

THE GENDER DIFFERENCE IN LOCUS OF CONTROL AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Locus of control is the degree to which people believe that they have control over the outcome of events in their lives, as opposed to external forces beyond their control. Understanding of the concept was developed by Julian B. Rotter in 1954 and has since become an aspect of personality studies. A person's "locus" is conceptualized as internal (a belief that one can control one's own life) or external (a belief that life is controlled by outside factors which the person cannot influence, or that chance or fate controls their lives). Individuals with a strong internal locus of control believe events in their life derive primarily from their own actions and tend to praise or blame themselves and their abilities. People with a strong external locus of control tend to praise or blame external factors like chance, fate, mightiness of others, etc. Thus, the study aims to find if there is any gender difference in locus of control among college students. 120 students have participated in this study through convenient sampling, in which there was equal participation from both genders

Introduction

Locus of control refers to the extent to which people feel they have control over the events that influence their life. It is important to know that locus of control is a continuum, No one has a 100% of internal or external locus of control. Instead, most people lie somewhere on the continuum between the two extremes.

There are many ways of describing and understanding personality – the holistic approach, the types approach, the trait approach and the dimensional approach, to name only a few. It was Eysenck (1952) who brought the term “dimension” technically into use in the scientific study of personality. In his theory of personality there are four levels of behavior. At the third level, traits which are “an observed constellation”, of individual action tendencies. At the 4th level, the traits are organized into general “types” which are “an absorbed constellation or syndrome of traits”. Using number of tests & questionnaires, Eysenck obtained ratings on 39 traits from a large number of neurotic patients. Making a factorial analysis of these test result, he arrived at two factors at the 4th level of personality organization. This he called, “Dimension” of personality.

The internal – External dimension (I-E) pertains to the degree to which an individual perceives reinforcement as resulting from his own actions or sees them as stemming from such forces as luck, chance, fate or other powerful figures in his life. Considerable research has demonstrated the activity of this conflict and the predictive efficiency of a measure of this generalized expectancy (Lefcourt, 1966, Rotter, 1966). Locus is defined as a particular position, point, or place. Locus of control refers to a set of beliefs about the relationship between behavior & the subsequent occurrence of rewards & punishments. The more precise phrase for these beliefs is internal versus external control of reinforcement in which reinforcement (either positive or negative) are perceived by the individual as being the result of his or her own behavior, efforts or relatively permanent characteristics, an example of internal belief. External beliefs in contrast, involves perception that reinforcements occur as the result of luck, chance, fate or the interventions of powerful others or else are simply unpredictable because of complexity of events. Beliefs about locus of control are not either-or, but can lie anywhere on the line of continuum between internal and external locus of control.

There are few findings regarding internal & external locus of control:

- When information relevant to controlling important life conditions is available, internals learn & recall it better than externals do.
- Internals are more successful at influencing the attitudes of others as opposed to externals.
- Externals display more conformity in situations involving social pressures than internals do.
- College students low in externals expresses a greater willingness and desire to engage in social action than those who are high in externals.

In recent years, need for social approval, locus of control and need for achievement are among the personality variables that have been related to social behavior, test anxiety and tendency towards conformity. The achievement-oriented person very likely sets imposing goals for him, because his abilities make their attainment possible. The highly conforming persons may be a follower in the group judgmental situation, because he lacks sufficient confidence to behave in independent manner.

Gender difference in Locus of Control

Kolotkin (1994) investigated (1) relationships among locus of control, attributional style, and depression; (2) if a depressogenic attributional style could be empirically isolated; and (3) if reliable relationships existed between attribution and depression when depression was operationalized using different instruments. Gender-combined analyses showed that an internal, stable and global attributional style for positive events was negatively correlated with depression, and that depression was positively correlated with locus of control, with these relationships reliable across measures of depression for females only. Factor analyses of gender-combined, female and male data yielded factors of depression, behavioral helplessness, and hopelessness. A female pessimism, and male optimism, factor also emerged. Results were discussed in relationship to learned helplessness, hopelessness, and sex differences in the prevalence of depression.

Wehmeyer (1993) studied gender differences on locus of control scores for students with learning disabilities. Significant differences were found by gender on the Nowicki-Strickland Inventory. On all assessments girls' mean scores were more external than boys'.

Significance of the study

Most of the contemporary psychological research has proved the relationship between the person's belief system and the external behavior. At the same time, our expressions of beliefs and behaviors are each subject to many influences. Gender difference is a common predictor of belief-behavior mechanism. Every society, ethnic group, and culture has gender role expectations, where women are often expected to be accommodating and emotional, while men are usually expected to be self-confident and aggressive (Parenthood). Therefore, such norms laid down by the society may influence the locus of control. Various researchers from various periods of time have conducted the study in many population types in same or related topics. However, it is not necessary for the results to be similar. It is because, researches were conducted on various population types where it may differ in ethnic, cultural, social, economic, constituent factors etc. Further, the scientific advancements would also influence the human evolution from time immemorial, which in turn would initiate change in a person's opinion, ideas, behavior, beliefs, etc. Hence, the present study focuses on the gender difference prevailing in the locus of control among college students with a Hindu majority group.

Variables of study

The following variables were used in the present study:

- 1) Locus of Control
 - a) Individual control as a subscale of locus of control

- b) Chance control as a subscale of locus of control
- c) Powerful others as a subscale of locus of control

Objectives of the study

The following were the objectives of study.

1. To find out whether there was any difference between boys and girls in locus of control among college students.

Statement of hypothesis

1. There will not be any gender difference among girls and boys with respect to individual control subscale of internal locus of control.
2. There will not be any gender differences among girls and boys in relation to chance control subscale of external locus of control.
3. There will not be any gender differences among girls and boys with regard to powerful control subscale of external locus of control.

Research Design

A cross sectional research design was used to collect the data. Analysis of the data was done using Pearson's Co-efficient of Correlation for the present study. The design was ex-post-facto in nature because the investigator did not experimentally manipulate any of the variables, namely, locus of control. Thus, the study became essentially univariate and cross-sectional.

Sample

The sample of the present study were selected from students studying in arts, science, and professional subjects of various colleges in Chennai city. The age of the students ranged from 21-28 years with mean age of 22 years. Convenient sampling technique was adopted in the study for selection of sample.

146 students were contacted, and the questionnaire was distributed to all. The sample was chosen in such a way that they belong to various religions of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. Out of 146 students only 120 have completed and returned the questionnaire to the invigilator. The sample consisted of both male and female students equal in numbers (60 each). In the questionnaire, blank was given in order to fill their respective religion and there it was also instructed orally to write their system of belief rather than writing one's religion by certificate. After collection and evaluation of the questionnaire, individual interaction was made with the respondents based on the answers given by them, with a motive to analyze their self-opinion.

Inclusion criteria

1. Students should belong to early adulthood, i.e., age between 21-28 years
2. Students should know the English language fluently as both tools used were in English.
3. Sample should include equal number of boys and girls in this comparative study.

Tools used

In the present study, the following instruments were used.

1. Scale for Locus of control (1981) by Levenson.

Results:

Table 1: shows the gender difference of male and female in individual control, sub-scale of internal locus of control.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance(p)
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Individual Control					
Male	60	31.05	5.486	1.045	.305 (NS)
Female	60	29.70	5.464		

Table 1: result shows that there is no significant gender difference existing in the individual control sub-scale of internal locus of control.

Table 2: shows the gender difference of males and females in chance control sub-scale of external locus of control.

Variable					
Chance Control	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance(p)
Male	60	22.00	6.831	-1.482	.146 (NS)
Female	60	24.08	5.797		

Table 2 result shows that there is no significant gender difference in chance control sub-scale of external locus of control.

Table 3: indicates the gender differences in powerful others subscale of external locus of control.

Variable					
Powerful others	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance(p)
Male	60	22.52	4.489	2.085	.044 (S)
Female	60	24.65	5.655		

*Significant at .005 level.

Table 3 result shows that there is significant gender difference in powerful others subscale of external locus of control.

OVERALL DISCUSSION:

The following observations were made based on analyzing the results of the study and the interaction made with the participants after completing the questionnaire. The orientation of believing in oneself or one's capacity doesn't change with gender. This means females are equally self-assured and their thoughts in attributing to the outcomes of their own control doesn't vary significantly, in comparison with male population. This may rise from the observation that due to the recent academic exposure and the enhancement in professional and industrial growth, females acquired the quality of believing in themselves thereby, understanding the outcomes of their actions are results of their own abilities. Both males and females believe that their hard work would lead them to obtain positive or successful outcomes.

From the above discussion, there is no surprise in getting to know that gender difference doesn't make any significant impact in predicting a person's belief in chance/luck factor for their success or failure. Both men and women, regardless of their gender difference feel hopeless or powerless in the face of difficult situations. Though the degree of intensity may vary, both educated men and women equally believe in their inner self and the importance of the external events like fortune/chance in determining their success respectively.

Though men and women are assumed to have no difference in their perceived self-ability and their belief in the influence of chance factor in their life outcomes, females show higher mean value in accepting the mightiness of others (opponent/competitor or any other influenceable person other than their self) in determining their course of actions. Even after attaining definite academic and professional growth, females strongly have the tendency to believe in the superiority of other individuals (i.e. their parents, spouse, superordinate, etc.) in impacting the effectiveness of their life outcomes.

Conclusion

The findings of the present-day study were as follows:

1. There was no significant gender difference found in the internal locus of control.
2. There was no significant gender difference in the perceived chance factor in determining the successful life outcomes.
3. Women believe the influence of other powerful people in determining their life outcomes as compared to the men.

Limitations

1. The study is limited to college going students who belong to the age group of 21 to 28.
2. The study was carried out only among students who can read and comprehend English language as the questionnaire was in that language.
3. As the study is in ex-post facto nature, cause and effect relationship could not be convincingly established.

Future Scope for research

1. A similar study can be conducted on a larger sample.
2. The study can be extended to students belonging to high and low socio-economic status.
3. A study can be carried out by taking factors such as social media and technological advancements into consideration and their influence.

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