (plural "loci") can be classified as internal (a belief that one can handle one's own life outcomes or events) or external (a conviction that life is constrained by outside factors on which the individual has no control). Mental health is a state of mental well-being which enables people to cope with stresses of their life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and also contribute to their community. The study was conducted with 160 college students aged from different colleges and universities of Delhi and Varanasi. The data was collected using Rotter's locus of control scale (Kumar and Srivastava, 1985), and Mental health inventory (Jagdish & Srivastava, 1988) which included dimensions, positive self-evaluation, perception of reality, integration of personality, autonomy, goal-oriented attitude, and environmental mastery. The results indicated that there has been found a significant effect of locus of control on mental health of college students.

**Keywords:** *Locus of Control, Mental Health, Mental Wellbeing, Self-Evaluation*

Locus of control refers to how much individuals perceive that they themselves control their own actions in response to events occurring in their lives or is it the external forces which control their life outcomes. An individual believes that s/he has control over what happens in their lives, s/he have what psychologists refer to as an internal locus of control. For example, if an individual falls from stairs and gives the reason that it was his fault because he was not attentive while walking, he has internal locus of control. But, if an individual believes that s/he has no control over what happens and that external variables are to blame for the events occurring in one's life, such as luck or destiny, s/he have what is known as an external locus of control. For example, if a person falls from stairs and blame stairs for it, say the stairs are not in right condition, then it will be due to the external causes. (Carton, 2021). An individual's "locus" (plural "loci") can be classified as internal (a belief that one can handle one's own life outcomes or events) or external (a conviction that life is constrained by outside factors on which the individual has no control, or that their lives are controlled by their destiny). A person with high internal locus of control views himself as having a great deal of personal control over his life and therefore is more inclined to take personal responsibility for his behavior. He will attribute events in his life based on his own

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, DAV PG College, B.H.U., Varanasi, India

<sup>2</sup>Researcher, Department of Psychology, DAV PG College, B.H.U., Varanasi, India

\*Corresponding Author

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capabilities and will praise himself for his success and will try to improve in areas where he did not perform well, thus, giving credit for his success to himself and reason for his failure to his limitations. Rotter (1954) suggested that our behavior is controlled by rewards and punishments, we try to maximize the chances of being rewarded and avoiding punishment, and it is the consequences of our actions which determine our beliefs about the likely results of future behaviors.

There are various different characteristics which people with internal and external locus of control possess, and these characteristics differ in individuals having external and internal locus of control.

Characteristics of people with high internal locus of control: (Lopez, 2011)

- People with high internal locus of control are more likely to take responsibility for their actions, be it success or failure.
- They don't get affected by the opinions of other people.
- They are having Strong self-efficacy
- Who has high internal locus of control tend to work hard to achieve the things they want, this is why they attribute the causes of their success and failure to themselves.
- They work hard to achieve their goals, find it interesting and feel confident.
- They believe in their abilities that they can achieve their goals and things they want.
- People with internal locus of control work hard to achieve their goals and ultimately the goals of their workplace, leading to greater success there.

### ***Mental health***

The term mental health describes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It is a state of mental well-being which enables people to cope with stresses of their life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and also contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that supports our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. It is a basic human right which is crucial for our personal, community and socio-economic development. (WHO, 2022).

Mental health allows individuals to use their abilities, be productive, make decisions, and play an active role in their communities and make the society a better place to live in with efforts of all individuals. Having poor mental health is many a times confused with having a mental illness, however, they both are extremely different. Mental health refers to a person's state of psychological well-being whether or not they have a psychiatric condition, whereas mental illness actually refers to having a psychiatric condition, such as schizophrenia, depression, and so on, with impaired mental functioning. Mental health has been characterized by terms antonymous with disease, mental illnesses, and pathological symptoms/signs (Murphy, 2009). Ryff (1989a, 1989b, 2008) demonstrated that mental health (well-being) can be characterized by its six major components that cover different psycho-social aspects of human being.

A study was conducted to assess the influence of locus of control on mental health, the findings revealed the adolescent females who had internal locus of control showed better mental health and overall adjustment pattern which includes home, social, emotional, educational domains and health adjustment domain than those who had external locus of control. The results also indicated that there was a significant difference in mental health between the male and female sample (Krishnakar et.al, 2016)

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Fatemi and Hoseiniyan (2016) conducted a study with male and female students on locus of control, the results indicated that there was existed more internal locus of control in male students as compared to female student. Further, it was revealed that male students attributed their success to internal factors, but failure to external factors. However, this was opposite in females and they attribute negative events to internal causes.

In the several studies regarding gender differences and mental illness, females report more problems although these disorders vary across age groups (Scott, 1998; Parker, et.al., 2001; Kessler, et al, 1994; Hawton, et. al, 2002; Linzer, et al., 1996). It was also observed that Indian females exhibited high threshold of suffering. Ram, Strohschein and Gaur, (2014) have also found that gender inequality is still present in Indian families. Although females had more gender-egalitarian attitudes they also had more constraints on their freedom than males. Gender bias was more recognized by males whereas mental health problems were more among females. Mishra and Jha (2015) observed independent effect of gender on mental health among college students with males having better mental health. Whereas several other studies (Anand, 1999; Nanda, 2001; Deshmukh & Singh, 2013) have reported better mental health among females.

A pioneered study to explore the association between LOC and mental health of the respondents. The study revealed that there was a close significant association between locus of control and mental health of young adults (Shojae & French, 2014). The individuals with internal locus of control were found to possess high level of mental health and were emotionally stable and had a balance between different aspects of life whereas those having external locus of control had comparatively lower level of mental wellbeing with more pessimistic attitude towards life. The research reported that individuals who had an inner locus of control displayed high level of mental health and overall better adjustment pattern such as, social, emotional, home, educational domains and health adjustment domain than those who had external locus of control (Jain et.al. 2015).

### *Objectives*

- To study the effect of gender on mental health among college students.
- To study the impact of Locus of control on mental health among college students.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research Design*

A 2x2 factorial design (gender and locus of control) was used for the study. The data was collected with the help of purposive random sampling method for selecting the students for the study.

### *Sample*

The study was conducted with 160 college students (80 male and 80 female students) aged 18 to 25 years from different colleges of Varanasi and Delhi. The students selected as sample for the study were either pursuing or completed their graduation, or were pursuing post-graduation.

### *Tools*

- **Locus of control scale:** Locus of control for this study was measured using Rotter's Locus of Control Scale (English version). It is a standardized tool for measuring the

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locus of control of students with age range 18-25 years (Kumar and Srivastava, 1985). The scale consists of 29 pairs of items and is forced choice instrument, which means that the participant must select one out of each pair, which is more suited to their experiences and thoughts. 23 items are scored as either 0 or 1, as per the scoring key, while other 6 items are filler items which are not scored. The scores were added for each participant and interpretation of scores was done according to the norms given in the manual. A high or a maximum score indicates high externality (external locus of control) and lower scores reveal internality (internal locus of control). The norms as per the manual indicates that scores ranging from 0-12, were labelled for internal locus of control, and scores ranging from 13-23, were categorized as external locus of control.

- **Mental Health Inventory:** Mental health for this study was measured using Mental Health Inventory developed by Jagdish and Srivastava (1988). It is a standardized tool to measure mental health of normal individuals. It consists of 54 items distributed along six dimensions. These six dimensions include: Positive self-evaluation (PSE), Perception of reality (PR), Integration of personality (IP), Autonomy, Group oriented attitudes (GOA), and Environmental mastery (EM). Students have to select one of the four options (always, often, rarely, and never) present in front of each item. 4 scores are given to always, 3 to often, 2 to rarely, and 1 to never. However, scoring is reversed for false keyed items.

### *Procedure*

The demographic information, Rotter's locus of control scale, and mental health inventory were used for the data collection. Firstly, a good rapport was established with the participants and they were explained about the study being conducted. They were also informed that their responses will be kept confidential and how their co-operation will help in the research. Afterwards, they were given instructions for all three scales one by one in the sequence they were asked to fill the questionnaire. The participants were asked to write the responses for all the items mentioned. After successful completion of the data collection, scoring was done according to the norms given in the manual.

## **RESULT**

The two-way ANOVA was applied to examine the impact of gender, locus of control, and interaction of gender and locus of control on mental health (including positive self-evaluation, perception of reality, integration of personality, autonomy, group-oriented attitude, environmental mastery) to assess the significant relationship between them. The F-ratio was obtained to check this significance,

*Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation of LOC and gender on Mental health.*

Gender	LOC category	N	Mean	SD
Male	Internal LOC	42	154.80	15.95
	External LOC	38	141.50	14.77
	Total	80	152.48	16.46
Female	Internal LOC	41	151.03	16.47
	External LOC	39	145.50	19.63
	Total	80	150.06	17.06
Total	Internal LOC	83	152.92	16.26
	External LOC	77	143.50	17.16
	Total	160	151.27	16.76

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Table 3 highlights the Mean and Standard deviation of LOC category and gender on mental health among college students. The table shows Mean and SD of males and females with LOC category, i.e., internal and external locus of control. It can be stated that the mean of internal locus of control of males was higher than that of female students, contrary to which, the mean of females on external locus of control was found to be higher than that of male students. Though this difference was small it can be seen that the internal locus of control of males was higher than that of females, and external locus of control of females was higher than that of males.

**Table 2: Summary of ANOVA outcomes on Mental health.**

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F-ratio
Gender	.29	1	.298	.001
LOC category	2048.36	1	2048.36	7.60**
Gender*LOC category	348.89	1	348.89	1.29
Error	42037.38	156	269.47	

\* Significant at  $p < .05$ \*\* Significant at  $p < .01$

Table 2 demonstrates summary of two-way ANOVA outcomes on Mental health. There was no significant effect of gender on Mental health as a dependent variable. However, the category of locus of control was found to be significantly effect on mental health ( $F = 7.60^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This means that LOC category affects mental health significantly and is responsible for mental health. Table 3 shows that the mean of internal locus of control was higher than that of external locus of control. Thus, high internal locus of control signifies good mental health, whereas, high external locus of control shows a lower level of mental health. Furthermore, table also shows that there was no interaction effect of gender and LOC category on Mental health ( $F = 1.29$ ,  $p > .01$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The study aimed to examine the impact of gender and locus of control on mental health among college students. The result of the study indicates that there was no any significant difference of gender on mental health, This means that it may be possible that both male and female are not differentiated at the level of mental health. Similar finding has been found in the study on the gender differences in mental health among youth in Kerala, it was explored that male and female youth were not differ in terms of their mental health (Dmodaran, et.al, 2016). The finding is also supported by a study conducted with students, which found no significant difference between gender and mental health of college students (Waghmare, 2018). It is seen that men were having relatively better sense of mental health and more progressive gender ideology. Women experienced more stress in most of the areas. But a change in trend in a positive direction indicated that the younger, better educated had better mental health irrespective of their gender. Mental health in childhood is influenced greatly by the nature and quality of childhood experiences, and mental health in adulthood is determined by one's mental health in childhood and adolescence (Fergusson, Horwood, Grant, & Ridder, 2005; Anda et al., 2006).

However, there was found a significant difference of the category of locus of control on mental health, the results also revealed that there was no significant impact of the interaction of gender and locus of control on mental health. Thus, the result indicates that high internal locus of control is responsible for good mental health, whereas high external locus of control is responsible for low level of mental health. This may be because a person with high

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internal locus of control believes that he himself is responsible for his life outcomes and believes in his abilities, and so he has a good mental health because he is not dependent on his luck or any chance factors for his life events which people with external locus of control are. A study found similar finding which is in favor with the results of the present study. It found that locus of control produces significant difference in mental health of students, and also that internal locus of control students were high on mental health than external locus of control (Krishnakar et al., 2016). Shojae and French (2014) pioneered a study to explore the association between LOC and mental health of the respondents. The study revealed that there was a close significant association between locus of control and mental health of young adults. The individuals with internal locus of control were found to possess high level of mental health and were emotionally stable and had a balance between different aspects of life whereas those having external locus of control had comparatively lower level of mental wellbeing with more pessimistic attitude towards life. The findings of the study are supported by the study in which the individuals who had an inner LOC displayed high level of mental health and overall better adjustment pattern which includes social, emotional, home, educational domains and health adjustment domain than the individuals who had outer locus of control (Jain et.al., 2015). A person with internal locus of control will focus more on self-acceptance, having self-confidence, knowing one's strengths and weaknesses to improve on and will focus on himself rather than attributing things to external factors. There was no significant effect found in the combined effect of gender and locus of control on mental health in this present study.

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained, it can be concluded that a significant difference of gender was not found on mental health, but effect of locus of control was found significant on mental health. Taking into consideration the dimensions of mental health, it was found that locus of control had a significant impact on different dimensions of mental health such as, positive self-evaluation, and integration of personality etc., however gender had no significant effect on the mental health dimensions.

This study contributes to understand the impact of gender and locus of control on mental health among students. Findings of this study could be beneficial for future psycho-social researches and there might be used different tools with in-depth understanding of these variables.

#### *Limitations of the study*

- The results of the study may be attributed to low sample size.
- Some of the data was collected online because the data was collected from different colleges and universities of Delhi and Varanasi (city), which may have contributed to no significant difference being found among variables. It can be predicted that if the sample size would have been greater, the results would have shown significant difference among variables.
- The questionnaire used for the study contained a huge number of items and so, there can be a possibility of students not taking the amount of interest they should take while filling the data.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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