



Work Status shapes Locus of Control among Rural Indian Youth: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract: Employment matters greatly for youth development, especially in rural areas where job opportunities are limited and incomes are uncertain. This study examined how employment status affects locus of control (LoC), the belief that people can control life outcomes among rural youth in Dumka district, Jharkhand, India. The research was based on Rotter's (1966) social learning theory and cross-cultural research showing employment shapes psychological beliefs. The study tested whether employed youth would report higher internal LoC than unemployed youth (H1). A quantitative survey included 500 rural youth aged 22–36 years, stratified by employment status. Data were collected using a self-developed LoC Scale. Results showed a significant difference: employed youth reported higher internal LoC ($M=76.1$) compared to unemployed youth ($M=66.9$), $t(498)=7.21$, $p<.001$, with a medium-to-large effect size (Cohen's $d=0.62$). Employment strengthens personal agency and belief in personal control. Unemployment often reinforces external beliefs, particularly in rural India where structural barriers and limited job opportunities constrain individual choices. These findings suggest employment is both an economic and psychological necessity for rural youth. The study contributes to psychological theory and highlights the importance of targeted employment programs designed to build personal agency and mental health strength in rural communities.

Keywords: *Locus Of Control, Employment Status, Rural Youth, Psychological Agency, Cross-Cultural Psychology*

1. Introduction

Youth is a key stage when people transition into adult roles and responsibilities. During this time, they establish independence and economic security. Employment plays a crucial role in this transition. It provides income, structure, and personal growth opportunities. Arnett (2000) noted that late teens through the thirties are important years for exploring identity, relationships, and careers. Work shapes how young people feel about their agency and well-being.

Employment helps youth in several ways. It offers economic stability. It creates social status and community belonging. It strengthens the belief that effort produces results, building a sense of control over life (Jahoda, 1982; Warr, 1987). Unemployment, however, brings uncertainty, lost purpose, and lower self-worth. Long-term unemployment reduces confidence and creates the belief that life outcomes depend on external forces (Paul & Moser, 2009). Employment matters not just for money but as a setting for psychological growth.

Understanding Locus of Control

Locus of control (LoC) is central to understanding how work affects psychological development. Rotter (1966) introduced this concept. LoC means people's beliefs about whether life outcomes depend on their own actions (internal LoC) or on outside forces like chance or fate (external LoC). It is an important personality trait linked to motivation, decision-making, and well-being (Lefcourt, 1982).

People with internal LoC believe their efforts produce results. They solve problems actively, persist through difficulties, and show strong motivation to achieve (Findley & Cooper, 1983). People with external LoC credit outside factors for outcomes. This weakens self-confidence and promotes giving up (Weiner, 1985). Research shows internal LoC connects to academic success, job performance, better health, and greater well-being (Judge & Bono, 2001; Ng et al., 2006).

LoC matters most during life changes, like youth, when beliefs about control shape career choices, social adjustment, and strength to face challenges. Strong internal LoC helps young people pursue chances, overcome barriers, and handle uncertainties. External LoC may lead to helplessness, passivity, and low goals (Seligman, 1975).

How Employment Status Shapes Locus of Control

Employment is a powerful factor that shapes LoC. Rotter's (1966) social learning theory explains this. When people see their actions produce rewards (wages, praise), they believe outcomes are within their control. Employment strengthens internal beliefs. Without work, when effort seems unconnected to results, people see life as controlled by outside forces, creating external beliefs (Lefcourt, 1982).

Jahoda's (1982) theory adds more. Employment gives money and other benefits: daily structure, social ties, shared purpose, and personal identity. These benefits support internal beliefs and emotional strength. Without work, people lose these benefits, reducing confidence and increasing external beliefs. Warr (1987) noted that work offers elements like opportunity for control and skill use that directly support mental health.

Research supports these ideas. Paul and Moser (2009) reviewed 237 studies and found unemployment consistently harms mental health, lowers self-confidence, and increases external control beliefs. Studies show employed people report stronger internal LoC and life satisfaction than unemployed people (Judge & Bono, 2001; Ng et al., 2006). This shows employment shapes control beliefs in both economic and psychological ways.

The Rural Indian Context

Most research on LoC and employment comes from Western countries. Rural India faces different challenges. Areas like Dumka in Jharkhand have few jobs, depend on farming, and face structural inequality (Dreze & Sen, 2013). Rural youth struggle to find stable work due to poor infrastructure, limited schooling, and minimal industry.

Here, unemployment reflects not just personal limits but structural barriers. Few opportunities reinforce external beliefs. Young people see outcomes controlled by government decisions, economic forces, and social systems (Patel et al., 2007). Getting work—formal, informal, or farming—proves effort works and builds internal beliefs and confidence.

Rural youth follow collectivist values where family and community shape goals and identity (Misra & Mohanty, 2002). Employment strengthens personal control and meets social duties, increasing its value. Unemployment brings stigma and family stress, deepening external beliefs and mental health problems.

Why Dumka Matters

Dumka district in Jharkhand is agrarian with tribal populations and high poverty. Jobs outside farming are rare. Many youths leave for cities seeking work. This makes Dumka important for studying how employment shapes LoC.

This focus fills a *research gap*: rural, tribal, and poor populations are underrepresented in studies. Most research on LoC in India used urban, educated, middle-class groups (Misra & Gergen, 1993). Rural youth in Dumka show how structural limits and psychology interact in unique ways, offering new insights into employment and LoC.

1.1 Research Aims

Limited research examines employment and LoC in rural India, where job scarcity and structural inequality shape beliefs about control. Studies show links between poverty and mental health (Patel et al., 2007), but few examine how work status shapes LoC in rural youth.

This gap matters because LoC is shaped by social structures, not just psychology. Understanding how employment affects LoC in rural India can guide programs that boost both jobs and mental strength. This research is timely given India's large youth population facing employment challenges during rapid change.

This study examines whether employment status influences LoC among rural youth in Dumka, Jharkhand. It tests whether employed youth show stronger internal LoC than unemployed youth. The study addresses these questions: Do employed and unemployed youth differ in LoC? How does employment build internal beliefs in settings with few jobs? What does this mean for youth policy and rural development?

1.2 Objectives

The study had the following objectives:

- a) To examine whether there are significant differences in the levels of locus of control among rural youth based on their work status (employed vs. unemployed).
- b) To evaluate the direction and magnitude of these differences in order to understand the psychological impact of employment.

1.3 Hypothesis

Drawing from Rotter's (1966) theory of control expectancies and Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation theory, the following hypothesis was tested:

H1: *There will be significant differences in the levels of locus of control among youth with different work statuses (employed vs. unemployed) in Dumka district.*

This hypothesis predicts that employed youth will demonstrate significantly higher internal LoC compared to unemployed youth, reflecting the reinforcement of agency and self-efficacy through work experiences (Warr, 1987; Paul & Moser, 2009).

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The present study adopted a *comparative survey design* to investigate differences in locus of control (LoC) across rural youth based on their employment status. A survey approach was chosen as it allows for systematic collection of self-reported psychological data from a relatively large and diverse sample within natural community settings. The comparative design was particularly suited to the objective of contrasting employed and unemployed groups, ensuring that variations in LoC could be attributed to work status rather than incidental demographic differences. *Stratified sampling* ensured proportional representation of participants across socio-economic and cultural segments of Dumka district, thereby enhancing the generalizability of findings. The cross-sectional nature of the design enabled the study to capture a snapshot of psychological orientations at a given point in time, while the use of standardized measures provided reliability and validity to the assessment of LoC. This design thus balanced contextual relevance with scientific rigor.

2.2 Sample

A total of 500 rural youth, aged between 22 and 36 years, participated in the study. Participants were stratified based on employment status, ensuring representation from both employed and unemployed groups. Stratification was necessary to capture variability across the rural population, where socio-economic conditions and work opportunities are unevenly distributed.

2.3 Instrument and Procedure

Data were collected using Locus of Control Scale (M.K. Mallick, 2025), designed in line with Rotter's (1966) framework and adapted to rural Indian contexts. The scale included 24 items rated on a 5-point Likert format, with higher scores reflecting stronger internal LoC. Reliability testing yielded Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$, indicating strong internal consistency, while content and construct validity were established through expert review and factor analysis. Alongside, a demographic sheet captured age, gender, caste, and employment status. Surveys were administered both online via Google Form (65% participants) and face-to-face using printed questionnaires (35% participants) to ensure inclusivity.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 28. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, percentages) summarized sample characteristics. Independent samples *t*-tests compared LoC scores between employed and unemployed groups. Effect size was calculated using Cohen's *d* to estimate practical significance. Reliability analysis ensured scale consistency. Normality

checks and Levene's test confirmed assumptions. Significance levels were set at $p < .05$. Supplementary analyses included Pearson's correlations between demographics and LoC, though primary focus remained on testing H1. This rigorous statistical approach ensured validity and reliability of findings.

3. Results

The analysis tested *H1*, which proposed that there would be significant differences in locus of control (LoC) between employed and unemployed rural youth.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Locus of Control Scores by Employment Status*

Employment Status	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Employed	250	76.10	9.24
Unemployed	250	66.90	10.15

Note: Higher scores reflect stronger internal locus of control.

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of LoC scores for the two groups. As expected, employed youth reported higher internal LoC scores compared to unemployed youth. Employed participants demonstrated a mean score nearly 10 points higher than unemployed participants, indicating a marked tendency towards internality among those with work experience.

Group Comparisons

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine whether the difference between employed and unemployed youth was statistically significant. Results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Locus of Control by Employment Status*

Comparison	<i>t</i> (df)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Employed vs. Unemployed	7.21 (498)	< .001	0.62

Note. Two-tailed test, equal group sizes.

The analysis revealed a significant difference in LoC between employed and unemployed youth, $t(498)=7.21$, $p<.001$. The effect size ($d=0.62$) suggests a medium-to-large practical difference (Cohen, 1988), indicating that employment status substantially shapes control beliefs among rural youth.

4. Discussion

The study tested whether locus of control (LoC) differs based on employment status among rural youth. Results supported this hypothesis strongly. Employed youth showed higher internal LoC ($M=76.10$, $SD=9.24$) than unemployed youth ($M=66.90$, $SD=10.15$). This difference was statistically significant, $t(498)=7.21$, $p<.001$. The effect size ($d=0.62$) showed a medium-to-large practical difference.

The results are both statistically strong and psychologically important. The mean difference of nearly 10 points reflects a substantial gap in how rural youth view their control over life. For employed youth, work consistently reinforces the link between effort and results through wages and recognition. They believe their actions—skills, hard work, and choices—shape their outcomes.

Unemployed youth showed much lower internal beliefs, indicating stronger external orientations. They tend to credit success or failure to luck, fate, or forces beyond their control. This matches their lived experience in Dumka, where few jobs exist and structural barriers limit opportunities regardless of personal effort. Employment builds agency and confidence. Unemployment strengthens helplessness and passivity.

The effect size ($d=0.62$) emphasizes employment's role as a psychological force. Following Cohen's (1988) guidelines, this represents a medium-to-large effect. Employment status explains a meaningful share of LoC differences among rural youth. This shows work status shapes psychology profoundly, not just economics.

Connection to Existing Theory

The findings support major theoretical frameworks. Rotter's (1966) Social Learning Theory states that control beliefs form through reinforcement experiences. Employment gives consistent reinforcement through effort-outcome links, building internal beliefs. The results confirm this, showing employed youth report stronger internal LoC (Rotter, 1966).

Jahoda's (1982) Latent Deprivation Theory offers additional insight. Jahoda argued work provides more than income: daily structure, social connection, shared purpose, status, and purpose. Losing these during unemployment harms mental health and increases external beliefs. Dumka's unemployed youth, lacking both income and these benefits, showed weaker internal control beliefs (Jahoda, 1982).

Warr (1987) added that work settings offer chances for control, skill building, and outside goals. All these strengthen internal beliefs. Dumka's employed participants benefited from these factors even in modest informal work, explaining their stronger internal orientations.

Research worldwide supports these findings. Paul and Moser's (2009) review of 237 studies showed unemployment consistently harms mental health, lowers confidence, and increases external LoC. The present findings mirror this global pattern in rural India (Paul & Moser, 2009). Ng et al. (2006) showed internal LoC predicts job success, confirming the reciprocal link between work and internal beliefs.

Indian research validates these patterns. Patel et al. (2007) noted mental health risks for unemployed youth in poor areas. Misra and Gergen (1993) stressed how culture shapes personality traits like LoC; in rural collectivist settings, unemployment carries stigma that reinforces external beliefs. Dreze and Sen (2013) explained how rural poverty and unemployment create powerlessness, visible in external orientations. Seligman's (1975) learned helplessness theory adds that repeated exposure to uncontrollable events builds passivity and external beliefs. Dumka's unemployed youth, facing structural barriers and limited chances, likely experience such situations, explaining their external views.

This study's unique strength is its rural Indian focus. Most prior work examined urban or Western groups. The Dumka results show employment's LoC link is equally or more important in rural settings. The large mean difference and effect size suggest employment has particularly strong effects where jobs are scarce and unemployment is stigmatized.

Practical and Policy Implications

The findings matter for theory, practice, and policy. They support social learning, latent deprivation, and helplessness theories by showing employment in rural India actively shapes control beliefs. The findings extend these theories beyond their original urban-industrial contexts.

For practice, these insights suggest adding employment support to youth programs. Programs should emphasize skill-building, career guidance, and methods to strengthen internal beliefs. Mental health workers can use refraining and problem-solving to help unemployed youth build strength. Employed youth benefit from work that strengthens their sense of control.

Policy must view employment as both economic and psychological support. Programs offering skill training, rural jobs, and business opportunities boost both income and well-being. In areas like Dumka, expanding local work options and matching training to job needs can break cycles of helplessness. They can show how personal effort links to real results.

Future Research

Longitudinal research should track how employment status changes LoC over time. Qualitative studies can capture youth stories behind the numbers. Research comparing rural and urban areas would show how conditions shape the employment–LoC link. Crucially, future

work must examine how gender, caste, and ethnicity interact with employment and LoC in rural India.

Employment matters for survival and self-belief. For rural Dumka youth, work builds agency, confidence, and strength. Joblessness increases helplessness and external beliefs. These findings support established theories while grounding them in rural Indian reality. This offers both academic understanding and practical direction for building resilient youth generations.

5. Conclusion

The study examined whether employment status shapes LoC among rural Indian youth. Results supported this. Employed youth showed significantly higher internal LoC than unemployed youth. The effect size was medium-to-large. These findings confirm theories from Rotter (1966) and Jahoda (1982). They also fit rural India's real conditions.

Employment is more than just money. It is a psychological tool that builds agency, confidence, and strength. Unemployment strengthens external beliefs. It can trap people in cycles of helplessness and risk.

This study extends personality psychology research into rural, non-Western contexts. It highlights how culture and structure shape psychological development. The findings stress the need for employment policies and rural programs. These must build both jobs and people's sense of personal control.

Future research should examine different regions. Longitudinal studies tracking youth over time would help. Using multiple measures of control would provide deeper insights. This would show how work status shapes psychological growth in developing economies.

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