

Research Paper

Gender and Locus of Control in the Socio-Cultural Context of Dumka District

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between locus of control (LoC) and gender among youth aged 22–36 years in Dumka District, Jharkhand, India, a region characterized by its significant tribal population and unique socio-cultural dynamics. Utilizing an adapted version of Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale tailored for the Indian context, the research examines how gender shapes internal and external LoC orientations, emphasizing the influence of cultural and socio-demographic factors such as area of residence (rural vs. urban) and educational attainment. Data were collected from 140 respondents (74 males, 68 females) through self-administered questionnaires in English and Hindi, ensuring accessibility across diverse educational backgrounds. Statistical analyses, including independent samples t-tests and three-way ANOVA, revealed significant gender differences in LoC. Males exhibited a stronger internal LoC ($M=78.5$, $SD=12.3$) compared to females ($M=72.1$, $SD=11.8$), with a significant gender-residence interaction indicating that rural males displayed higher internal LoC than their urban counterparts, while female scores remained consistent across settings. These findings align with global research suggesting that patriarchal norms grant males greater agency, fostering internal control beliefs, while females, constrained by systemic barriers, lean toward external LoC. In Dumka's tribal context, females scored higher on the Family & Relationships dimension, reflecting the collectivist emphasis on relational control. The study underscores the role of cultural factors, including family dynamics and tribal traditions, in shaping LoC perceptions. Implications include the necessity for gender-sensitive psychological interventions and policies to enhance autonomy, particularly among females, by leveraging community-based approaches like women's self-help groups. These findings contribute to understanding psychological resilience in tribal communities, offering insights for empowerment plans personalized to India's rural socio-cultural landscape.

Keywords: *Locus of Control, Gender, Dumka District, Psychological Well-being, Indian Context*

Locus of control (LoC), an introductory psychological concept developed by Rotter (1966), describes the degree to which individuals perceive control over their life outcomes. Those with an internal LoC believe their actions directly influence events,

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reflecting a sense of personal agency, while those with an external LoC attribute outcomes to external factors such as fate, luck, or societal forces. According to Wallston & Wallston (1982), this concept is particularly relevant in understanding how individuals navigate challenges within specific socio-cultural contexts, where factors like gender, education, and cultural norms shape perceptions of control. In India, Sinha (1988) argued that a country marked by diverse cultural practices and collectivist values, LoC is influenced by unique social structures, including family dynamics, caste systems, and gender roles.

This study focuses on Dumka District in Jharkhand, India, a region predominantly inhabited by tribal communities such as the Santhal and Paharia, which represent approximately 44% of the district's population (Census of India, 2011). Dumka's socio-cultural landscape, characterized by a blend of traditional tribal values and increasing exposure to modernization, provides a unique setting to explore LoC. Tribal societies in India often exhibit distinct gender dynamics compared to non-tribal regions, with women sometimes enjoying greater community roles but still facing systemic patriarchal constraints (Misra & Gergen, 1993). These dynamics make Dumka an ideal context for examining how gender influences LoC, particularly among youth aged 22–36, a demographic navigating the transition between traditional expectations and modern aspirations.

Gender roles in India, especially in rural and tribal areas, are deeply rooted in patriarchal norms that often afford men greater autonomy and decision-making power (Kabeer, 1999). Women, on the other hand, may face restrictions in education, mobility, and economic opportunities, potentially fostering an external LoC orientation (Chakraborty & Basu, 2010). In Dumka, these gender disparities may be moderated by tribal customs that grant women roles in community governance, yet broader societal structures still limit their agency. This study hypothesizes that males in Dumka District will exhibit a stronger internal LoC due to societal privileges, while females may display a more external LoC due to cultural and structural constraints. By exploring these differences, the study aims to contribute to the understanding of psychological resilience and empowerment in a culturally unique and understudied region.

Objectives

The primary objective of the study is to investigate the relationship between locus of control (LoC) and gender among youth aged 22–36 years in Dumka District, India, using Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale adapted for the Indian context. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine how gender influences internal and external LoC orientations in a tribal-dominated region.
2. Explore the role of socio-cultural and demographic factors, such as residence (rural/urban) and education, in shaping LoC differences.
3. Provide insights for psychological interventions and policy-making to foster empowerment and autonomy in tribal communities.

Hypotheses

1. **Gender Differences in LoC:** Males in Dumka District will exhibit a stronger internal LoC compared to females, who are expected to display a more external LoC due to societal and cultural constraints.
2. **Interaction with Socio-Demographic Factors:** Gender differences in LoC will be moderated by residence (rural vs. urban) and educational attainment, with rural

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males and those with higher education potentially showing stronger internal LoC orientations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of locus of control (LoC) has been a cornerstone of psychological research since its introduction by Rotter (1966), providing a framework to understand how individuals perceive control over their life outcomes. Internal LoC is associated with positive psychological outcomes, such as higher self-efficacy, resilience, and mental well-being, while external LoC is linked to feelings of helplessness and lower motivation (Levenson, 1973). Cross-cultural studies (Smith & others 1995) have highlighted that LoC is not a universal construct but is shaped by cultural, social, and economic contexts. Sinha, (1988) argued that, in India, the collectivist orientation, emphasis on family interdependence, and belief in concepts like karma significantly influence LoC perceptions.

In the Indian context, researchers have adapted Rotter's Internal-External (IE) Scale to account for cultural nuances, such as the role of fate and familial obligations. For instance, Sethi and Raj (1985) validated the scale in India, incorporating items related to family and societal expectations, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of 0.72. Kumar and Kapoor (2017) further refined the scale for Indian populations, achieving a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75 and confirming its reliability across diverse demographic groups. These adaptations highlight the importance of family, social hierarchy, and spiritual beliefs in shaping LoC in India, distinguishing it from Western frameworks.

Gender differences in LoC have been a focal point in psychological research. Globally, males tend to report higher internal LoC due to greater access to social and economic resources, which foster a sense of agency (Lefcourt, 1991). In contrast, the study conducted by Sherman and others, (1997) reveals, females often exhibit external LoC, particularly in patriarchal societies where structural barriers limit their autonomy. In India, these differences are pronounced due to entrenched gender norms. For example, Chakraborty and Basu (2010) found that Indian adolescent females scored significantly higher on external LoC compared to males, attributing this to societal expectations that prioritize male agency. In tribal contexts like Dumka District, gender dynamics are complex. While patriarchal structures persist, tribal communities often grant women greater roles in economic and social activities compared to non-tribal Indian societies (Xaxa, 2004). For instance, Santhal women in Dumka participate actively in agriculture and community decision-making, which may enhance their sense of control in specific domains. However, broader systemic constraints, such as limited access to education and economic independence, may still foster external LoC orientations (Mishra & Gergen, 1993). Recent studies (Agarwal & Dalal, 1993) suggest that modernization, including exposure to education and urban influences, may shift LoC toward internality, particularly among younger populations. This study builds on this literature by examining how gender shapes LoC in the unique socio-cultural context of Dumka, contributing to the sparse research on tribal populations in India.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate the relationship between locus of control (LoC) and gender among youth in Dumka District, India. A cross-sectional approach was chosen to capture a snapshot of LoC orientations across gender, residence, and educational levels at a single point in time, allowing for efficient data collection in a resource-constrained setting. The study utilizes a survey-based

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methodology, with the adapted Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale as the primary instrument. The design incorporates comparative analyses to examine differences in LoC scores between males and females, as well as interactions with socio-demographic factors (residence and education), using statistical techniques such as t-tests and ANOVA. This approach enables the exploration of hypothesized gender differences while controlling for key contextual variables, providing a robust framework for understanding LoC in a tribal-dominated region.

Sample

The sample comprised 140 respondents aged 22–36 years from Dumka District, Jharkhand, as documented in the provided demographic data. The sample included 72 males and 68 females, with 62% residing in rural areas and 38% in urban areas. Educational attainment varied, with 45% holding a bachelor's degree or higher, and 55% having completed higher secondary education or less. The sample included both tribal (35%) and non-tribal (65%) respondents, reflecting the district's demographic composition.

Instrument

The Locus of Control Questionnaire, adapted from Rotter's I-E Scale for the Indian context, was used. It consists of 24 items across eight dimensions: Personal Control & Effort, Luck & Chance, Social & Political Control, External Influences & Fate, Family & Relationships, Academic & Career, Health & Personal Well-being, and Social Recognition & Status. Internal LoC items (e.g., 1, 2, 3) are directly scored (1–5), while external LoC items (e.g., 4, 5, 6) are reverse scored (5=1, 4=2, etc.). The total score ranges from 24 to 120, with higher scores indicating internal LoC.

Procedure

Data were collected via self-administered questionnaires in English and Hindi, ensuring accessibility for diverse educational backgrounds. Informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was maintained. The administration followed ethical guidelines, with cultural sensitivity training provided for administrators working with tribal populations.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were computed for LoC scores by gender. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare male and female LoC scores. ANOVA was used to explore interactions between gender, residence (rural/urban), and educational attainment. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. All analyses were performed using Python with the SciPy and Stats models libraries.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The mean LoC score for males was 78.5 (SD=12.3), indicating a moderate internal orientation. Females had a mean score of 72.1 (SD=11.8), suggesting a mixed orientation closer to external LoC. Dimension-wise, males scored higher on Personal Control & Effort (M=12.1, SD=2.1) and Social & Political Control (M=11.8, SD=2.0), while females scored higher on Family & Relationships (M=11.5, SD=2.2).

T-Test Results

An independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in LoC scores between males and females, $t(140) = 3.24$, $p = 0.001$. This suggests that males exhibit a stronger internal LoC compared to females.

ANOVA Results

A three-way ANOVA examined the effects of gender, residence, and education on LoC scores. The main effect of gender was significant, $F(1,134) = 10.51, p = 0.001$, confirming the t-test findings. The interaction between gender and residence was also significant, $F(1,134) = 4.87, p = 0.029$, indicating that rural males ($M=80.2, SD=11.9$) had higher internal LoC than urban males ($M=75.3, SD=12.5$), while female scores were consistent across residence types. Education level did not significantly interact with gender ($p = 0.152$).

Table 1: LoC Scores by Gender and Residence

Group	Mean LoC Score	SD
Male (Rural)	80.2	11.9
Male (Urban)	75.3	12.5
Female (Rural)	72.0	11.7
Female Urban)	72.3	12.0

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide compelling evidence of gender differences in locus of control (LoC) among youth in Dumka District, with males demonstrating a significantly stronger internal orientation ($M=78.5, SD=12.3$) compared to females ($M=72.1, SD=11.8$). This finding aligns with global research, which consistently shows that men, benefiting from greater societal privileges, tend to attribute life outcomes to personal agency rather than external forces (Lefcourt, 1991). In the context of Dumka, a predominantly tribal region, these differences are likely amplified by patriarchal norms that grant males greater autonomy in decision making, particularly in rural settings. The significant gender-residence interaction ($F(1,134) = 4.87, p = 0.029$) further illuminates this dynamic, revealing that rural males exhibit a stronger internal LoC ($M=80.2, SD=11.9$) compared to their urban counterparts ($M=75.3, SD=12.5$). This may reflect the unique sociocultural environment of rural Dumka, where traditional gender roles are more pronounced, and males often assume leadership roles in community and family structures.

Females, conversely, displayed a more external LoC orientation, which may stem from systemic constraints such as limited access to economic resources, restricted mobility, and dependence on family or societal approval for major life decisions (Sinha, 1988). Notably, females scored higher on the Family & Relationships dimension ($M=11.5, SD=2.2$), suggesting that social connections and familial roles serve as critical anchors for their sense of control. This finding is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where collectivist values emphasize interdependence and relational harmony (Mishra & Gergen, 1993). In Dumka’s tribal communities, women often play pivotal roles in maintaining family cohesion and community traditions, which may explain their higher scores in this domain. However, this reliance on relational control may also reflect a compensatory mechanism for their limited agency in other areas, such as personal or political spheres, where males scored higher (Personal Control & Effort: $M=12.1, SD=2.1$; Social & Political Control: $M=11.8, SD=2.0$).

The absence of a significant interaction between gender and education ($p = 0.152$) is noteworthy, suggesting that educational attainment does not substantially alter LoC differences in this population. This may be attributed to the limited access to higher education in Dumka, particularly among tribal populations, where only 45% of respondents held a bachelor’s degree or higher. In rural areas, educational infrastructure is often

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underdeveloped, and cultural barriers may disproportionately affect females' access to advanced schooling. Consequently, education may not yet serve as a significant equalizer in shaping LoC orientations in this region. This finding contrasts with studies (Kumar & Kapoor, 2017) in urban Indian settings, where education has been shown to enhance internal LoC, particularly among women.

The cultural context of Dumka, with its blend of tribal traditions and modern influences, adds complexity to these findings. Tribal communities in Dumka, such as the Santhal and Paharia, often exhibit more egalitarian gender norms compared to non-tribal Indian societies, with women participating actively in community decision-making and economic activities like agriculture (Sinha, 1988). Yet, the persistence of patriarchal structures, particularly in rural areas, appears to limit females' internal LoC, as evidenced by their lower overall scores. This duality suggests that while tribal women may have some agency in specific domains, broader societal constraints continue to shape their perceptions of control.

Implications

These findings have profound implications for designing psychological and community-based interventions in Dumka District. To enhance internal LoC among females, interventions should prioritize empowerment through targeted education and skill-building programs that address cultural and economic barriers. For instance, vocational training and microfinance initiatives could bolster women's economic independence, potentially shifting their LoC toward a more internal orientation. Additionally, interventions should leverage the strength of females' relational control, incorporating family and community-based approaches that align with collectivist values. For example, women's self-help groups, which are prevalent in Jharkhand, could integrate LoC-focused workshops to promote autonomy while respecting cultural norms.

For males, particularly in rural areas, interventions could focus on sustaining their internal LoC while addressing potential overconfidence or risk-taking behaviours that may accompany high internal control beliefs. Community leadership programs could channel their sense of agency into positive outcomes, such as advocating for gender equity and community development.

Policymakers should also consider the urban-rural divide highlighted by the gender-residence interaction. Rural areas, where traditional norms are stronger, may require more intensive gender sensitization programs to challenge patriarchal structures. Urban areas, with greater exposure to modern influences, could benefit from programs that bridge traditional and contemporary values to foster balanced LoC orientations across genders.

Limitations

The study's reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias, particularly in a culturally sensitive context where respondents may conform to socially desirable answers. The sample size (N=140), while sufficient for statistical analysis, limits the generalizability of findings beyond Dumka District. Additionally, the cross-sectional design precludes inferences about causality or changes in LoC over time. Future research could employ longitudinal methods to explore how LoC evolves with life transitions, such as marriage or employment, in this population. Finally, the study did not account for specific tribal affiliations, which may influence LoC due to varying cultural practices among groups like the Santhal or Paharia.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights significant gender differences in LoC among youth in Dumka District, with males demonstrating a stronger internal orientation. The findings underscore the influence of cultural and socio-demographic factors, particularly in rural tribal settings. Interventions should focus on fostering autonomy among females while respecting cultural contexts. Future research could explore additional variables, such as employment status, to further elucidate LoC dynamics in India.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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