

# Paranormal Beliefs and Locus of Control among Young Adults

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**Abstract:** *The objective of the study was to find the relationship between paranormal beliefs and locus of control as to how an individual's locus of control affects their paranormal beliefs. Revised paranormal belief scale (Tobacyk, 2004). And locus of control scale (Rotter, 1996) was used. The scales were administered on 110 young adults (50 males and 60 females). Pearson Correlation was done using SPSS to find the relationship. As hypothesized, significant correlation showed relationship between: a) External locus of control and higher paranormal beliefs b) Internal locus of control and lower paranormal beliefs*

**Keywords:** paranormal beliefs; external locus of control; internal locus of control; young adults

## 1. Introduction

Did ever a black cat cross your path and you thought you have been doomed for the day? Did you trying avoiding any risk taking behaviors on Friday the thirteen? Or did you think wearing an amulet around your neck would make you lucky enough to instantly gain success and that same amulet would save you from any supernatural threat, and do you believe in aliens and the Loch Ness monster. If you involved in any above mentioned behaviors and actions or believe in those, you may be called a superstitious person, or a person who believes in paranormal. Individuals who hold such beliefs may be able to explain the phenomenon but they would not be able to logically explain the underlying scientific principles. . What makes and individual to hold strong beliefs in paranormal phenomena? What factors influence a person to actively participate in these behaviors?

The term paranormal is used to describe phenomena, which if found authentic violate basic limiting principles of science (Broad, 1949; Tobacyk, 1995). In simple words these are irrational beliefs that will lead to unnecessary anxiety which further will lead to reduced task performance. Paranormal beliefs have long captured researchers' attention and have been linked to many factors, considering few examples, superstitions has been found to be greater among girls, lower intelligence levels, and also in individuals with high levels of suggestibility (Zapf, 1945).

Paranormal beliefs are expressed stronger in women than among men. Higher scores by women on global measures of paranormal beliefs are reported by Irwin (1985), although no gender differences in accord with their paranormal beliefs was found by James (1977). gender differences can be observed on different dimensions of paranormal beliefs which are Traditional Religious Belief, Psi, Witchcraft, Superstition, Spiritualism, Extraordinary Life Forms, and Precognition.

Women tend to show higher beliefs under superstitions (Blum, 1976), reincarnation (Gray, 1990) and men show relatively stronger beliefs in existence of aliens (Clarke, 1991; Gray, 1990) and in extraordinary life forms such as the Loch Ness monster (Tobacyk & Milford, 1983; Tobacyk & Pirtilla Backman, 1992). Belief in witchcraft does not generally vary with gender (Emmons & Sobal, 1981; Scheidt, 1973), theorizes that the differences in the levels of paranormal beliefs across gender is a resultant of differences in attitude to science and religion.

Researches have stressed more on other correlates of paranormal beliefs, only few have associated relationship between paranormal beliefs and locus of control.

Locus of control can be the extent to which people believe their lives are controlled by the outcomes of events. Which can be further divided into external locus of control and internal locus of control. People who are believed to have an internal locus of control are in charge of their own decisions and do not blame it on external factor for any negative circumstances. Whereas people with external locus of control believe that occurrences in their life are controlled by external factors over which they do not have any control. Early research demonstrated a relationship between a more external locus of control and greater belief in paranormal phenomena (Tobacyk & Milford). Irwin (1994) in his study put forward that external locus of control is a resultant of people trying to overcome the uncontrollability of their lives.

### Need and significance of the study

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between paranormal beliefs and locus of control. In particular the question of whether an individual's degree of locus of control will affect the extremity of that individual's superstitious beliefs and behaviors will be examined. Future researches could be addressed toward the analysis of

influence of personality traits, resilience, self-efficacy, and purpose in life as essential facet of psychological wellbeing in young adults on paranormal beliefs about of psychological wellbeing in young adults on paranormal beliefs about superstition.

## 2. Review of literature

(Jerome J. Tobacyk, Ed Nagot, & Mark Miller, 1988) tried to find the relationships between paranormal beliefs and locus of control, using multidimensional operationalization of both constructs. The Paranormal Belief Scale (Tobacyk & Milford, 1983) and the Paulhus (1983) Spheres of Control Scale were administered 349 introductory college students. The results showed significant correlations between greater personal efficacy control and less belief in superstition also showed significant relationship between greater interpersonal control and less belief in superstition.

Robert W. Newby and Jessica Boyette Davis (2004) studied the association between scores on paranormal beliefs, locus of control, and certain psychological processes such as affect and cognitions as measured by linguistic inquiry and word count. A total of 132 university students enrolled in introductory psychology classes volunteered to participate. The data was collected 3 weeks apart Initially the participants were asked to write their deepest thought on the terrorists attacks on the world trade Centre. During the second session the participants were administered with Tobacyk's Revised Paranormal Beliefs Scale and Rotter's Locus of Control. Analysis revealed significant relationship of correlation between scores on locus of control and paranormal beliefs. Further a step wise regression was analyzed which revealed that locus of control was related to new age philosophy. Other correlations were found between Tobacyk's subscales, Locus of Control, and three processes measured by the Linguistic Inquiry and Wordcount. These studies have already provided an insight as to how there is a relationship between paranormal beliefs and locus of control. Not only this but these findings also have shown relationship between other dimensions of paranormal beliefs and other psychological processes with locus of control. Although the literature has been able to show relationship between external locus of control with paranormal beliefs, this paper will also focus upon the relationship between internal locus of control and paranormal beliefs.

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Research design

This study of paranormal beliefs and locus of control among young adults is a descriptive and correlational study is carried out among young adults aged between 18-35. The study consists of 110 young adult's age ranging between 18-35. The number of male participants was 50 and female participants was 60. Making use of purposive sampling technique, the questionnaires were circulated through Googleforms due to

the rise of pandemic and results were analyzed and interpreted.

### 3.2 Variables of the study

- 1) Paranormal beliefs
- 2) Locus of control (a) internal locus of control (b) external locus of control

### Operational definitions of the key concepts:

**Paranormal beliefs:** These are irrational beliefs that an individual holds in order to cope with Stressful Situations, for which they can provide an explanation but without any scientific base.

**Locus of control:** Locus of control can be the extent to which people believe their lives are Controlled by the outcomes of events

### Tools used for the study:

- 1) The Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Julian. B. Rotter, 1966)
- 2) A revised paranormal belief scale (Jerome. J. Tobacyk, 2004)

### Universe of the study:

Young adults from Karnataka, Tamilnadu, India

**Geographical area:** Bangalore urban, Shivmoga, Hormavu, Chintamani, Coimbatore, Mysore

### Objective of the study:

The objective was to find relationship between paranormal beliefs and locus of control

### Research question:

- Is there any significant relationship between paranormal beliefs and locus of control?
- Does an individual with an external locus of control have higher paranormal beliefs?
- Does an individual with internal locus of control have lower paranormal belief?

### Hypothesis

With reference to the relationship among the above-mentioned dimensions which are paranormal beliefs and locus of control it is predicted that (a) The individuals with external locus of control will possess higher degree of paranormal beliefs and (b) individuals with internal locus of control will have lower degree of paranormal beliefs.

### Statistical analysis:

- **Descriptive statistics:** mean, standard deviation
- **Inferential statistics:** Pearson correlation

- **Research ethic**the consent of the participant was obtained. Anonymity and confidentiality was maintained throughout.it was assured the current study would not possess any harm or threat to the participant.

**Procedure**

The participants data was collected through Googleforms, participants acknowledged their informed consent by completing the questionnaires. The constructs of paranormal beliefs and locus of control were assessed using the following scales. An insight into participant's paranormal beliefs was accessed using revised paranormal belief scale (Tobacyk, 2004). The scale includes questions such as `the number 13 is unlucky`, `there are actual cases of witchcraft`, `aliens do exist` etc. the scale consists of 26 items of two subscales: traditional paranormal beliefs and new age philosophy. Each item was rated by the participant on a likert scale ranging from one to seven, with one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree with a higher rating indicating stronger endorsement. Item 23 was reverse scored. The cronbach alpha score for the scale was found to be  $\alpha = .911$  which indicates very high reliability of the scale.

Rotter`s locus of control scale has 29 two response items. For each statement the participant must chose either of the statement that best represents his or her own belief as the same for which a participant must choose one of the two given statement such as `many of the unhappy things in people`s life are partly due to bad luck` versus` people`s misfortunes results from the mistakes they make, out of all 29 items there are six filler items. Items representing external choices are summed, yielding a range from 0 to 23. Higher scores indicate greater levels of external locus of control and low score indicates internal locus of control.

Data analysis was done using Pearson`s correlation. The correlation was performed to find relationship between paranormal beliefs and locus of control. Level of significance was also interpreted of the obtained correlation score

**4. Results and discussion**

**4.1 Results**

The reason of this study was to understand how an individual`s locus of control has an effect on their paranormal beliefs they hold and whether there is an existing relationship between the two variables.

**Table 1: Mean Scores**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Paranormal belief	110	113.00	24.501	2.336
Locus of control	110	13.00	4.523	.431

Descriptive statistics was used to interpret the result of paranormal beliefs and locus of control. Data analysis was done using SPSS (20).sample size was 110, to test for mean difference it was divided into mean and standard deviation of

descriptive statistics. Paranormal belief had a mean of 113.00 with a standard deviation of 24.501 and locus of control had a mean of 13.00 and standard deviation of 4.523

**Table 2: Scores on Pearson correlation**

		Paranormal belief	External locus of control	Internal locus of control
Paranormal belief	Pearson Correlation	1	.582**	-.582**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	110	110	110

\*\*p<0.01

The correlation was calculated between the variables that is paranormal beliefs and locus of control. Between paranormal beliefs and external locus there was a significant positive moderate correlation ( $r=.582, p<.0.1$ ) and significant negative moderate correlation ( $p<0.01$ ) between internal locus of control and paranormal belief. Results showed that more the young adults were externally locus of control believers, they held more paranormal beliefs, also participants who were internal locus of control believers; the less theybelieved in paranormal beliefs.

**4.2 Discussion**

Results of the current study showed a confirmation of the hypotheses according to which the internally locus of control participants expressed a low degree of belief in paranormal beliefs, consistently the externally locus of control of believers have put their faith in paranormal beliefs.table1 shows mean scores and standard deviation. Table 2 shows the finding of a significant correlation between an external locus of control and high belief in paranormal phenomena( $r=.582$ ) has supported the assumptions concluded by previous scholars, according to which there might be a strong link between the holding of paranormal beliefs and the need to cope with the uncontrollability of life. This finding also supports previous research in which an external locus of control was found to correlate with strong superstitious and paranormal belief (Belter & Brinkmann, 1981; Irwin, 1994; Groth-Marnat & Pegden, 1998; Peterson, 1978; Randall & Desrosiers, 1980; Scheidt, 1973). A moderate negative correlation was found between paranormal beliefs and internal locus of control ( $r= -.582$ ) which suggests that there is no strong direct relationship but it's certainly noticeable , These findings may reflect that they believe they are in charge of their life and that their own actions have an impact rather than any external event. A significance value of .000 suggests that the correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

**5. Conclusion**

These findings may reflect a strong religious individual`s tendency to ascribe life`s occurrences to external life events over which they have no control. If individuals with strong paranormal beliefs do find a need to cope with life`s uncontrollability, it is possible that these individuals might face to problems with self-concept. Future research might

examine such personal characteristics as self-esteem, self-efficacy, or a tendency for depression in individuals that hold belief in paranormal phenomena. Identifying the need in these individuals for using superstitious beliefs to deal with their feelings of lack of control may assist in the therapeutic process for depression or clients with low self-efficacy.

This study can be further used to examine other individual paranormal beliefs (sub-scales) and other possible related characteristics of these paranormal beliefs which help us to know as to how and why people hold irrational beliefs. Also after identifying the reasons we can further look for ways to help people who hold these irrational beliefs so that we can minimize or eliminate them to a certain extent that they do not interfere with or put a person's life at risk.

## 6. Limitation

- Gender differences were not studied
- Age of participants: the population size in terms of age is recognized as young adults (18-35) but many people may see it as 2 different groups such as youth and adults.
- Participants had to fill questionnaire online, this could have affected the concentration of the participants resulting in inaccurate responses.
- As the sample was taken from narrow geographical area it cannot be generalized to the whole population

## 7. Scope for Future Studies

- This study can be further used to examine other individual paranormal beliefs (sub-scales) and other possible related characteristics of these paranormal beliefs.
- By identifying the reason we can minimize or eliminate them to a certain extent that they do not interfere with or put a person's life at risk.

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