

Research Paper

Comparative Study of Locus of Control and Life Satisfaction among Individuals Living with Pets and Individuals not Living with Pets

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ABSTRACT

The present study looked at whether living with pets makes a difference in locus of control and overall life satisfaction among young adults. Daily routines and responsibilities related to pets may influence how individuals feel about their control over life events and their overall satisfaction. The study included a total of 244 individuals aged 18-35 years. The Rotter Internal and External Locus of Control Scale, as well as the Satisfaction with Life Scale, were employed to collect responses. The results were analysed using t-tests, and correlation. The results indicated that people who lived with pets had a higher internal locus of control, while those without pets showed somewhat higher satisfaction in life.

Keywords: *Locus of Control, Life Satisfaction, Living with Pets, Human-Animal Interaction*

Psychological health can be affected by many variables, including mental processes, affect or mood and the nature of an individual's everyday experiences. These experiences have a large impact on the way in which a person perceives what is happening in their environment, which informs their judgments as to their quality of life. Rotter (1966) introduced the term locus of control to describe a person's perception of themselves in relation to the control of the consequences of their lives. An internal locus of control is when people see situations and circumstances as being under their own control and believe they can control their outcomes, whereas an external locus of control refers to individuals viewing events as well as situations as caused by luck, coincidence, and other people. Studies have shown that individuals who report a stronger sense of internal control will believe that many things depend on their own actions, and this perception can influence how individuals approach problems, how persistent they are and what choices they make every day. A case in point is the research by Torres et al. (2005), which demonstrated that people with high internal control beliefs were more persistent in pursuing goals under adverse circumstances.

Life satisfaction represents another important psychological construct associated with overall well-being. Diener considered life satisfaction as a person's overall cognitive assessment of their life according to personal goals and purposes, with consideration of

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Received: April 18, 2026; Revision Received: May 17, 2026; Accepted: May 21, 2026

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accomplishments and perceived life situation. It reflects how individuals assess the quality of their life as a whole rather than focusing on specific domains. Life satisfaction is affected by many factors, including one's belief systems, social relationships, daily experiences and environmental settings. People who believe that they have a high level of control over their lives tend to view themselves as competent and stable and are more likely to be satisfied and to adjust well. Kesavayuth et al. (2022) found higher levels of well-being and satisfaction among individuals who reported stronger internal control beliefs, whereas Sharma (2024) observed that internal control contributed to life satisfaction by enhancing psychological empowerment and perceived competence.

Living with pets has been recognised as an important daily experience that may influence psychological functioning and emotional well-being. Living with pets involves routine caregiving responsibilities such as feeding, grooming, monitoring health, and maintaining daily schedules. These responsibilities may promote discipline, responsibility, and emotional bonding, which can contribute to a feeling of purpose and routine in everyday life. Kim et al. (2021) observed that individuals living with pets often reported emotional support and companionship that contributed to improved subjective well-being and daily emotional stability. However, Wang et al. (2025) suggested that the psychological effects of living with pets may vary depending on individual personality traits, lifestyle demands, and environmental conditions, indicating that living with pets does not always lead to improved life satisfaction for all individuals.

Existing literature has examined the dimensions of control and life satisfaction across different groups, underscoring the contribution of perceived control in psychological consequences. Besides, little research has examined the association of locus of control with life satisfaction. Kesavayuth et al. (2022) suggested that people who experienced a stronger sense of personal control also had higher life satisfaction and higher resilience scores on the stressful life event scale. Mishra and Kewalramani (2025) have shown that people who are living with pets show significant improvements in subjective well-being scores under certain circumstances, while also showing significant differences in all the variables when studied across individual differences. However, limited research has examined these two theoretical constructs among individuals living with pets compared to those not living with pets, particularly in exploring how these variables interact among young adults. In addition, in the Indian context, not many studies have investigated these dimensions with respect to social pressure, lifestyle and cultural influences, thus making it more imperative to study these constructs among young adults living with and without pets in India. At the end, the present research study aimed to compare life satisfaction and locus of control in young adults living with pets and not living with pets, as well as examine the association between the two variables.

Rationale of the Study

Psychological research has highlighted the role of cognitive beliefs and subjective evaluations in influencing quality of life, with locus of control and life satisfaction being strongly associated with psychological adjustment and mental health (Kesavayuth et al., 2022; Nowak et al., 2024). Although studies on human–animal interaction have increased, findings on the psychological effects of living with pets remain mixed, with some studies distinguishing between general pet ownership and living with pets as a source of emotional support and routine (Zacharidou & Tragantzopoulou, 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Previous studies also indicate that life satisfaction is positively associated to internal locus of control

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(Sharma, 2016) and that pet ownership may influence life satisfaction and overall well-being (Gmeiner and Gschwandtner, 2017; Mishra and Kewalramani, 2018). Therefore, comparing individuals living with pets and those not living with pets may help explain differences in locus of control and life satisfaction.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives have been framed for the study:

1. To compare the levels of locus of control and life satisfaction among individuals living with pets and individuals not living with pets.
2. To examine the relationship between locus of control and life satisfaction in individuals living with pets.
3. To examine the relationship between locus of control and life satisfaction in individuals not living with pets.

Hypotheses

Drawing from the theoretical framework, review of the previous research studies and objectives of this research, the following hypotheses were constructed for statistical testing

- **H₁:** Individuals living with pets will report higher internal locus of control and life satisfaction as compared to individuals not living with pets.
- **H₂:** Locus of Control will be positively associated with life satisfaction among individuals living with pets.
- **H₃:** Locus of Control will be positively associated with life satisfaction among individuals not living with pets.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current research study followed a quantitative cross-sectional design to analyse the differences in locus of control as well as life satisfaction between those who live with pets and those who do not live with pets. The study further explored the association between locus of control and life satisfaction.

Sample

Samples were collected through convenience sampling. The study comprised adult individuals residing in India. Participants were categorised into two groups based on their cohabitation with pets: individuals living with pets and individuals not living with pets. The sample consisted of N = 224 participants, of which n = 132 (59.0%) were female and n = 112 (41.0%) male.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Participants aged 18 to 35 years were included in the study.
2. Participants were considered 'pet-owners' if they had resided with at least one pet for at least one year.
3. Participants categorised as not living with pets were required to have no pet cohabitation for at least one year before participation.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Individuals who had been living with a pet for less than one year.
2. Individuals who had only occasional, temporary, or indirect contact with pets.

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3. Individuals who had experienced the death of or permanent separation from a pet within the previous 12 months.
4. Individuals with a clinically diagnosed history of any existing mental health condition.

Instruments

The study used two instruments,

1. **Rotter Internal External Locus of Control Scale:** Julian B. Rotter (1966) developed this instrument, which aims to determine whether a person thinks that a large portion of their life's results is within their control or is determined by an outside force, like luck. The participant must select the statement that most closely resembles them from each of the 29 matched statements on the scale. Six pairs are filler items, while 23 pairs are graded. The range of total scores is 0 to 23. An external view of locus of control is supported by a higher score, while an internal view is supported by a lower one. The scale has a satisfactory construct and criterion-related validity. The reliability of 0.70 was obtained through the test-retest method.
2. **Satisfaction with Life Scale:** It assesses a person's overall judgment regarding the quality and satisfaction of their life. It includes five items, and responses are rated using a seven-point Likert scale. The scores range from 5 to a maximum of 35. Higher scores suggest greater life satisfaction. The scale has demonstrated good construct validity. The scale's test-retest reliability of 0.82 demonstrates sufficient internal consistency.

Scoring and Analysis

Scoring was done as specified in the respective test manuals. Data were analysed using the programme JAMOV, and the following analyses were used to investigate differences and relationships, using independent samples t-tests and Pearson correlation

Ethical Considerations.

Participation in the present study was entirely voluntary. Before collecting data, participants were provided with information about the study and a consent form was provided to record their agreement. The participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential and would be used strictly for research purposes. The participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test for Study Variables.

	Group	Skewness		Kurtosis		Shapiro-Wilk	
		Skewness	SE	Kurtosis	SE	W	p
Locus of Control	Living with Pets	-0.0779	0.235	-0.3072	0.465	0.987	.383
	Not Living with Pets	0.0726	0.206	0.0693	0.410	0.984	.098
Life Satisfaction	Living with Pets	0.2291	0.235	-0.3978	0.465	0.985	.265
	Not Living with Pets	-0.1937	0.206	-0.5374	0.410	0.985	.132

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Before conducting inferential statistical analyses, the data were tested for normality. Table 1 shows skewness and kurtosis values obtained for locus of control and life satisfaction, which were examined using JAMOVI, and when standardised using their respective standard errors, all values fell within the acceptable range of ± 2 , indicating no severe violations of normality. These findings suggest that the distributions of the study variables were normal based on skewness and kurtosis criteria. Therefore, parametric statistical techniques were considered appropriate for further analysis.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Locus of Control and Life Satisfaction by Living Status with Pets.

Variable	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Locus of Control	Living with Pets	11.0	3.15	0.306
	Not Living with Pets	14.3	3.09	0.263
Life Satisfaction	Living with Pets	18.6	5.16	0.501
	Not Living with Pets	24.2	4.76	0.405

Descriptive statistics for locus of control and life satisfaction across living status groups are presented in Table 2. Individuals living with pets ($n = 106$) obtained a mean locus of control score of 11.00 ($SD = 3.15$), whereas individuals not living with pets ($n = 138$) obtained a mean score of 14.30 ($SD = 3.09$). Similarly, individuals living with pets reported lower life satisfaction ($M = 18.60$, $SD = 5.16$) than those not living with pets ($M = 24.20$, $SD = 4.76$).

Table 3 Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Locus of Control and Life Satisfaction Between Individuals Living with Pets and Individuals Not Living with Pets

Variable		Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference
Locus of Control Scale	Student's t	-8.10	242	<.001	-3.26	0.402
	Student's t	-8.79	242	<.001	-5.60	0.638

Note. $H_a \mu_{Yes} \neq \mu_{No}$

Table 3 summarises the results of an independent samples t-test comparing locus of control scores among individuals living with pets and those not living with pets. A statistically meaningful difference was observed between the two groups, $t(242) = -8.10$, $p < .001$, with a mean difference of -3.26 ($SE = 0.402$). These findings indicated that individuals living with pets demonstrated a stronger sense of internal control in contrast to those not living with pets, thereby supporting the proposed hypothesis. This difference may be attributed to the regular responsibility and routine involvement associated with pet care, which may enhance perceptions of personal control and self-agency. The findings are consistent with Ahlin and Antunes (2015), who suggested that stable and predictable environments encourage an internal locus of control, and with Botha and Dahmann (2024), who reported that people with internal control beliefs have an increased likelihood to engage in responsible and self-regulated behaviours. Thus, living with pets may represent a real-life context that reinforces beliefs related to personal control over life events.

A statistically significant difference was also observed for life satisfaction across the two groups, $t(242) = -8.79$, $p < .001$, with a mean difference of -5.60 ($SE = 0.638$), indicating that respondents not living with pets showed significantly higher life satisfaction than

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individuals living with pets. This suggests that the presence of pets in the household does not necessarily improve overall life satisfaction. Living with pets involves both emotional and practical responsibilities, including time and financial commitments, which may influence daily experiences and perceptions of well-being, particularly among young adults managing academic, occupational, or transitional life demands. These findings support previous literature indicating that the psychological outcomes of human–animal interaction may vary across individuals and circumstances, as reported by Zachariadou and Tragantzopoulou (2025) and Li and Wong (2025), although they contrast with studies such as Kim et al. (2021) and Gmeiner and Gschwandtner (2025) that reported higher life satisfaction among pet owners. Overall, the findings suggest that the psychological effects of living with pets may be conditional and influenced by individual and contextual factors.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Between Locus of Control and Life Satisfaction among Individuals Living with Pets

	Locus of Control	Life Satisfaction
Locus of Control	—	
Life Satisfaction	0.250**	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4 presents the results of the Pearson product–moment correlation analysis conducted to assess the association between locus of control and life satisfaction in individuals living with pets. A positive and statistically significant relationship was observed between locus of control and life satisfaction ($r = .250$, $p < .01$), suggesting that participants who reported greater internal control also tended to experience higher satisfaction with life. These results suggest that a sense of individual control of life events holds a stronger correlation with life satisfaction in people living with pets, despite the caregiving duties. The findings were in line with the findings of Sharma (2024) and Kesavayuth et al. (2022), who found internal locus of control to be a determinant of life satisfaction, as well as Nowak et al. (2024), who found that internal control beliefs are promising for promoting well-being and adaptive functioning.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Between Locus of Control and Life Satisfaction among Individuals not Living with Pets

	Locus of Control	Life Satisfaction
Locus of Control	—	
Life Satisfaction	0.316***	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The findings summarised in Table 5 present the Pearson product–moment correlation used to examine the association between locus of control and life satisfaction among individuals not living with pets. The findings indicated a significant positive correlation between locus of control and life satisfaction ($r = .316$, $p < .001$), indicating that individuals not living with pets who reported greater internal control also tended to experience higher satisfaction with life. These findings suggest that perceptions of personal control contribute to well-being even in the absence of pet-related emotional interactions or caregiving routines. Individuals with stronger control beliefs may be more likely to engage in goal-oriented behaviour, self-regulation, and adaptive coping strategies, which may enhance psychological well-being. This finding is consistent with previous research by Sundaresan and Sharma (2023) and Han et al. (2024), who suggested that individuals demonstrating greater internal control

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tendencies generally experience higher levels of life satisfaction and subjective well-being across various populations.

Limitations and Future Implications

Certain limitations of the current study need to be considered while interpreting the findings. This study did not consider additional factors such as lifestyle patterns, family environment, and personal circumstances that may influence locus of control, as well as levels of life satisfaction. The sample consisted only of urban young adults, limiting the applicability of the findings to rural or semi-urban groups and other age groups. Participants were grouped based solely on pet ownership status, without considering variations in pet type, emotional attachment, or level of caregiving, which may influence psychological outcomes. Additionally, reliance on self-report measures could have led to subjective influences related to participants' mood or tendencies toward socially desirable responses. Despite these limitations, the findings add to the existing research by emphasising the contribution of perceived control as a significant factor associated with life satisfaction. The findings suggest that psychological well-being is influenced by both individual belief systems and living experiences, including interactions with pets. The results also provide culturally relevant insights into the experiences of urban Indian young adults and indicate the potential value of interventions aimed at strengthening perceived control, adaptive coping, and decision-making skills to promote well-being.

CONCLUSION

The current study investigated the differences in locus of control and life satisfaction among individuals living with pets and individuals not living with pets, and explored the relationship between these variables. The results indicated clear statistical differences across the two groups in levels of locus of control as well as satisfaction with life, where individuals living with pets demonstrated stronger internal control tendencies but lower levels of life satisfaction compared to individuals not living with pets. These findings suggest that life satisfaction is shaped by both psychological factors and environmental conditions, and that living with pets may influence individuals differently depending on their responsibilities, lifestyle demands, and personal experiences. The study contributes to a better insight into how everyday living contexts and perceived control interact to influence life satisfaction in young adults.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Hakim, T. & Singh, L. (2026). Comparative Study of Locus of Control and Life Satisfaction among Individuals Living with Pets and Individuals not Living with Pets. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(2), 1274-1281. DIP:18.01.119.20261402, DOI:10.25215/1402.119