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ROLE OF LOCUS OF CONTROL AND OPTIMISM IN RELATIONSHIP WITH SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEF AND SELF- EFFICACY

***Noushida Karumbil, K. Noushida**

Assistant Professor of Psychology, Ansar Women's College, Perumpilavu, India, Kerala.

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*Corresponding Author: Noushida Karumbil

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Assistant Professor of Psychology, Ansar Women's College, Perumpilavu, India, Kerala.

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the role of locus of control and optimism in the relationship between superstitious belief and self-efficacy among young adults in Malappuram, Kerala. The study was conducted among 200 undergraduate and postgraduate college students aged 18–24 years using a convenience sampling method. Data were collected using the Superstitious Belief Scale by Surekha Chukkali and Anjali M. Dey, the Locus of Control Scale by Terry Petty John, the General Self-Efficacy Scale by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995), and the State Optimism Measure by Millstein (2019). The findings revealed that optimism did not mediate the relationship between superstitious belief and self-efficacy. However, locus of control significantly mediated this relationship. Specifically, individuals with stronger superstitious beliefs were more likely to exhibit an external locus of control, whereas individuals with a more internal locus of control demonstrated higher levels of self-efficacy. The results suggest that locus of control plays an important role in explaining how superstitious beliefs influence self-efficacy, while optimism does not have a significant mediating effect.

KEYWORDS: Locus Of Control, Optimism, Superstitious Belief, Self-Efficacy.

Superstitious beliefs have existed throughout human history and continue to influence people's thoughts, emotions, and behaviours despite remarkable scientific and technological advancements. Although many events in everyday life can now be explained through scientific evidence, individuals across different cultures continue to engage in superstitious practices to seek protection, good fortune, or control over uncertain situations. These beliefs

are deeply rooted in cultural traditions, religious practices, and personal experiences and are often passed down from one generation to another. Consequently, superstitions remain an important aspect of human behaviour and continue to be practiced by people regardless of their educational background or level of scientific knowledge. (Wong, 2015).

Superstitions differ considerably across cultures and societies. What is considered unlucky in one culture may be viewed as fortunate in another. For instance, the number 13 is regarded as unlucky in many Western countries, while the number 4 is often avoided in several East Asian countries because of its association with death. (Wong, 2015). In India, several superstitious beliefs are infused into daily life, such as avoiding travel during an eclipse, drinking curd and sugar before starting any significant works, or choosing auspicious dates and times for important events for instance marriages and birthday programs. Whereas most of these beliefs are somewhat harmless cultural practices, overindulgence on these superstitions may influence decision-making, increase illogical thinking, and affect psychological well-being.

From a psychological viewpoint, superstitious beliefs frequently arise when individuals experience uncertainty, stress, or contexts beyond their control. In such conditions, people may embrace rituals or beliefs that give a sense of certainty, security, or hope, even if no objective relationship exists between the behaviour and the result.

The development of superstitious behaviour has been explained through behavioural theories, particularly B. F. Skinner's theory of operant conditioning. Skinner demonstrated that behaviours reinforced by accidental or coincidental outcomes may continue even in the absence of a genuine causal relationship (Skinner, 1991). Similarly, people frequently repeat rituals earlier practiced before achieving a positive outcome, believing that these behaviours were responsible for their success.

Another important psychological factor associated with superstitious beliefs is self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in one's competence to cope with a broad range of stressful or challenging demands (Schwarzer et al., 2005). According to Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to approach difficult situations with confidence, persistence, and resilience. In contrast, individuals with lower self-efficacy may depend more on external sources of reassurance, including luck, rituals, or superstitious beliefs, particularly when facing uncertainty. Understanding the relationship between superstitious beliefs and self-efficacy may therefore provide valuable insight into how individuals cope with challenging situations (Jinks & Morgan, 1999).

Similarly, locus of control, mentions how much power a person believes they have over their own actions. It is possible for a person either to have an internal locus of control or an external locus of control (Rotter, 1954). Their locus of control orientation refers to the outcomes of their actions that are determined by what they do (internal control orientation) or external forces that are beyond their control (external control orientation) (Zimbardo, 1988). Since superstitious beliefs often depend on external forces or luck, individuals with an external locus of control are more likely to hold and practice such beliefs than individuals with a stronger sense of personal control.

Another important psychological construct associated with this relationship is optimism, which refers to the emotional and psychological way of looking at life. It is a positive attitude and means that one has the view that one expects the best results from a given situation (AlleyDog.com, n.d.). Optimistic individuals generally view challenges as temporary and manageable and are more likely to use effective coping strategies during stressful situations. On the other hand, individuals with a lower degree of optimism may face greater uncertainty and may be more likely to depend on superstitious beliefs as a means of coping with anxiety and uncertainty. Therefore, optimism may influence the relationship between superstitious beliefs and self-efficacy by influencing individuals' expectations and coping strategies.

Although superstitious beliefs are often treated as irrational or unscientific, research suggests that they may have both positive and negative psychological effects. In certain situations, they may alleviate anxiety, boost confidence, and offer psychological comfort. Conversely, overreliance on superstitions may hinder rational decision-making, promote reliance on external forces, and reduce personal responsibility for outcomes. Therefore, investigating the psychological variables related with superstitious beliefs is crucial for understanding why such beliefs continue to exist in modern society.

The present study aims to examine the relationship between superstitious beliefs and self-efficacy among young adults while investigating the role of locus of control and optimism as possible mediating or moderating variables. Young adulthood is a crucial developmental stage marked by increasing independence, academic responsibilities, career planning, and important life decisions. Examining how these psychological variables influence may lead to a clearer understanding of the psychological factors associated with superstitious beliefs and their influence on individual functioning. The findings of the study may also offer relevant contributions for counselling, mental health strategies, and future psychological research on belief systems, coping processes, and positive psychological functioning.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The study collected data from 200 participants aged between 18-24 years of which 120 were females and 80 were males. Participants were undergraduate and postgraduate students from two colleges from Malappuram, Kerala selected using convenience sampling.

Instruments

Four measures were used in this study,

- 1. Superstitious Belief Scale: SBS** is a scale of Superstitious belief developed by Surekha Chukkali & Anjali M. Dey (2020). The SBS consisted of 20 items. This scale measures popular beliefs, belief in good luck, belief in bad luck, superstitious behaviour, social superstitious behaviours, and belief that luck can change. From previous studies the reported test re-test reliability of the scale is 0.90.
- 2. Locus of Control Scale:** This scale is a measure of locus of control developed by Julian Rotter (1966). The Locus of Control scale consisted of 20 true or false items. The construct is unidimensional which measures a single continuum such as internal locus of control and external locus of control.
- 3. General Self-Efficacy Scale:** This scale is a measure of self-efficacy developed by Ralf Schwarzer & Matthias Jerusalem (1995). The scale is a 10-item self-report scale. GSE is a unidimensional scale with a high score indicating greater self-efficacy. Many studies have indicated good to excellent reliability, and good construct validity.
- 4. State Optimism Measure:** SOM is a scale of state optimism developed by Millstein (2019). The scale consists of 7 items rated on a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Procedure

Permission was obtained from the respective colleges before data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The questionnaires were administered to 200 students from two colleges in Malappuram. After data collection, responses were scored according to the respective manuals and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques.

RESULTS

Table No 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Study Variables.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Superstitious Belief	53.83	9.77
Self-Efficacy	27.71	5.26
Locus of Control	56.75	10.38
Optimism	26.30	4.80

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of superstitious belief, self-efficacy, locus of control and optimism among young adults. The mean is 53.83 and the standard deviation is 9.766 for superstitious belief. The mean is 27.71 and the standard deviation is 5.259 for self-efficacy. The mean is 56.75 and the standard deviation is 10.379 for the locus of control and the mean of optimism is 26.30 and its standard deviation is 4.804.

Table No 2 Relationship between superstitious belief, self-efficacy, optimism, and locus of control among young adults.

	Superstitious belief	Locus of control	Optimism	Self-Efficacy
Superstitious belief	1	-.254*	.077	-.068
Locus of control	-.254**	1	.008	.252**
Optimism	.077	.008	1	.275**
Self-Efficacy	-.068	.252**	.275**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

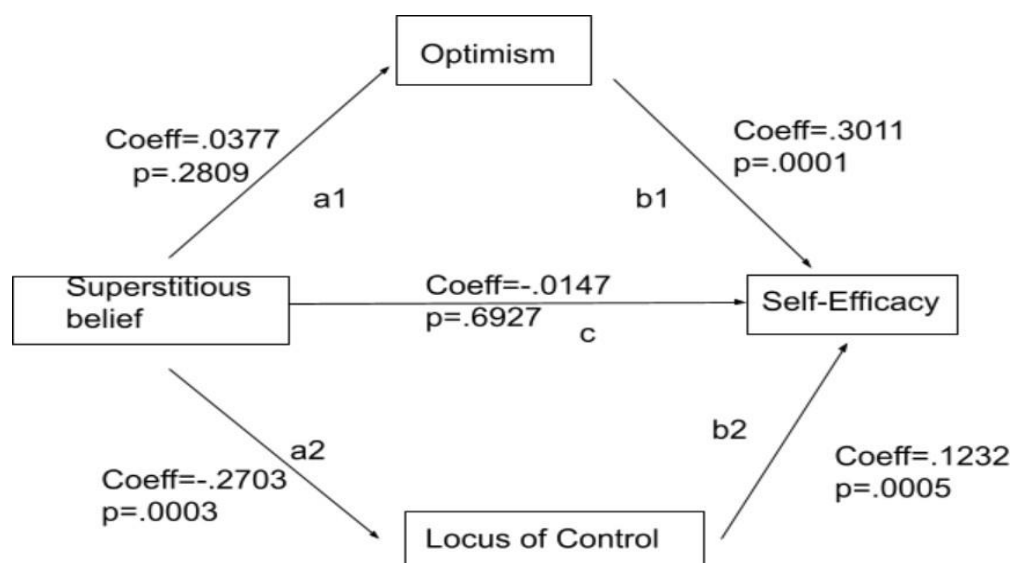
Table 2 shows significant correlations among the variables. Superstitious belief showed a significant negative correlation with locus of control ($r = -.254$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher superstitious belief was associated with lower locus of control. Locus of control was positively correlated with self-efficacy ($r = .252$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher locus of control was associated with greater self-efficacy. Similarly, optimism demonstrated a significant positive correlation with self-efficacy ($r = .275$, $p < .001$), showing that individuals with higher optimism tended to report higher self-efficacy.

Table No 3 Total effect, direct effect, and indirect effect through mediational analysis.

Total Effect (a*b+c)			Direct Effect (c)			Indirect Effect (a*b)				
Coeff	p	t-value	Coeff	p	t-value	Coeff	SE		Percentile bootstrap 95% confidence interval	
-.0366	.3388	-.9589	-.0147	.6927	-.3958				Lower	Upper
					Loc	-.0333	.0129		-.0610	-.0106
					Opt	.0113	.0145		-.0190	.0406

The table 7 shows the total effect coefficient is -.0366, which is not significant (p-value = .3388, $p > 0.001$). And 0.46 percent of change accounted for superstitious belief (independent variable) to self-efficacy (dependent variable) by the mediator's optimism and self-efficacy (mediators). The coefficient of direct effect is -.0147 which is not significant where the p-value is .6927, $p < 0.001$. And there is no effect between superstitious belief (independent variable) and self-efficacy (dependent variable). The coefficient of indirect effect by optimism is .0113 and the standard error is .0145 which is not significant. There is no zero in between the lower and upper confidence intervals (-.0610--.0106). The coefficient of indirect effect by locus of control is -.0333 and the standard error is .0129 which is significant and it is negative.

So, the direct effect between superstitious belief and self-efficacy is not significant. But the predictor variable or independent variable exerts its total influence via the mediating variable locus of control, not by the variable optimism. Hence, the locus of control is a mediator and there is a partial mediation.

**Figure 1: depicts the coefficient value and p-value of each path of variables.**

CONCLUSION

The findings from the mediational analysis revealed that there is no significant effect between superstitious belief and self-efficacy. From the mediators, optimism is not affecting the relationship between superstitious belief and self-efficacy. Hence, optimism is not a mediator. But locus of control represented the negative mediation effect between superstitious belief and self-efficacy. Individuals With high superstitious beliefs possess an external locus of Control. Individuals with low superstitious beliefs will affect an internal locus of control that was supported by previous studies such as studies on locus of control contributing to superstitious behavior by Shrivastav (2018), and Stanke (2004).

When the locus of control increases self-efficacy also increases. The findings show that people with an internal locus of control will have high self-efficacy in which the individual's belief in her capacity to execute behaviors to produce specific performance. Hence, the locus of control plays a mediator between superstitious belief and self-efficacy. And there is no moderation effect by optimism and locus of control in the relationship between superstitious belief and self-efficacy.

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