

Research Paper

Locus of Control and Superstition Beliefs among Young and Midlife Adults

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ABSTRACT

Superstitions and locus of control often show significant association with mental health and wellbeing. This study investigates the relationship between Locus of Control and Superstitious beliefs among Young Adults and Midlife Adults, with a focus on comparing them among young and midlife adults. Sample was collected through a convenience sampling method. Using the Rotter's Locus of Control Scale (LoC) and the Indian Superstitious Scale (ISS), data were collected from 159 participants through face to face offline surveys. Mann Whitney and Spearman's correlation were used for statistical analysis. The result revealed a significant difference in locus of control and superstitious beliefs between young adults and midlife adults, indicating that the midlife adult individuals had external locus of control and higher superstitious beliefs than young adults. The study concluded that there were significant age-related differences in Locus of Control and superstitious beliefs among young adults and Midlife adults. Midlife adults scored more in Locus of Control and Superstitions, showing external Locus of Control and higher superstitious beliefs. A weak positive correlation was found between Locus of Control and Superstitious Beliefs among Young adults and Midlife adults. The study's implications suggest that interventions addressing Locus of Control and Superstitious beliefs may help to improve logical thinking and rational thinking. Limitations of the study include quantitative research design, sample size and age limits.

Keywords: *Locus of Control, Superstitious Beliefs, Young Adult, Midlife Adult*

Superstitious beliefs are highly prevalent across different cultures, religions, and society. Studies conducted in India found that people hold superstitious beliefs related to daily life events, pregnancy and death regardless of their educational background (Sethi & Saini, 2019). It serves as a mechanism of dealing with emotions to decrease distress, increase feelings of control, and increase confidence during stressful or high-pressure situations, explaining how even well-educated people will engage in this way of thinking during an instance of being anxious (Risen, 2016). Research has found a significant positive correlation between locus of control and superstition belief (Sagone & De Caroli, 2014). Even though internal locus of control is often associated with better

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Received: April 17, 2026; Revision Received: September 22, 2026; Accepted: September 28, 2026

mental health and wellbeing (Jain & Singh, 2015). Superstitions still exist in modern society despite the rise in education and advancements in science, (Sontakke & Chowdhury, 2025) and therefore, it is necessary to investigate them to promote better mental health and wellbeing.

Superstitious beliefs

Superstitions are defined as the belief that some events occur in ways that cannot be explained through logic or science, and are often linked to the expectation of good or bad fortune (Hoffman et al., 2022). Superstition refers to widespread beliefs and ritualized behaviors in which causal powers are attributed to neutral actions, objects, and coincidences. They exist mainly because they enable people to interpret uncertainty, reduce anxiety, and give a feeling of control over situations that cannot be predicted (Risen, 2016). The cultural or anthropological view looks to explain the mechanism of superstition not being simply the product of cognitive biases, speaking to the way in which it is the result of shared behaviors ratified in society, further expressed through the way in which societal culture imbues the actions or items with significant meaning, thus allowing it to transcend generations to further solidify the cultural identity of the society at large (Chukkali & Murthy, 2020). Research on child development makes it absolutely clear that children develop their own causal theories intuitively and magically when they are young and that these theories get transformed into a belief based on their environment when they enter adulthood (Woolley et al., 2020).

Research implemented amongst higher secondary school teachers in Kerala showed that superstitious beliefs tend to exist irrespective of gender, religious, and subject categories, and that superstitious beliefs, which are irrational, can have a detrimental effect on concentration and personal development (Tamilselvi & Sindhu, 2016). Beginning to explain this specific regional research, studies undertaken at a wider Indian level suggest that superstitious beliefs continue to be common even in the 21st century, as shown in a research carried out amongst 285 adults in a descriptive manner, at Panipat, where superstitious beliefs about everyday matters, death, and pregnancy were noted, irrespective of educational qualifications (Sethi & Saini, 2019). Going beyond research at a country level, superstitious beliefs have been noted to be a universal aspect of human phenomena, found universally across various cultures and geographies around the world, though differing according to their cultural, environmental, and traditional influences (Mandal, 2018).

Locus of control

Within this broader understanding of superstition as a universal yet culturally shaped phenomenon, Locus of control can be understood as an individual's beliefs about their own personal control and responsibility for life events and outcomes or their susceptibility to external forces and influences (Sagone, 2014). Rotter (1966) has generally classified locus of control into two broad types: internal and external locus of control. Internal locus of control individuals believe that outcomes largely stem from their own efforts and abilities, while those with an external locus of control believe that outcomes and events are shaped by chance, luck, fate, and powerful others (Sagone, 2014). Individuals with an external locus of control strongly believe in superstitions since they see the outcome and achievements as results of luck and chance and not as outcomes and results of personal efforts and abilities. However, individuals with an internal locus of control believe in high self-efficacy and optimism and do not believe in superstitions and luck (Sagone, 2014). Literature and research studies also show that there exists some difference or variation in locus of control based on sex and personality traits (Sagone, 2014).

Building further on this association, studies on the psychological predictor of superstition show a correlation between the individuals' locus of control, the degree to which they believe outcomes are subject to their own control versus control by external circumstances and the adoption of superstition ideas (Sagone & De Caroli, 2014). People who score high on the external locus of control attribute their outcomes to chance or luck and external entities rather than their own abilities (Sagone & De Caroli, 2014). These individuals score high on the superstition scale. Internal locus of control individuals views outcomes as a consequence of their behavior and actions, and they score low on the superstition measure (Sagone & De Caroli, 2014). Locus of control studies in the adolescent age group found a positive correlation between external control and superstition ideas, and studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic found a positive relationship between superstition and risk perception and a negative relationship between internal control and superstition and risk perception (Hoffmann et al., 2022). This indicates that locus of control is a predictor or a psychological predictor where external locus of control promotes superstition ideas and internal locus of control reduces superstition and risk perceptions.

Even though there is much research exploring the relationship between superstition belief and locus of control there is only little exploring the difference in superstition belief and locus of control with regard to different developmental periods especially among young and middle life adults, Hence the present study address this gaps by exploring the relationship between locus of control and superstition and to compare them among young adults and midlife adults, as both variables play a significant role in shaping the thinking patterns, decision-making, and coping mechanisms of individuals.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the study

1. To find out whether there exists any significant relationship between Locus of control and superstition beliefs among young adults and midlife adults
2. To find out whether there exists any Significant difference on Locus of control among young adults and midlife adults
3. To find out whether there exists any significant difference on superstition beliefs among young adults and midlife adults

Hypotheses:

- **H1:** Locus of control would not significantly differ on young adults and Midlife adults
- **H2:** Superstitional beliefs would not significantly differ on young adults and Midlife Adults
- **H3:** Locus of control would not have any significant relationship with superstition among young adults and midlife adults

Description of variables

1. **Locus of Control:** Locus of Control, in the current study, is defined as an individual's belief system concerning the extent to which they believe that they control their life events and outcomes, or the extent to which they believe that outcomes are controlled by external forces such as luck, fate, chance, and powerful others. According to Julian B. Rotter (1966), locus of control can be broadly categorized into two types: internal and external. People with an internal locus of control believe that their successes and failures are due to their own efforts and abilities, whereas people with an external locus of control believe that their successes

and failures are due to external events beyond their control. In the current study, locus of control is related to the extent to which young and old adults believe that they control their life events and how these beliefs are related to their superstitious beliefs (Sagone, 2014).

2. **Superstitious Beliefs:** Superstitious Beliefs, in the present study, refers to the beliefs and rituals that individuals engage in, whereby they attribute causality to actions, objects, and coincidences, especially when faced with uncertain situations or circumstances that are beyond their control. This is because these beliefs provide individuals with an explanation for uncertain situations, reduce their level of anxiety, and provide them with a sense of control over situations. Superstitious beliefs may vary from personal beliefs, such as carrying an object that one believes brings good fortune, to beliefs that are socially accepted within a community or culture (Risen, 2016).
3. **Young Adults:** Young adults, in the present study, refers to “students studying in colleges typically within the age range of 18 to 25 years.”
4. **Midlife Adults:** Midlife Adults, in the present study, refers to “individuals between the ages of 35 and 60 years, representing the developmental stage of middle adulthood, typically characterized by established career roles, family responsibilities, increased social and financial commitments, and relatively stable psychological and emotional functioning.”

Sampling:

- **Sampling Frame:** The data were collected from Young Adults, pursuing undergraduate studies at the time of data collection and Midlife Adults from Kerala with educational qualifications of SSLC, pre-degree, diploma, ITI and undergraduate levels of education are included in the study.
- **Sample Unit:** Young Adults (18-25 years), and Midlife Adults (35-60 years) who meet the inclusion criteria are included as sampling units.
- **Size of Sample:** 159 is the total sample size, 79 young adults and 80 Midlife Adults including 99 females and 60 males.
- **Sample Selection Procedure:** The participants for the current study were chosen through a convenience sampling technique. The participants included young adults who were studying in colleges, including classmates who were accessible and willing to participate in the study. The researcher personally approached the participants in the college setting and made them aware of the purpose of the study before the data collection process. The questionnaires were personally administered, and the responses were collected from the participants directly. Likewise, the participants for the Midlife adults were chosen through convenience sampling from accessible community sources like parents or guardians of students, neighbors, relatives, and acquaintances. The participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to them before the administration of the questionnaires.

Inclusion criteria:

- For Young Adults

Participants who are currently pursuing undergraduate or postgraduate education in a recognized higher education institution, Individuals who fall within the age range of 18–25 years, Individuals who are able to read and understand the language of the questionnaire.

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- For Midlife adults

Individuals who fall within the age group of 35–60 years, Individuals who are able to read and understand the language of the questionnaire.

Exclusion criteria:

- For Young Adults

Students who are below 18 years and above 25 years of age were excluded from the study, Students with any form of disability such as visual impairment, intellectual disability, severe physical ailments, or any condition that may interfere with their ability to comprehend and respond to the questionnaire were excluded.

- For Midlife adults

Individuals who are below 35 years and above 60 years of age were excluded from the study, Individuals with severe cognitive impairment, visual impairment, serious physical illness, or any condition that may impede their ability to complete the questionnaire were excluded.

Description of the tools used for data collection:

1. **Rotter's Locus of Control Scale (Julian B. Rotter, 1966):** Rotter's Locus of Control Scale (I-E Scale) developed in 1966 is used to measure an individual's generalized expectancies about control over reinforcement. The scale was developed from the Social Learning Theory of Rotter. It was intended to measure whether an individual views the outcomes of life as being under their own control (internal locus of control) or under the control of external factors like luck, fate, or powerful others (external locus of control). The scale consists of 29 forced-choice items, with 6 of these items being filler items to reduce response bias. Each item on the scale has two statements, one marked "a" and the other marked "b." The participant is asked to choose the statement they agree with more. Of the 23 items that are scored, one statement in each pair is external in orientation and is scored as 1, while the internal statement is scored as 0. The total scores can range from 0 to 23. The higher the scores, the more an individual has an external locus of control. Conversely, the lower the scores, the more an individual has an internal locus of control. The instrument can be used on both adolescents and adults. It can be used individually or in a group setting. It is commonly used in research studies to investigate personality, motivation, achievement, health behaviors, and coping styles.
 - **Reliability:** The test-retest reliability coefficient was determined to be 0.78, and the index of reliability was 0.88. The split-half reliability coefficient was 0.73, and the index of reliability was 0.85.
 - **Validity:** Rotter (1966) indicated that the Locus of Control Scale has good discriminant validity, as evidenced by low correlations with such variables as intelligence, social desirability, and political preference.
2. **Indian Superstition Scale (An et al., 2019):** Indian Superstition Scale (ISS) is an 18-item scale developed by Sieun An, Navya Kapoor, Aanchal Setia, Smriti Agiwal, and Ishika Ray (2019) with the aim of measuring superstitious beliefs that are common in the Indian cultural setting. This scale was developed to meet the need for a culturally appropriate scale, as the existing scales for measuring superstition were mainly based on Western beliefs. The process of item generation was done through inputs that were culturally informed, which included beliefs that are practiced in

Indian culture. The initial scale consisted of 34 items, and after the statistical analysis, the final scale consisted of 18 items. The scale uses a 7-point Likert scale to measure all items, ranging from (0) Not at all to (6) Very much, depending on the relevance of each statement to Indian cultural superstitions. The final scale includes statements about beliefs in evil eye, auspicious numbers, omens, taboos associated with eclipses, manglik dosha, and other superstitions. Factor analysis extracted two factors: Influence on Well-being (13 items), which includes beliefs associated with health, luck, marriage, and misfortune, and Symbolistic Prophecy (5 items), which includes beliefs associated with signs and symbols of prophecy. The score for the scale is calculated by averaging the 18 items, and higher scores indicate higher levels of superstitious beliefs. The ISS is a culturally appropriate instrument that can be used for research on superstition, religion, cognition, and behavior in the Indian population.

- **Reliability:** The test-retest reliability coefficient of the Indian Superstition Scale was found to be 0.91, which indicates high internal consistency. The split-half reliability coefficient also showed high reliability of the scale.
- **Validity:** An et al. indicated that the Indian Superstition Scale has good content validity. The construct validity of the scale was determined through factor analysis, which revealed that the scale is capable of measuring the underlying dimensions of superstition.

Procedure

The sociodemographic data sheet was developed, and a consent form was designed that included the purpose of the study, procedure, voluntary participation, benefits, and confidentiality and anonymity of the responses. The investigator personally approached the young adults and midlife adults in the local community for the purpose of data collection. The participants were selected based on the inclusion criteria of the age group.

The investigator personally met the potential participants in their locality and briefly explained the objective of the research. They were informed that the study intended to explore the relationship between locus of control and superstitious beliefs. The participants were also informed that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Written informed consent was obtained from those who agreed to participate.

After obtaining consent, the survey instruments were administered one by one. The respondents were given clear instructions on how to answer the questions in the survey instruments. The respondents were asked to answer all the questions honestly, based on their own understanding and experiences. They were also advised to seek clarification of any doubts they may have directly from the investigator, without discussing their answers with anyone else. After completing the data collection, the investigator gathered the completed questionnaires, thanked the respondents for their cooperation, and assured them that the data collected would be used only for academic purposes.

Statistical analysis

The collected data was coded and analyzed using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the data. Before performing inferential statistics, the assumption of normality was checked using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, as the sample size was more than 50.

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The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test result showed that the scores of locus of control and superstitious beliefs were significantly not normally distributed ($p < .05$). Since the assumption of normality was violated, parametric statistical tests were not used. Rather, suitable non-parametric statistical tests were used for further data analysis.

To compare the locus of control and superstitious beliefs of young adults and midlife adults, the Mann-Whitney U test was used. To find the relationship between locus of control and superstitious beliefs, Spearman's rank-order correlation (Spearman's rho) test was used. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at 0.05.

Ethical consideration

The current research was conducted in line with the necessary ethical procedures. Data was collected from young adults and Midlife Adults. Before collecting the data, written informed consent forms were collected from the participants. Participants were also informed about the risks and benefits of participating in the study. No descriptive information (name, surname etc.) was requested from the participants. Privacy, reputation, and participants rights were taken into consideration. The researchers provided information to the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without giving any reason. Data was analysed and reported depending upon the principle of transparency. Data were collected using self-reported measures. The survey questionnaire was filled out based on the voluntary involvement of the participants.

RESULT

Table 1 Comparison of Locus of control among young adults and Midlife adults

	Group	Mean Rank	U	z	Sig
Locus of control	Young adult	72.32	2553	-03	0.035
	Midlife adult	87.59			

Table 1 indicates the results obtained from the Mann Whitney U test analysis conducted among the variables of the study with young adults and midlife adults of the participants. The results indicate that Locus of control in young adults ($M = 72.32$) differ significantly from Midlife adults ($M = 87.59$), $U = 2553$, $z = -03$, $r = 0.035$. Midlife adults showed higher locus of control than young adults. Hence, **Locus of control would not significantly differ on young adults and Midlife adults (H1) in Kerala is rejected.**

Table 2 Comparison of Superstitious Beliefs among Young adults and Midlife Adults

	Group	Mean Rank	U	z	Sig
Superstitious Beliefs	Young Adult	63.11	1826	- 4.6	0.00
	Midlife Adult	96.68			

Table 2 indicates the comparison of superstitious Beliefs among young adults and midlife adults. The results indicate that Superstitious Beliefs in young adults ($M = 63.11$) differ significantly from Midlife adults ($M = 96.68$), $U = 1826$, $z = -4.6$, $r = 0.00$. Midlife adults showed higher Superstitious Beliefs than young adults. Hence, **Superstitious beliefs would not significantly differ on young adults and Midlife Adults (H2) in Kerala is rejected.**

Table 3 Relationship between Locus of control and Superstitious belief among young adults and Midlife adults

		Locus of control	Superstitious belief
Locus of control	Spearman rho	-	-
	P value	-	-
Superstitious belief	Spearman rho	0.235	-
	P value	0.003	-

Table 3 shows the interrelationship between Locus of control and superstition belief. Findings of the Spearman's Rank correlation revealed a significant relationship between the Locus of control and Superstitious belief, $\rho = 0.235$, $p < 0.05$. Hence, **Locus of control would not have any significant relationship with superstition among young adults and midlife adults (H3) in Kerala is rejected.**

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated the relationship between locus of control and superstitious beliefs in young adults and midlife adults, and also investigated whether there were any significant age-related differences between the two groups. The normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk statistic revealed that both locus of control and superstitious beliefs were not normally distributed, as the p-values were less than .05. Since the data was not normally distributed, parametric tests were not applicable. Consequently, equivalent non-parametric tests, called the Mann-Whitney U test and Spearman's correlation, were employed for the analysis.

The sample included 159 participants, with an almost equal number of young adults (49.7%) and midlife adults (50.3%). Although the proportion of females (62.3%) was higher than that of males (37.7%), both were adequately represented for analysis. The representation of the age groups enabled a comparison between the two.

The result of the Mann-Whitney U test showed a significant difference in locus of control between young adults and midlife adults ($U = 2553$, $p = .035$). The mean rank of the midlife adults (87.59) was greater than that of the young adults (72.32), which indicates that the midlife adult individuals had higher scores on locus of control than young adults. Hence the hypothesis, Locus of control would not significantly differ on young adults and Midlife adults has been rejected. According to Rotter, the higher score in Rotter's Locus of Control scale represents a stronger external locus of control, suggesting that midlife adults are more likely to assign life events to external forces such as fate, luck, or accidental happenings (Rotter, 1966). This could be attributed to the fact that midlife adults are disclosed to more stressful events, such as financial problems, work pressures, family responsibilities, and health concerns (Rotter, 1966). "Repeated experiences with uncontrollable events may have a cumulative effect of strengthening the belief that external forces are influential in determining outcomes." Another possible explanation is the effect of generational factors, where midlife individuals may have been brought up in more traditional and collectivist settings where beliefs about destiny and external forces were strengthened, whereas the younger generation is more likely to be brought up in modern and individualistic settings that emphasize personal agency and self-efficacy. Recent research has shown that Young adults and Middle - aged adults show high internal locus of control (Gupta et al., 2010). Contrary to the findings, some research shows that Middle-aged adults of age 35-50 showed greater internal locus of control (Bradley & Webb, 1976).

Similarly, the result of the Mann-Whitney U test also revealed a highly significant difference in superstitious beliefs among different age groups ($U = 1826, p < .001$). The mean rank of people belonging to the midlife adults (96.68) was considerably higher than that of young adults (63.11), indicating that midlife adults were more supportive of superstitious beliefs. Therefore, the hypothesis, Superstitious beliefs would not significantly differ on young adults and Midlife Adults has been rejected. This result can be explained on the basis of cultural transmission and life experiences. Superstitious beliefs are usually acquired in family and social environments (Mandal, 2018). People belonging to midlife adulthood might have been more exposed to the influences of culturally imprinted traditions and rituals, making them more helpful (Shrivastav & Kotnala, 2015). Additionally, superstition can also act as a coping device in uncertain situations. Middle age is a period of multiple role demands and uncertainty, and the practice of superstitious beliefs may serve as a source of comfort and a way to feel in control. Younger adults, who are more familiar with scientific thinking, digital knowledge, and critical thinking methods, may be less predisposed to superstitious beliefs (Brashier & Multhaup, 2017). Supporting the findings, some research suggests that there is a generational shift in superstitions. i.e. older adults show more superstitions than young adults (Tanya, 2019).

The Spearman correlation test showed a positive correlation between locus of control and superstitious beliefs that was statistically significant ($r = .235, p = .003$). Although the correlation was weak, it was statistically significant, and this indicated that as the scores on locus of control increased, the scores on superstitious beliefs also tended to increase. Hence the hypothesis, Locus of control would not have any significant relationship with superstition among young adults and midlife adults has been rejected. This indicated that people who tend to see the outcomes of events as being more under the control of external forces tend to be more superstitious (Jeethu et al., 2025). The positive correlation is consistent with the theoretical explanation that superstition often arises as a means of interpreting uncertainty and maintaining a sense of control in unpredictable environments (Kashiha, 2015). The weak strength of the correlation, however, indicates that locus of control is not a complete determinant of superstitious beliefs and that other variables, such as culture, education, personality, and stress, may also be involved (Ofori et al., 2017). Consistent with the present findings, recent research studies show that external locus of control is positively correlated with superstition beliefs (Kashiha, 2015).

Generally, the findings suggest that age differences play an important role in understanding both locus of control and superstitious beliefs. Middle-aged individuals scored higher on external locus of control and superstitious beliefs than young adults. The findings suggest the importance of the stage of development, culture, and exposure to different generations in understanding belief systems and perceptions of control.

CONCLUSION

The research aimed to investigate the relationship between locus of control and superstitious beliefs and to examine the difference in these variables among young adults and midlife adults. The present study is required to understand the relationship between these variables as it plays a significant role in shaping thinking patterns, decision making and coping mechanisms among young adults and midlife adults. The findings indicate that the midlife adult individuals had higher scores on locus of control than young adults. The study also found that there is a weak positive correlation between locus of control and superstitious beliefs i.e, when external locus of control increases, the superstitions tend to increase. These findings can be implied in educational settings, counselling settings, and can help in shaping

behavior of individuals through increasing internal Locus of Control of family members, who plays an important role in shaping children's behavior.

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Acknowledgment

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all the participants and research guide for their valuable support and cooperation throughout the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Lathief, J. & Rashin, P.K. (2026). Locus of Control and Superstition Beliefs among Young and Midlife Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(3), 2327-2338. DIP:18.01.212.20261403, DOI:10.25215/1403.212