

Ethnic Identity, Control Beliefs, and Well-being: A Contextual Analysis among Rural Youth in Jharkhand

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Abstract

This study explored how ethnic identity moderates the relationship between locus of control and psychological well-being among 500 rural young adults (aged 22–36) in Dumka, Jharkhand, including 250 tribal and 250 non-tribal participants. Grounded in Rotter's and Ryff's theories, it used validated tools to assess control orientation and well-being. Independent t-tests revealed non-tribal participants scored significantly higher on both constructs (Cohen's $d = 0.45$ – 0.78). Correlations between locus of control and well-being were stronger for non-tribal ($r = 0.82$) than tribal ($r = 0.59$) youth. Hierarchical regression confirmed ethnic identity as a significant moderator ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < .001$), adding 5.2% to explained variance in well-being. Findings suggest internal locus of control is more strongly linked to well-being in contexts with greater socio-economic and educational access. The results underscore the need for culturally sensitive mental health interventions that address both individual agency and structural inequities affecting tribal communities, contributing to cross-cultural psychology and rural mental health policy in India

Keywords: Locus of Control, Psychological Well-being, Ethnic Identity, Tribal Youth, Rural India

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I. INTRODUCTION

The developmental transition from adolescence to young adulthood represents a critical period marked by educational advancement, vocational establishment, identity formation, and relationship development, during which psychological well-being (PWB) emerges as a fundamental determinant of long-term life satisfaction, resilience, and social functioning. Understanding factors that enhance PWB among young adults is essential for theoretical advancement and practical applications, particularly in non-Western rural contexts where socio-cultural norms and economic conditions differ substantially from environments where most psychological research has been conducted.

Two key constructs—Locus of Control (LoC) and Psychological Well-being (PWB)—serve as the central focus of this investigation. LoC, rooted in Rotter's (1966) Social Learning Theory, encompasses individuals' generalized beliefs about whether life outcomes are determined by personal actions versus external forces. An internal LoC orientation reflects beliefs that outcomes depend on personal abilities, efforts, and choices, fostering proactive coping and enhanced agency. Conversely, external LoC orientation attributes outcomes to luck, fate, or circumstances beyond individual control, often resulting in passive responses or learned helplessness.

Ryff's (1989) multidimensional PWB model extends beyond the absence of mental illness to encompass six fundamental dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. This framework recognizes that optimal functioning involves active engagement with existential challenges, effective utilization of talents, and meaningful community contribution.

While substantial Western evidence supports robust positive associations between internal LoC and enhanced PWB—linking internality to elevated life satisfaction, superior coping, and reduced psychological distress—universal cultural applicability cannot be assumed. LoC mechanisms and their impact on PWB are significantly influenced by socio-cultural values, economic opportunities, historical circumstances, and contextual factors that vary across cultural and geographic regions.

Within rural Indian contexts, where collectivist norms, systemic inequalities, and ethnic diversity intersect, psychological benefits associated with internal control orientations may vary significantly between ethnic and socio-economic groups. These variations suggest that relationships between personal control beliefs

and psychological outcomes may be substantially moderated by cultural identity, historical experiences, and structural opportunities within specific community contexts.

Dumka district in Jharkhand presents a unique setting for examining these dynamics through the coexistence of distinct tribal and non-tribal populations maintaining separate cultural values, historical experiences, and socio-economic conditions. Tribal communities frequently encounter structural barriers including limited educational access, economic marginalization, geographical isolation, and political underrepresentation. These disadvantages profoundly influence psychological well-being and mechanisms through which control beliefs translate into psychological outcomes. Non-tribal populations typically demonstrate greater access to educational resources, economic opportunities, social mobility, and socio-political capital, potentially amplifying beneficial effects of internal LoC on well-being.

Rotter's (1966) LoC concept describes how individuals form generalized expectancies about whether outcomes stem from personal actions or external influences. Those with internal LoC believe decisions, efforts, and abilities determine events, supporting proactive behaviors and adaptive coping. External LoC reflects attributions to fate, luck, or external forces, correlating with learned helplessness and passivity. Research across academic achievement, occupational advancement, health behaviors, and psychological adjustment consistently associates internal LoC with resilience, problem-focused coping, and superior stress management, while external LoC aligns with anxiety and depression vulnerability (Benassi et al., 1988; Judge & Bono, 2001; Ng et al., 2006; Strickland, 1989).

Cross-cultural examinations reveal nuanced patterns influenced by societal norms. In individualistic cultures valoring self-determination, internal LoC strongly predicts positive outcomes. Collectivist cultures emphasizing interdependence and communal deference can moderate LoC–well-being relationships (Cheng et al., 2013; Sinha et al., 2002). Attributing outcomes to family or community—moderate externality forms—may not undermine functioning if culturally endorsed (Chandra & Satyanarayana, 2010). For socio-economically disadvantaged groups, externality frequently reflects structural constraints—inadequate educational resources, limited employment, inaccessible healthcare—that inhibit agency and reinforce beliefs about uncontrollable circumstances (Sharma & Misra, 2010).

Ryff's (1989) PWB model advances eudaimonic perspectives emphasizing optimal functioning across six dimensions: Self-Acceptance, Positive Relations, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth. Studies demonstrate robust associations between internal LoC and PWB dimensions—particularly Autonomy and Environmental Mastery—because perceived agency enhances environmental control confidence (Gale et al., 2008; Lefcourt, 1982). External LoC can erode Self-Acceptance and Purpose by undermining personal efficacy (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998).

Despite substantial Western literature, Indian research remains limited, focusing mainly on urban populations. Urban Indian findings generally mirror Western patterns—internal LoC predicts higher well-being (Khanna & Khanna, 1979; Malhotra, 2017). Rural environments introduce distinct moderators—caste dynamics, ethnic identity, gender norms, community networks—reshaping control–well-being relationships (Patel et al., 2019). Among tribal and non-tribal rural groups, social capital and structural opportunity access varies greatly, suggesting internal LoC benefits depend on socio-economic context.

Ethnic diversity and socio-economic disparities are pronounced in tribal regions where Adivasi communities face historical marginalization, displacement, and exclusion (Xaxa, 2005). Tribal populations often endorse external LoC orientations due to cumulative socio-economic exclusion experiences (Pandey & Tripathi, 2008). This contributes to lower PWB as structural barriers limit opportunities to translate control beliefs into life improvements (Das & Deb, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014).

Research integrating LoC and PWB among ethnically diverse rural youth remains sparse. Where moderation analyses exist, ethnic identity can strengthen or attenuate LoC–PWB links depending on communal resources and historical trajectories (Phinney, 1990; Yoon et al., 2011). Chhattisgarh studies show tribal adolescents reporting lower self-efficacy and well-being, attributing outcomes to fate or divine will (Mishra et al., 2014). Das and Deb (2015) highlight that socio-economic constraints mediate LoC–PWB relationships among rural youth, with disadvantaged groups deriving fewer internality benefits.

Rural settings possess unique cultural assets—strong social networks, collective traditions, locally embedded coping strategies—contributing to well-being in ways not fully captured by Ryff's model (Singh & Saxena, 2016). Nagaland research found that while internal LoC correlated with better mental health, collective factors like community support and cultural practices significantly influenced well-being (Suokhrie&Longkumer, 2024).

Three critical gaps emerge: first, urban-centric research fails representing rural realities in tribal districts like Dumka; second, ethnicity's moderating role remains inadequately investigated; third, measurement tool adaptation for rural, ethnically diverse populations is often insufficient. By situating ethnic identity as a moderator, this study advances theoretical understanding of how cultural contexts shape psychological processes, building on Rotter's (1966) and Ryff's (1989) frameworks while examining whether established LoC–

PWB associations are equally robust across tribal and non-tribal rural youth or if systemic disparities attenuate benefits for marginalized communities.

Objectives: This investigation pursues three primary aims:

1. To assess differences in locus of control and psychological well-being levels between tribal and non-tribal youth in Dumka district.
2. To determine whether ethnic identity moderates the association between locus of control and psychological well-being among rural youth.
3. To contextualize findings within socio-cultural, economic, and historical frameworks, contributing to culturally responsive mental health approaches in ethnically diverse rural communities.

Hypotheses: H1: Ethnic affiliation significantly influences the relationship between locus of control and psychological well-being among youth in Dumka district.

H2: Significant differences exist in LoC and PWB scores between tribal and non-tribal youth populations.

H3: Ethnicity significantly moderates the LoC-PWB relationship, with stronger associations anticipated among non-tribal youth compared to tribal youth.

Through integrated group comparison and moderation analyses, this study transcends simple ethnic disparities to explore interactions between individual psychological resources and socio-cultural contexts. Research outcomes will inform culturally adapted mental health interventions addressing both personal agency development and structural factors affecting well-being in marginalized rural populations.

II. METHODOLOGY

This investigation utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design to examine ethnic identity's moderating role in the relationship between Locus of Control (LoC) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) among rural youth in Dumka district, Jharkhand. The research framework integrated independent samples t-tests for group comparisons (H2), Pearson correlations for association analysis, and hierarchical multiple regression to test moderation effects (H1, H3).

Research Design and Theoretical Framework: Grounded in Rotter's Social Learning Theory and Ryff's multidimensional well-being model, the study adopted a positivist paradigm with deductive reasoning. Single-point data collection enabled between-group comparisons and moderation analysis, assuming psychological constructs can be quantified and analyzed objectively.

Participants and Sampling: The target population comprised youth aged 22-36 years permanently residing in Dumka district, representing early adulthood's identity consolidation and career establishment phase. Purposive sampling ensured equal representation across ethnic groups. A total of 500 participants (250 tribal, 250 non-tribal) were recruited based on a priori power analysis indicating adequate sample size for detecting medium effect sizes ($d \approx 0.5$) with 80% power at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Inclusion criteria: Age 22-36 years, Hindi proficiency, informed consent provision. Exclusion criteria: Self-reported severe mental disorders or cognitive impairments to minimize confounding effects on self-report measures.

Instruments: Locus of Control Scale: A 24-item Hindi adaptation of Rotter's scale with equal internal and external items rated on five-point Likert scales. External items were reverse-scored, yielding total scores from 24-120, with higher scores indicating greater internality. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$.

Psychological Well-Being Scale: A 24-item Hindi translation of Ryff's model measuring six dimensions (Self-Acceptance, Positive Relations, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, Personal Growth) with four items per dimension on five-point scales. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$.

Both instruments underwent rigorous translation-back-translation procedures and pilot testing in similar rural settings for semantic and conceptual equivalence.

Data Collection Procedures: Data collection employed dual formats: online via Google Forms through institutional networks and offline via printed questionnaires in community centers. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Institutional ethics committee approval was secured.

Statistical Analysis: IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28) performed all analyses. Descriptive statistics and reliability assessments preceded hypothesis testing. Independent samples t-tests compared mean LoC and PWB scores between groups (H2), with Cohen's d evaluating effect sizes. Pearson correlations assessed LoC-PWB relationships within each ethnic group. Hierarchical multiple regression tested moderation (H1, H3), entering center-scored LoC and dummy-coded ethnicity in Step 1, followed by the LoC $\times$ Ethnicity interaction term in Step 2. Significant R-squared change and interaction coefficients indicated moderation effects.

All procedures adhered to APA ethical principles, prioritizing cultural sensitivity and anonymity while respecting tribal communities' historical and social contexts throughout instrument adaptation and data collection processes.

III. RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics: Descriptive analyses revealed substantial differences between tribal and non-tribal participants in both Locus of Control (LoC) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB). Non-tribal participants demonstrated higher internal control orientation and enhanced psychological well-being compared to tribal counterparts.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics by Ethnic Group

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

Group Comparisons (H2): Independent samples t-tests examined ethnic group differences in LoC and PWB scores. Results strongly supported H2, revealing statistically significant mean differences across both variables with medium-to-large effect sizes.

Table 2. Independent Samples T-Test Results

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Mean Difference	95% CI	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

Non-tribal youth scored significantly higher on both LoC ($M = 75.4$) and PWB ($M = 73.7$) compared to tribal youth (LoC: $M = 62.3$; PWB: $M = 64.9$), with medium-to-large effect sizes indicating practical significance.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlations assessed LoC-PWB associations within each ethnic group. While both groups demonstrated significant positive correlations, the relationship strength differed substantially between populations.

Table 3. Within-Group Correlations

Ethnic Group	Pearson r	r ² (%)	p-value
Non-tribal	0.82	67.2	.001
Tribal	0.59	34.8	.001

Non-tribal participants exhibited stronger LoC-PWB associations ($r = .82$) compared to tribal participants ($r = .59$), suggesting differential mechanisms underlying control-wellbeing relationships across ethnic contexts.

Moderation Analysis (H1, H3): Hierarchical multiple regression tested ethnic moderation of the LoC-PWB relationship. Results provided compelling evidence supporting both H1 and H3.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Results

Step	Predictors	R ²	ΔR ²	F-change	df	P-value	Interaction β	Interaction p
1	LoC, Ethnicity	.682	–	534.8	2, 497	.001	–	–
2	LoC × Ethnicity	.734	.052	45.7	1, 496	.001	.23	.001

The significant interaction term ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$) confirmed ethnic moderation, with the interaction contributing an additional 5.2% to explained variance beyond main effects.

Hypothesis Testing Summary: Statistical analyses provided robust support for all hypotheses:

H1 (ethnic influence on LoC-PWB relationship): Confirmed through significant moderation effects demonstrating ethnic identity's substantial role in shaping control-wellbeing associations.

H2 (ethnic group differences): Strongly supported, with non-tribal youth scoring significantly higher on both LoC ($d = 0.67$) and PWB ($d = 0.48$) measures.

H3 (stronger associations among non-tribal youth): Validated through differential correlation patterns, with non-tribal participants showing substantially stronger LoC-PWB relationships ($r = .82$) compared to tribal participants ($r = .59$).

These findings collectively demonstrate that psychological benefits of personal agency are significantly influenced by socio-cultural contexts, highlighting the necessity for culturally responsive mental health interventions in ethnically diverse rural populations.

IV. DISCUSSION

This investigation examined whether ethnic identity moderates the relationship between locus of control (LoC) and psychological well-being (PWB) among rural youth in Jharkhand, India. Statistical analyses provided robust support for all hypotheses: H1 (ethnic moderation of LoC-PWB relationship), H2 (significant group differences), and H3 (stronger associations among non-tribal youth).

Key Findings: Results confirmed significant ethnic differences, with non-tribal youth demonstrating higher internal control orientations ($M = 75.4$) and greater PWB ($M = 73.7$) compared to tribal counterparts (LoC: $M = 62.3$; PWB: $M = 64.9$), yielding medium-to-large effect sizes (Cohen's $d = 0.67$ and 0.48). The LoC-PWB association was substantially stronger among non-tribal youth ($r = .82$, explaining 67.2% variance) than tribal youth ($r = .59$, explaining 34.8% variance). Most significantly, ethnic identity emerged as a significant moderator ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .052$), indicating that psychological benefits of internal control are considerably greater for non-tribal youth.

Theoretical Implications: These findings extend Rotter's Social Learning Theory and Ryff's multidimensional well-being model by demonstrating that cultural identity significantly shapes psychological construct dynamics. The moderation effect suggests internal LoC confers greater well-being advantages in environments with higher resource availability and socio-political empowerment. This aligns with cross-cultural evidence indicating individual agency yields optimal benefits when structural supports enable translation of control beliefs into concrete opportunities. Conversely, in tribal communities facing systemic barriers, internality appears less directly linked to well-being, as structural constraints may limit personal agency utility. Theoretical models must therefore incorporate contextual moderators like ethnic identity to accurately reflect diverse cultural realities.

Practical Implications: Differential patterns between tribal and non-tribal youth underscore the necessity for culturally tailored mental health interventions. Programs enhancing internal control beliefs may yield optimal results in non-tribal settings with robust educational and economic infrastructures. Tribal interventions should adopt dual focus: fostering personal agency while concurrently addressing systemic limitations through community development, resource mobilization, and advocacy efforts. Integrating skill-building workshops with initiatives improving education and employment access could enable tribal youth to leverage internal control orientations more effectively.

Comparison with Prior Research: The stronger LoC-PWB association in non-tribal youth corroborates studies in other rural Indian contexts linking internality to greater life satisfaction under favorable socio-economic conditions. Suokhrie and Longkumer (2024) reported internal LoC correlated with improved mental health when community support systems were strong. Das and Deb (2015) found systemic disadvantages in tribal regions attenuate well-being benefits of internal control, consistent with present moderation findings.

Limitations and Future Directions: Several limitations warrant consideration. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences; longitudinal investigations are needed to ascertain temporal stability of moderation effects. Self-report measures may introduce social desirability bias, particularly in collectivist contexts. While the sample achieved adequate power, stratified analyses by specific tribal groups were not feasible due to sample constraints. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method designs to elucidate causal pathways, explore additional moderators such as gender and caste, and adapt measurement tools for diverse tribal languages and cultural frameworks.

V. CONCLUSION

This research provides compelling evidence that ethnic identity significantly moderates the relationship between locus of control and psychological well-being among rural youth, supporting all three hypotheses. Non-tribal participants demonstrated higher LoC and PWB scores with substantially stronger correlational patterns, while hierarchical regression confirmed significant ethnic moderation effects. These findings advance psychological theory by demonstrating that socio-cultural and structural factors significantly shape agency-wellbeing relationships, with internal control beliefs yielding greater benefits where systemic supports are available. The results highlight critical needs for mental health strategies promoting individual empowerment while addressing structural barriers in marginalized communities. Although cross-sectional limitations preclude causal conclusions, this investigation establishes ethnic identity as a crucial moderator enriching theoretical understanding and supporting culturally sensitive intervention development. Future longitudinal and mixed-method studies should explore additional moderators and adapt measurement tools to local contexts, ultimately contributing to nuanced, culturally responsive well-being interventions in ethnically diverse rural settings.

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