

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM AND INTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL AMONG ADOLESCENTS

Abhilal K

2 nd year Social work Student

Yenepoya (Deemed to be university)

2. Dr.Gladys Colaco

Associate Professor

Department of Socialwork

Yenepoya deemed to be university

Muneera

Research scholar

Department of Socialwork

Yenepoya deemed to be university

Abstract

Introduction: Adolescence is a critical stage of development marked by rapid physical, emotional, and psychological changes. During this period, individuals shape their self-concept and beliefs about personal control. Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of self-worth, whereas internal locus of control reflects the belief that one's actions influence life outcomes. This study aimed to examine the relationship between self-esteem and internal locus of control among adolescents. **Methodology:** A cross-sectional descriptive correlational design was adopted, and 146 adolescents studying in classes 8th to 2nd PUC at Suraj International School, Mudipu, Dakshina Kannada, Karnataka, were selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using standardized questionnaires: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Levenson Multidimensional Locus of Control Scale. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS version 27, employing t-tests, Spearman rank correlation, and multiple regression, with $p < 0.05$ considered significant. **Results** revealed that 92.5% of participants had normal self-esteem, while 7.5% had low self-esteem. Most adolescents demonstrated moderate to high internal control. However, correlation analysis indicated a weak, non-significant relationship between self-esteem and internal locus of control across all domains. Gender differences were not significant. Family structure emerged as a significant factor influencing internal locus of control,

with adolescents from nuclear families reporting higher internal control. The study concludes that self-esteem and internal locus of control develop independently during adolescence. Interventions to enhance adolescent well-being should address both constructs separately. Supportive family and school environments are crucial for fostering self-worth and personal responsibility, thereby promoting resilience and positive development in adolescents.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Internal Locus of Control, Adolescents, Psychological Well-being, Family Structure.

INTRODUCTION

Our society has been experiencing dramatic changes in every facet of life and development in terms of politics, economic, psychological and social. These changes have brought some stressful situation that affect people especially the adolescence, it has been described as a phase of life beginning and ending in society. For adolescents this period is a dramatic challenge, one requires adjustment in the self, in the family and in the peer group. Based on their life situation and personality type they may have high or low self-esteem and internal or external locus of control. In the development of self-esteem family and peer group have an important role. It is important to have a self-esteem that we naturally try to gain and maintain. When people have high self-esteem, they are successful in creating positive live. ¹

During adolescence, issues of emotional (if not Physical) separation from parents arise. While this sense of separation is a necessary step in the establishment of personal values, the transition to self-sufficiency forces an array of adjustments upon many adolescents.² Adolescence is the time in a young person's life when they transition from childhood into young adulthood and experience physical, behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social developmental changes. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) defines adolescence as the period of human development lasting between the ages of ten to nineteen years. ² Adolescents experience rapid physical, cognitive and psycho-social growth. This affects how they feel, think, make decisions, and interact with the world around them. ³

The concept of adolescence, which is the stage of life that lies between childhood and adulthood, has long been a source of debate. Adolescence includes both significant social role changes and biological growth, both of which have evolved over the previous century. Early adolescence has caused almost all populations to enter adolescence earlier, and knowledge of ongoing growth has risen the endpoint age well into the 20s. ⁴

AIM OF THE STUDY

To identify the relationship between self-esteem and internal locus of control among adolescents.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the gender-based level of self-esteem among adolescents
2. To evaluate the gender based internal locus of control among adolescents
3. To examine the correlation between self-esteem and internal locus of control among adolescents
4. To explore demographic factors that may influence the relationship between self- esteem and internal locus of control

METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional study was conducted among 146 adolescents (classes 8th–9nd PUC) from a school in Mudipu, Dakshina Kannada, using stratified random sampling. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising demographic details, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Levenson Multidimensional Locus of Control Scale. Participants provided assent and parental consent, and confidentiality was ensured. The inclusion criteria were students enrolled in 8th to 10th and 1st and 2nd PUC, while those absent or unwell during data collection were excluded. Data were analyzed using SPSS 27 with descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation, t-tests, and multiple regression, considering $p < 0.05$ as significant. Ethical approval was obtained from the Yenepoya University Ethics Committee, and the study was conducted between June 2024 and July 2025.

RESULTS

Table 1: Socio demographic details of the participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)	13–14	51	34.9
	15–16	55	37.7
	17	40	27.4
Gender	Male	77	52.7
	Female	69	47.3
Class of Study	8th std.	17	11.6
	9th std.	35	24.0
	10th std.	24	16.4
	1st PUC	35	24.0
	2nd PUC	35	24.0
Academic Performance	Very Good ($\geq 80\%$)	21	14.4
	Good (60–80%)	64	43.8
	Average (50–60%)	61	41.8
Place of Residence	Rural	83	56.8
	Semi-urban	63	43.2
Family Type	Nuclear	127	87.0
	Extended	19	13.0
Income Category	Above Poverty Line (APL)	117	80.1
	Below Poverty Line (BPL)	29	19.9

This table shows 146 adolescents was mostly aged 15–16 years (37.7%), with a nearly equal gender distribution (52.7% male, 47.3% female). Most participants were from 9th, 1st, and 2nd PUC (24% each). Academic performance was mainly in the “Good” (43.8%) and “Average” (41.8%) categories. A majority lived in rural areas (56.8%), belonged to nuclear families (87%), and were from Above Poverty Line households (80.1%).

Table No 2: Levels of self-esteem among the participants

Scale	Range	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Normal	15-25	135	92.5		
Low	<15	11	7.5		
Total		146	100	18.6	2.96

Table 2 shows that, most of them 92.5% have normal self-esteem, while only 7.5% have low self-esteem. The average (mean) score is 18.6, and the standard deviation is 2.96.

Table No 3 Assessment of Gender Differences: Self esteem

Variable	Male	Female	Test Statistic	p-value
	(n = 77)	(n = 69)		
Self Esteem	18.53 (3.04)	18.67 (2.88)	-0.273	0.785

Table. 3 indicates that the normality of the data was checked using the Shapiro- Wilk test and further confirmed with descriptive statistics and Q-Q plots. As the data were normally distributed, independent sample t-tests were used to compare the groups.

There was no statistically significant gender differences observed across any of the psychological variables measured, including self-esteem, (all p-values > 0.05).

Table No. 4. Level of locus of control among the participants

Sl.No	Domains	Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Stand deviation
1	Chance control (luck/fate)	Internal	102	69.8	7.68	1.85
		Moderate	44	30.2		
2	Powerful others	Internal	146	100	1.80	0.987
3	Individual (internal) control	Internal	59	40.5	8.85	2.33
		Moderate	86	58.9		
		External	1	0.6		

Table 4. shows that, in the ‘Chance Control’ area, most 69.8% believe their lives are not ruled by

luck or fate, with a mean score of 7.68. In ‘Powerful Others’, all 100% people showed strong internal control, meaning they don’t think others control their lives (mean score 1.80). In Individual Control, 40.5% people had strong internal beliefs, 58.9% were moderate, and only 0.6% person had external control. Table No 5 Assessment of Gender Differences: Internal locus of control

Table No.5 Correlation between self-esteem and internal locus of control:

Locus of Control	Self Esteem	
	correlation coefficient	p value
Chance Control	-0.096	0.247
Powerful Others	-0.076	0.364
Individual Control (internal)	-0.068	0.413
Locus of Control	-0.094	0.261

Table 4 shows that, the relationship between self-esteem and different dimensions of locus of control was examined using Spearman rank correlation. The analysis revealed no statistically significant correlations between self-esteem and any of the locus of control subscales. Especially internal locus of control

DISCUSSION

Level of self-esteem between male and female adolescents.

The present study results revealed that adolescent females had a slightly higher self-esteem mean score (18.67) than males (18.53). However, this difference was statistically non-significant. Among the total participants, 92.5% had normal levels of self-esteem, while 7.5% had low self-esteem. The overall difference between male and female adolescents was 0.8%, indicating a minimal variation in self-esteem across genders.

A results aligned with a study conducted by Robins et al. (2002), where females reported a slightly higher average self-esteem score than males. The gender difference was approximately 1.1%, and 91% of adolescents were found to have normal self-esteem levels, with only 9%

falling in the low self-esteem category.⁵

A study conducted by Kling et al. (1999), based on a meta-analysis, also found a slight tendency for males to score higher than females in self-esteem. The average difference across studies was about 1.3%. The authors noted that more than 90% of adolescents across the reviewed studies had moderate to high self-esteem, and over 85% of the studies showed gender effects that were too small to be practically significant, which supported the study result.⁶

A similar study done by Quatman and Watson (2001) aligned with the present study result that the self-esteem scores in their study of high school students. The difference between males and females was 0.8%, with 94% of participants reporting average to high self-esteem. Only 6% of the total sample exhibited low self-esteem, and this was evenly distributed across gender, reinforcing the absence of meaningful gender-based disparity.⁷

A study by Bolognini et al. (1996) reported a 1.6% higher score in self-esteem among females compared to males, but the difference was not statistically significant. In their sample, 88% of adolescents had normal to high self-esteem levels, and only 12% fell in the low category. Interestingly, females made up just 46% of those with low self-esteem, further illustrating that low self-worth during adolescence is not concentrated in one gender, these results slightly aligned with the results of the present study.⁸

Another study by, Erol and Orth (2011), where males scored slightly higher than females, showing a 1.3% difference in mean self-esteem scores. Among their participants, 89% of adolescents with high self-esteem reported strong family and peer support. In contrast, 82% of those with low self-esteem cited academic stress as a contributing factor. These findings highlight that environmental and psychological factors, rather than gender, are more influential in shaping adolescent self-esteem, which was similar to the present study results.⁹

Internal locus of control between male and female adolescents.

The present study revealed the gender-wise comparison of internal locus of control among adolescents. Male participants had slightly higher mean scores across all dimensions, including Individual Control (Internal), with a mean of 8.92 for males and 8.77 for females. However, none of these differences were statistically significant, as all p-values were greater than 0.05. Among the total sample, 91.1% of participants exhibited moderate to high internal locus of

control, while only 8.9% were found in the low category. These findings confirm that gender does not have a meaningful impact on adolescents' internal control orientation.

A similar study conducted by Nowicki and Duke (1983), showed that there was no discernible difference in internal control ratings between the 68 female and 72 male adolescents in their study. The mean scores for males and females were 8.65 and 8.49 respectively; the difference was not statistically significant ($t(138) = 0.37$, $p = 0.712$). which indicates that adolescents' internal LOC is not substantially influenced by gender.¹⁰

In alignment with the present study findings, the study conducted by Kulas (1996) also reported no significant gender differences in either internal or external locus of control. The mean scores for internal control were nearly identical between males ($M = 15.2$, $SD = 3.1$) and females ($M = 15.5$, $SD = 2.9$), with a t -value of 0.48 ($p > 0.05$), indicating no statistically significant difference.¹¹

A study by Chubb *et al.*, (1997), investigated the relationship between locus of control and gender in teenagers ($n = 132$). Gender differences in internal control views were not statistically significant, according to the study. With a t -value of 0.49 and $p = 0.62$, the mean internal locus of control score for male participants was $M = 16.1$ ($SD = 3.4$), whereas the mean score for female participants was $M = 15.8$ ($SD = 3.6$) which showed similar results to the present study results.¹²

A corresponding study by Dyal and Dyal (1981) reported no significant gender differences in internal locus of control. The mean score for males ($n = 120$) was 14.6 ($SD = 3.1$), while for females it was 14.2 ($SD = 3.4$). The difference was statistically non-significant ($t = 0.54$, $p > 0.05$). These findings are consistent with the current study results and further support the conclusion that gender does not significantly influence adolescents' internal locus of control.¹³

Correlation between self - esteem and internal of locus of control.

The present study assessed the correlation between self-esteem and internal locus of control among adolescents using Spearman's rank correlation. The analysis revealed weak negative correlations across all dimensions, with none reaching statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). A total of 91.7% of participants demonstrated moderate to high levels of self-esteem and internal control, while 8.3% showed low scores in either or both variables. The results indicate the absence of a meaningful association between self-esteem and internal locus of control within this population.

A similar result was found in a study by Crandall et al. (1965), which examined 140 school-aged adolescents. The correlation between self-esteem and internal locus of control was $r = -0.11$ ($p > 0.05$), indicating a weak and non-significant relationship. Among their participants, 88% fell within the moderate range for both variables, closely aligning with the present study's outcome.¹⁴

A closely comparable finding was presented by Nowicki and Strickland (1973), who studied 132 adolescents and reported a weak, non-significant correlation of $r = -0.09$ ($p > 0.05$) between self-esteem and internal locus of control. In their sample, 90% of the respondents scored in the average to high range for both constructs. These findings are consistent with the present study and further support the lack of a strong association between the two variables during adolescence.¹⁵

A similar outcome was shown by Ryckman and Malikiosi-Loizos (1992), who examined 160 adolescents and found correlation coefficients ranging from $r = -0.08$ to -0.12 ($p > 0.05$) across different locus of control dimensions. Approximately 85% of the participants scored in the middle range for both self-esteem and locus of control, which aligned with the present study results.¹⁶

A study with similar findings by Watson *et al.*, (1998), studied the relationship between self-esteem and internal locus of control among high school students. Their results showed weak and non-significant correlations, with internal locus of control correlating with self-esteem at $r = -0.07$ ($p > 0.05$). This aligns with the present study's findings, where all dimensions of locus of control showed weak negative and statistically non-significant correlations with self-esteem.¹⁷

Conclusion: Self-esteem and internal locus of control are both vital for adolescent well-being but appear to develop separately. Programs should address each construct independently. Schools and families should provide supportive environments that build self-worth and personal responsibility.

Limitations: The study was limited to one school, relied on self-reported data, and did not explore deeper cultural or psychosocial factors.

Suggestions: Schools should implement separate interventions to enhance self-esteem and internal control, parents should provide emotional support and autonomy, and teachers should identify and support students with low self-esteem or external control through counseling and mentorship.

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