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Research Paper

Ethnic Variation in Locus of Control and Psychological Well-Being Among Youth of Dumka, Jharkhand

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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether ethnic identity moderates the relationship between locus of control (LoC) and psychological well-being (PWB) among young people in Jharkhand's Dumka district. Drawing on Rotter's Social Learning Theory and Ryff's multidimensional well-being framework, 500 ethnically balanced participants (aged 22–36) responded to LoC and PWB measures adapted to the local cultural context. Statistically, non-tribal youth reported significantly higher levels of both LoC and PWB compared to their tribal counterparts, with effect sizes ranging from moderate to large. Correlation analysis revealed that the LoC–PWB link was markedly stronger for non-tribal youth ($r = 0.82$) than for tribal youth ($r = 0.59$). Hierarchical regression analysis confirmed ethnicity as a significant moderator, with the interaction effect contributing 5.2% additional explanation of PWB variance above main effects ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < .001$). These findings underscore that the psychological benefits of internal control beliefs are heightened in environments with broader socio-economic opportunities, emphasizing the importance of culturally sensitive approaches. Such interventions should address personal agency and structural disparities in marginalized communities, fostering well-being by supporting both individual empowerment and systemic change.

Keywords: *Locus of Control, Psychological Well-being, Ethnicity, Tribal Youth, Moderation, Dumka*

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a crucial developmental period that involves significant challenges related to education, career, self-identity, and relationships. During this time, **psychological well-being (PWB)** is vital for long-term life satisfaction, resilience, and social competence (Ryff, 1989). Understanding what contributes to PWB in young adults is essential, especially in non-Western, rural settings where the socio-cultural and economic conditions differ greatly from those where most psychological research has been conducted.

This study focuses on two key concepts: **locus of control (LoC)** and psychological well-being. LoC, a construct from Julian B. Rotter's **Social Learning Theory** (1966), describes an individual's belief about whether life outcomes are determined by their own actions

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(**internal LoC**) or by external forces like luck or fate (**external LoC**). An internal LoC is associated with proactive coping and personal autonomy, while an external LoC can lead to passivity and learned helplessness (Rotter, 1990). PWB is a multi-dimensional concept defined by Carol Ryff's (1989) six-factor model, which includes self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth.

Although numerous studies in Western contexts show a strong positive correlation between internal LoC and PWB (Gale et al., 2008), this relationship may not be universal. The influence of LoC on PWB is shaped by socio-cultural values, economic opportunities, and historical contexts (Cheng et al., 2013). In rural India, where collectivist values, systemic inequalities, and ethnic diversity are present, the psychological benefits of internal control may vary significantly across communities.

Dumka district in Jharkhand, India, is an ideal location to study this dynamic because it contains both tribal and non-tribal communities with distinct cultural backgrounds and socio-economic realities (Xaxa, 2005). Tribal communities often face systemic disadvantages, such as limited access to education, economic exclusion, and inadequate political representation. These factors can affect both their overall well-being and how personal control beliefs translate into psychological outcomes (Sharma & Misra, 2010). Conversely, non-tribal communities typically have greater access to resources, education, and socio-political influence, which may enhance the benefits of an internal LoC.

Locus of Control: Conceptual Foundations

Rotter's (1966) LoC framework posits that individuals differ in their generalized expectations of control over life events. Individuals with an internal LoC believe that their actions and efforts shape their outcomes, leading to proactive coping and self-regulation (Nowicki, 2016). In contrast, those with an external LoC attribute outcomes to forces beyond their control, such as fate or powerful others, often resulting in diminished motivation and feelings of learned helplessness (Rotter, 1990). Research has connected internal LoC to resilience and effective coping (Ng et al., 2006), while external LoC is linked to higher anxiety and vulnerability to depression (Benassi et al., 1988).

Psychological Well-being: A Flourishing Perspective

Ryff's (1989) model of PWB adopts a "eudaimonic" perspective, focusing on optimal human functioning. Its six dimensions—Self-Acceptance, Positive Relations with Others, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth—provide a comprehensive view of well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Empirical studies show that individuals with a higher internal LoC tend to score higher on PWB dimensions, particularly Autonomy and Environmental Mastery, as they feel capable of influencing their surroundings (Gale et al., 2008). Conversely, an external LoC can undermine a sense of agency, negatively impacting dimensions like Purpose in Life and Self-Acceptance (Lefcourt, 1982).

Cultural Context and Locus of Control

Cultural values play a crucial role in how LoC is formed and functions. In individualistic cultures, an internal LoC is highly valued and strongly predicts well-being (Cheng et al., 2013). However, in collectivist cultures, a moderate external LoC—attributing outcomes to family or community—may not be maladaptive if it aligns with cultural values of shared responsibility (Chandra & Satyanarayana, 2010; Sinha et al., 2002).

For socio-economically disadvantaged groups, high externality is often a reflection of structural barriers, not cultural preference. Limited access to resources can reinforce the belief that life outcomes are beyond personal control (Sharma & Misra, 2010). This indicates that the relationship between LoC and PWB is context-dependent and varies across different socio-economic groups within the same culture.

Ethnicity, Socio-economic Status, and Well-being in India

India's social landscape is characterized by ethnic diversity and persistent disparities. Tribal communities (Adivasis) in states like Jharkhand have historically faced marginalization, which has resulted in lower health and well-being indicators compared to non-tribal groups (Xaxa, 2005). Research by Pandey and Tripathi (2008) suggests that marginalized ethnic groups in India often have a more external LoC due to their cumulative experiences of socio-economic exclusion. This, in turn, can reduce the benefits that internal control beliefs have on mental health.

Other studies support this view. Mishra et al. (2014) found that tribal adolescents in Chhattisgarh reported lower self-efficacy and PWB than their non-tribal peers. Similarly, Das and Deb (2015) reported that for rural Indian youth, socio-economic constraints and cultural norms influenced the LoC–PWB relationship, with disadvantaged groups benefiting less from an internal LoC. A more recent study by Suokhrie and Longkumer (2024) in Nagaland found that young employed individuals had higher psychological well-being and a more internal LoC than their unemployed peers, highlighting the importance of both employment and perceived control.

Problem Statement

Although the relationship between locus of control and psychological well-being has been extensively examined in Western and urban Indian settings, little empirical attention has been devoted to understanding how ethnic affiliation shapes this association in rural, culturally diverse regions of India. Prior studies have predominantly reported mean differences in control orientations and well-being outcomes across tribal and non-tribal groups, yet have not investigated whether ethnicity alters the functional linkage between internal control beliefs and eudaimonic well-being. Without clarifying whether the psychological benefits of an internal locus of control operate equivalently across ethnic contexts, mental health interventions risk relying on one-size-fits-all models that overlook crucial socio-cultural and structural determinants of well-being. To address this gap, the present study examines ethnicity as a moderator of the locus of control–psychological well-being relationship among youth in Dumka district, Jharkhand, thereby providing context-specific insights essential for developing culturally sensitive empowerment and mental health strategies.

Objectives/Hypotheses

- **Objective 1:** Compare locus of control and psychological well-being between tribal and non-tribal youth to see if significant differences exist. This provides a baseline for understanding distinct psychological profiles.
- **Objective 2:** Determine if **ethnicity moderates** the relationship between locus of control and psychological well-being. This analysis checks if the strength and nature of this relationship vary between the two ethnic groups.
- **Objective 3:** Interpret the findings within the socio-cultural, economic, and historical context of the region to inform culturally sensitive interventions.

Hypothesis (H1): The relationship between locus of control and psychological well-being is significantly influenced by a person's ethnic group.

- **Sub-hypothesis 1 (SH1):** There are significant differences in locus of control and psychological well-being scores between tribal and non-tribal youth. It's predicted that non-tribal youth will have higher scores on both measures due to their greater socio-economic advantages.
- **Sub-hypothesis 2 (SH2):** Ethnicity significantly moderates the relationship between locus of control and psychological well-being. It's expected that the connection will be stronger for non-tribal youth because their structural advantages (like better education and employment opportunities) allow them to more consistently translate personal agency into tangible results, reinforcing the link between control beliefs and well-being.

METHODS

Research Design

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design to examine links between locus of control, psychological well-being, and ethnicity in Dumka district's youth. Data were collected at a single time point, allowing efficient analysis of group differences, within-group associations, and moderation effects. Three analytical approaches were employed: independent samples t-tests compared ethnic groups; Pearson correlations assessed LoC–PWB relationships; and hierarchical regression tested moderation. Guided by Rotter's Social Learning Theory and Ryff's well-being model, the study assumed psychological constructs could be measured objectively, enabling rigorous statistical examination of relationships and interaction effects.

Participants

The target population consisted of youth aged 22 to 36 years residing in Dumka district, Jharkhand, India, representing the emerging adulthood developmental period. The sample comprised 500 participants equally divided between tribal (n = 250) and non-tribal (n = 250) youth, ensuring balanced ethnic representation. A priori power analysis indicated this sample size provided adequate power (≥ 0.80) to detect medium effect sizes ($d \approx 0.5$) at $\alpha = 0.05$ in both t-tests and regression models (Cohen, 1992).

Variables and Measures

Locus of Control (LoC) served as the independent variable, operationally defined as generalized expectancies about personal control over life outcomes measured on an internal-external continuum. Psychological Well-being (PWB) functioned as the dependent variable, defined according to Ryff's six-dimensional model encompassing Self-Acceptance, Positive Relations, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth (Ryff, 1989). Ethnicity served as the moderator variable, coded categorically (0 = tribal, 1 = non-tribal) based on participants' self-identified ethnic affiliation.

Instruments

To measure locus of control (LoC), a culturally adapted 24-item scale was created based on Rotter's theoretical framework (M.K. Mallick, 2025). The scale used a 5-point Likert response format (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). A total of 12 items measured internal orientation, and 12 measured external orientation, with the latter being reverse-scored. Total scores ranged from 24 to 120, where higher scores indicated a more internal LoC. The scale's internal reliability was high, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.

For psychological well-being (PWB), a self-constructed (M.K. Mallick, 2025) 24-item scale was used, based on Ryff's six-dimensional model. This scale also used a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater well-being. This scale also demonstrated high internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89. Both instruments were administered in Hindi after undergoing a careful translation-back-translation process to ensure their conceptual and linguistic equivalence.

Data Collection

Data collection employed dual modalities: online via Google Forms distributed through institutional networks, and offline through paper-and-pencil questionnaires administered in community settings. Ethical protocols included informed consent procedures, anonymity assurance, confidentiality protection, and institutional ethics committee approval (American Psychological Association, 2017). Cultural sensitivity measures were implemented during administration, with research assistants trained in respectful engagement protocols for diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics in four systematic steps. Preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and reliability assessment (Cronbach's alpha) for both LoC and PWB scales. Independent samples t-tests compared mean scores between tribal and non-tribal groups, with Cohen's d reported for effect size. Within-group Pearson correlations examined the strength of LoC–PWB associations. Moderation was tested via hierarchical regression: main effects (LoC, ethnicity) were entered first, followed by their interaction term. The significance of R^2 change, F-change, and standardized beta coefficients were assessed, with simple slopes analysis interpreting significant interactions. Effect sizes were classified using Cohen's benchmarks; statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$, and 95% confidence intervals were reported for key estimates.

RESULTS

The statistical analyses were conducted to examine whether ethnicity moderates the relationship between locus of control (LoC) and psychological well-being (PWB) among youth in Dumka district, and to test for group differences between tribal and non-tribal youth.

Descriptive Statistics by Ethnic Group

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for LoC and PWB by ethnic group

Ethnic Group	N	LoC Mean	LoC SD	PWB Mean	PWB SD
Non-tribal	250	75.4	18.2	73.7	17.8
Tribal	250	62.3	21.6	64.9	19.4

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for LoC and PWB scores among tribal and non-tribal youth. The descriptive statistics reveal that non-tribal youth scored higher on both LoC and PWB compared to their tribal counterparts.

Testing SH1: Group Differences in LoC and PWB

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to determine whether the differences between groups were statistically significant.

Table 2. Independent samples t-test results for LoC and PWB

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Mean Difference	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Cohen's *d*
LoC	7.45	498	< .001	13.1	9.7	16.5	0.67
PWB	5.28	498	< .001	8.8	5.5	12.1	0.48

Results indicate that non-tribal youth have significantly higher LoC and PWB than tribal youth. Effect sizes were medium-to-large for LoC (d = 0.67) and medium for PWB (d = 0.48), suggesting practical as well as statistical significance.

Correlation Analysis by Ethnic Group

Pearson's correlation coefficients (*r*) were computed separately for each ethnic group to examine the strength of the LoC–PWB association.

Table 3. Correlations between LoC and PWB by ethnic group

Ethnic Group	Pearson *r*	r^2	p-value
Non-tribal	0.82	0.672	< .001
Tribal	0.59	0.348	< .001

The correlation between LoC and PWB is stronger among non-tribal youth (*r* = 0.82) than among tribal youth (*r* = 0.59). This means that LoC explains 67.2% of the variance in PWB for non-tribal youth, compared to 34.8% for tribal youth.

Testing SH2: Moderation by Ethnicity

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test whether ethnicity moderates the LoC–PWB relationship.

- **Step 1** included LoC (centered) and Ethnicity (coded 0 = tribal, 1 = non-tribal) as predictors.
  Step 2 added the interaction term (LoC × Ethnicity).

Table 4. Hierarchical regression results for moderation analysis

Step	Predictors	R^2 Change	F-change	df1	df2	p-value	β (Interaction)	p-value (β)
1	LoC, Ethnicity	0.682	534.8	2	497	< .001	—	—
2	LoC × Ethnicity	0.052	45.7	1	496	< .001	0.23	< .001

Adding the interaction term significantly increased the explained variance in PWB (ΔR^2 = 0.052, p < .001). The positive and significant β for the interaction term (β = 0.23, p < .001) confirms that ethnicity moderates the LoC–PWB relationship, with the association being stronger for non-tribal youth.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

- **SH1:** Supported — tribal and non-tribal youth differ significantly in LoC and PWB scores, with non-tribal youth scoring higher on both measures.
- **SH2:** Supported — Ethnicity moderates the LoC–PWB relationship, with the strength of association greater for non-tribal youth.

DISCUSSION

This study examined whether ethnicity moderates the relationship between locus of control (LoC) and psychological well-being (PWB) among youth in Dumka district, Jharkhand. Grounded in Rotter's Social Learning Theory and Ryff's multidimensional model of well-being, the investigation moved beyond mean comparisons to test interactive effects, addressing a gap in cross-cultural psychology research.

Major Findings and Theoretical Integration

Consistent with Rotter's framework, internal LoC correlated positively with PWB across both ethnic groups, affirming that beliefs in personal agency contribute to flourishing mental health. However, the strength of this association varied significantly: LoC explained 67.2% of PWB variance for non-tribal youth compared to 34.8% for tribal youth. These discrepancies confirm that psychological mechanisms operate differently across cultural contexts, aligning with cross-cultural theories that emphasize context-dependent construct functionality.

Non-tribal youth reported higher LoC and PWB scores than tribal youth, replicating prior findings that socio-economic advantage correlates with stronger internality and greater well-being. Structural inequalities—such as limited educational access and political marginalization faced by tribal communities—likely reinforce external attributions and restrict opportunities for personal agency to yield positive outcomes (Xaxa, 2005). In contrast, non-tribal youth benefit from environmental affordances that validate internal control beliefs, thereby strengthening dimensions of well-being like environmental mastery and purpose in life.

Crucially, hierarchical regression revealed that ethnicity significantly moderates the LoC–PWB relationship, with the LoC × Ethnicity interaction accounting for an additional 5.2% of PWB variance. This finding represents a unique achievement, demonstrating the empirical viability of moderation analysis in rural, ethnically diverse samples and providing rigorous evidence that cultural context conditions the utility of internal control beliefs. Unlike prior Indian studies focusing on descriptive group disparities, this research elucidates how structural and cultural factors shape the translation of personal agency into well-being outcomes.

Unique Contributions

This study's methodological strengths—culturally adapted tools, balanced sampling, and robust statistical analysis—enhance measurement validity for rural Indian populations. Careful language and conceptual adaptation, verified by expert review and pilot testing, ensured the relevance of both LoC and PWB scales, which showed high internal reliability. Theoretically, the research integrates Rotter's and Ryff's models with cross-cultural evidence, demonstrating that internal control beliefs promote well-being primarily when supported by favourable socio-economic and cultural contexts. Ethnicity emerged as a significant moderator, highlighting the importance of context-sensitive approaches to mental health.

Practical Implications

Interventions must be tailored to ethnic and structural realities. For non-tribal youth, programs boosting internal LoC—through goal-setting and self-efficacy training—effectively enhance well-being. For tribal youth, structural barriers to education, economic

opportunity, and political engagement must be addressed alongside personal agency development, enabling internal control beliefs to yield tangible benefits. Community-based approaches leveraging indigenous traditions and support networks offer vital alternative pathways where individual autonomy is constrained. Culturally sensitive educational and mental health services, alongside policy efforts to reduce resource disparities, are essential for fostering well-being across all communities.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study's cross-sectional design precludes causal conclusions; future longitudinal research is needed to examine how LoC-PWB relationships and moderation effects evolve over time. Reliance on self-reports risks response bias, especially in collectivist settings, highlighting the need for multi-method approaches including behavioural tasks and informant data. Findings from a single district may lack generalizability—replications across diverse rural regions are warranted. Exploring mediators (e.g., coping, social support) and additional moderators (e.g., gender, caste, geography) could deepen understanding. Qualitative research on tribal lived experiences would yield context-sensitive insights for conceptual and measurement refinement.

CONCLUSION

This study provides robust evidence that ethnicity significantly moderates the relationship between locus of control and psychological well-being among rural youth in Jharkhand. By integrating cross-cultural theory, rigorous methodology, and practical intervention insights, it advances understanding of how personal agency beliefs and socio-cultural environments interact to shape mental health outcomes. These findings underscore the necessity of contextually tailored interventions and policies that address both individual empowerment and structural inequities, moving beyond one-size-fits-all models toward approaches that honour the diverse lived experiences of ethnically varied communities.

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Conflict of Interest

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