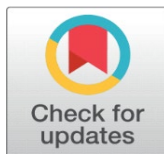


PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND LOCUS OF CONTROL OF ADOLESCENTS IN NATURAL DISASTER AFFECTED AREA OF KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Natural disasters can profoundly affect adolescents, disrupting their psychological and social development. This study explores the relationship between perceived social support and locus of control among adolescents in natural disaster-affected areas of Kerala, India. Data were collected from 600 adolescents aged 16–20 years residing in districts severely impacted by natural calamities such as floods and landslides. A quantitative approach was employed, utilizing standardized questionnaires to assess the extent of perceived social support and locus of control. Results indicate that higher levels of social support correlate strongly with an internal locus of control, which is associated with better emotional resilience and coping mechanisms. The study also found that there is a gender difference in perceived social support and locus of control with male adolescents exhibit higher social support thereby internal locus of control than female adolescents.

Keywords: Perceived Social Support, Locus of Control, Adolescents, Natural Disasters, Kerala

1. INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters such as floods, landslides, and cyclones are recurring events in Kerala due to its geographic and climatic conditions (Kuriakose, Sankar & Muraleedharan, 2009). Natural disasters have profound and far-reaching consequences that impact individuals, communities, economies, and ecosystems (Bonanno et al., 2010). The human and social toll is devastating, with the loss of life being one of the most immediate and tragic outcomes (Alexander, 2018). Survivors of the calamities face physical injuries which lead to the feelings of distress and helplessness (Kar, 2006). Displacement is a significant consequence of disasters (Rajeev, 2016), as many people lose their homes and are forced into temporary shelters or refugee situations. Economically, natural disasters cause extensive damage to property and infrastructure, including homes, roads, bridges, and public facilities, necessitating costly repairs (Chaudhary & Piracha, 2021). Livelihoods are also severely affected (Uddin et al., 2021), as farms, businesses, and industries are destroyed, which may cause to unemployment and Abhilash Joseph, Dr: Megha Manisha Sharma increased poverty. The damage to critical infrastructure, such as power lines, water systems, and communication networks, disrupts essential services in disaster affected area (Kadri, Birregah & Châtelet, 2014).

These disasters not only disrupt physical infrastructure but also have profound psychological (Morganstein & Ursano, 2020) and social (Arcaya, Raker & Waters, 2020) impacts, particularly on vulnerable groups such as adolescents. One common effect is the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bromet et al., 2017). Many adolescents experience heightened levels of anxiety and depression due to uncertainty and upheaval in their post-disaster lives (Gibbs et al., 2015). These psychological effects of disasters can linger for years thereby disaster affected population could develop severe psychological disorders in later phase of life. Since schools are often destroyed or repurposed as emergency shelters adolescents may face disruptions in their education and social networks, such as friends, schools, and community activities (Peek, 2008). Adolescents often rely on these networks for emotional support and stability (Cotterell, 2013). In the absence of these structures, they may feel isolated and disconnected, increasing the risk of developing mental health issues. Behavioral changes are another significant effect of natural disaster (Molua, 2021). Some adolescents may exhibit anger, aggression, or risk-taking behaviors as a way of coping with their distress (Sugar, 2016). Others may withdraw from social interactions, lose interest in previously enjoyed activities, or struggle academically due to difficulty concentrating and persistent emotional distress (Speier, 2006). These changes can also impact their relationships and educational outcomes in the long term. Adolescents, as they navigate a critical period of growth and development, are more susceptible to the adverse effects of disasters. Factors such as displacement, loss of property, interruption of education, and the trauma of witnessing destruction can lead to psychological stress (Norris & Wind, 2009). One of the important key constructs that influence adolescents' capacity to cope with these challenges is perceived social support (Dumont & Provost, 1999, Gottlieb, 2017).

Perceived social support refers to an individual's belief in the availability and adequacy of emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance from family, friends, and other social networks (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010). Social support plays a vital role in the recovery and well-being of adolescents in natural disaster-affected areas (Gibbs et al., 2021). Social support acts as a protective factor, helping adolescents cope with the challenges and uncertainties they face in such situations (Bhadra, 2022). One of the key needs for social support is to mitigate the psychological effects of disasters. Support from family, friends, and community members provides emotional reassurance and a sense of security, helping adolescents process their experiences and reduce feelings of isolation (Vernberg et al., 2016). Social support fosters resilience by encouraging adaptive coping strategies, promoting a sense of hope, and providing a safe space to express emotions (Khan & Sultan, 2023). The importance of social support also extends to meeting practical and educational needs. In disaster-affected areas, adolescents may face disruptions in schooling (Hebebe, 2023), loss of basic necessities, and economic hardship (Fothergill, 2017). Social networks, including community and relief organizations, can bridge these gaps by offering resources such as food, shelter, and access to education. This support not only helps maintain their developmental trajectory but also reinforces their sense of normalcy and stability during chaotic times. Social support strengthens adolescents' capacity for rebuilding their lives and communities. Positive interactions within a supportive environment empower them with a sense of agency and belonging, fostering self-confidence and optimism for the future. Peer support, in particular, can be crucial as adolescents often rely on their peers for validation and shared understanding of their experiences.

Locus of control is a psychological concept that refers to an individual's belief about the extent to which they can control events and outcomes in their lives (Nowicki & Duke, 2016). It is broadly categorized into two types: internal locus of control, where individuals believe they can influence outcomes through their actions and efforts, and external locus of control, where outcomes are perceived as being determined by external forces such as fate, luck, or powerful others (Lefcourt, 2013). Adolescents living in natural disaster-affected areas often face unique psychological challenges that can significantly shape their locus of control. The unpredictability and overwhelming nature of disasters can lead many to develop an external locus of control, feeling powerless in the face of such events. Several factors influence this shift. Trauma, stress, and loss caused by disasters can make adolescents feel that their lives are dictated by uncontrollable forces. On the other hand, the presence of strong social support systems, such as family, peers, and community networks, can foster resilience and help them maintain an internal locus of control. Adolescents with effective coping mechanisms are more likely to feel empowered, while those with poor coping skills may lean toward external attribution. Understanding and supporting the locus of control in adolescents in disaster-affected areas is essential for fostering resilience, self-efficacy, and overall psychological well-being.

Understanding how adolescents perceive social support during such critical periods is essential, as it plays a vital role in buffering stress and fostering resilience. Their locus of control—whether they attribute control over life events to themselves or external factors—impacts their ability to cope and adapt in the aftermath of disasters. Studying the

interplay between perceived social support and locus of control in this context provides valuable insights into the psychological and social needs of adolescents and helps inform intervention strategies. This study aims to investigate the interplay between these two constructs among adolescents in Kerala's disaster-affected areas, with a view to identifying strategies to enhance their resilience and well-being.

2. BACKGROUND STUDIES

Research consistently shows that adolescents are one of the most affected groups in disaster scenarios (Kousky, 2016). The disruption of routines, separation from family members, and exposure to traumatic events can result in psychological anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kar & Bastia, 2006). Perceived social support has been identified as a protective factor in disaster contexts. Studies have demonstrated that adolescents who perceive greater support from family, peers, and community members report lower levels of psychological distress and higher levels of satisfaction with life (Alshammari et al., 2021). Locus of control plays a critical role in shaping an individual's response to adversity (Ryon & Gleason, 2014). An internal locus of control—where individuals believe they can influence outcomes through their actions—is associated with proactive coping strategies and greater resilience. Conversely, an external locus of control—where individuals attribute events to fate or external circumstances—may lead to feelings of helplessness and passivity (Gore, Griffin & McNierney, 2016). Although extensive research exists on the psychological impacts of disasters, studies focusing specifically on the combined role of perceived social support and locus of control among adolescents in the Indian context, particularly in Kerala, are limited. Most studies address these variables in isolation (Kar, 2009), neglecting the cultural and socio-environmental nuances that influence adolescent coping mechanisms in disaster-affected regions. The study hypothesizes that there is no significant relationship between perceived social support and locus of control among adolescents in natural disaster-affected areas of Kerala. Furthermore, it assumes that there is no significant difference in perceived social support among adolescents based on gender in these regions. These hypotheses aim to explore the interplay between adolescents' perceived levels of social support and their locus of control, while also examining whether gender influences the perception of social support in the context of natural disasters.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative, descriptive-correlational design to explore the relationship between perceived social support and locus of control among adolescents in natural disaster-affected areas of Kerala. It also investigates differences in perceived social support and locus of control based on gender. This approach allows for the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data to address the research objectives. The target population consists of adolescents aged 16–20 years residing in districts of Wayanad and Kozhikode which are often affected by natural disasters. A stratified random sampling technique used to ensure representation from these two districts. The sample size of the study was 600 participants which determined based on statistical considerations to ensure adequate power for the analysis. The study selected adolescents who have experienced at least one natural disaster within the past five years and are willing to participate. Data collected through structured questionnaires administered in person in participants' locality. Consent has been obtained from both the participants and their parents or guardians before data collection. Participants completed the survey in a supervised setting to ensure the quality and consistency of responses.

The data collection process involved administering the following scales.

- 1) **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS):** The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) is a psychometric tool developed by Zimet, Dahlem, and Zimet, (1988) to measure perceived social support from three specific sources: Family, Friends, and Significant Others. The MSPSS consists of 12 items, with four items allocated to each of the three subscales. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate greater perceived social support. The MSPSS demonstrates high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.85 for the scale. The scale has robust construct validity and has been validated across diverse populations, including adolescents, adults, and clinical groups. Factor analysis supports its three-dimensional structure.
- 2) **Locus of Control Scale (LOCS):** The Locus of Control Scale (LOCS), developed by Julian B. Rotter in 1966, is a widely used psychological instrument designed to measure an individual's perceived control over events in their life, categorized as either internal (belief in personal control) or external (belief in control by external forces).

The scale consists of 29 forced-choice items, including 6 filler items intended to minimize response bias. Each item presents two statements, and the respondent selects the one that best aligns with their beliefs. Responses indicative of external locus of control are scored as 1 point, while those reflecting internal locus of control are scored as 0, resulting in a total score range of 0 to 23 (excluding filler items). Higher scores indicate a more external orientation; whereas lower scores suggest an internal orientation. The LOCS has demonstrated strong psychometric properties. Its construct validity is supported by its ability to distinguish between individuals based on their tendencies to attribute control internally or externally. The reliability of the scale is well-established, with test-retest reliability coefficients ranging from 0.49 to 0.83 across various time intervals and moderate internal consistency due to the diversity of item content.

The data analysis process commenced with data cleaning, which addressed missing values and outliers to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the dataset. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were calculated for demographic variables, perceived social support scores, and locus of control scores, providing a comprehensive demographic profile of the sample. For inferential statistics, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between perceived social support and locus of control. Additionally, independent samples t-tests were conducted to explore differences in perceived social support and locus of control based on gender.

4. RESULT

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between perceived social support and locus of control among adolescents residing in natural disaster-affected areas of Kerala. A total of 600 adolescents participated in the study. The demographic analysis revealed that 58% were male with mean age of 18.06 (SD = 1.82), and 42% were female with mean age of 17.56 (SD = 16.94). The mean score for perceived social support among the participants was 49.08 (SD = 19.8). Among the sub-dimensions, support from family was rated the highest (mean = 51.25) followed by support from friends (mean = 47.83) and significant others (mean = 36.96). On other hand, the mean locus of control score was 8.10 (SD = 2.929).

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PSS	49.08	6.198	600
LOC	8.10	2.929	600

To examine the relationship between Perceived Social Support (PSS) and Locus of Control (LOC) among adolescents in natural disaster-affected areas of Kerala, a Pearson correlation test was conducted. The data included a total of 600 participants. The analysis revealed a strong negative correlation between PSS and LOC, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = -0.855$. This correlation was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. The negative correlation suggests that adolescents who perceive higher levels of social support tend to have a more internal locus of control, meaning they are more likely to believe that they have control over their own actions and outcomes. On the other hand, adolescents with lower perceived social support are more likely to exhibit an external locus of control, attributing outcomes to external factors such as luck, fate, or external circumstances. This strong relationship underscores the critical role that social support systems play in influencing the psychological orientation of adolescents in disaster-affected areas. It suggests that enhancing social support may empower adolescents to develop a stronger sense of agency and personal responsibility, which can be crucial for their psychological resilience and overall adjustment in challenging environments.

Correlations			
		PSS	LOC
PSS	Pearson Correlation	1	-.855
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	600	600

LOC	Pearson Correlation	-.855	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	600	600
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the Locus of Control (LOC) and Perceived Social Support (PSS) scores between male and female adolescents in natural disaster-affected areas of Kerala. The purpose of this analysis was to determine whether gender differences exist in these psychological variables. The results showed that the mean Locus of Control (LOC) score for males ($M = 8.97$, $SD = 3.977$) was significantly lower than the mean LOC score for females ($M = 14.28$, $SD = 3.869$). The independent t-test demonstrated that this difference was statistically significant ($t(598) = -24.12$, $p < 0.001$). A lower LOC score indicates a more internal locus of control, whereas a higher LOC score reflects a more external locus of control. These findings suggest that males are more likely to perceive control over events and outcomes as being within their personal influence, showing a more internal locus of control. In contrast, females are more inclined to attribute control to external factors such as luck, fate, or external circumstances, indicating a more external locus of control. The analysis of Perceived Social Support (PSS) scores revealed that males had a significantly higher mean score ($M = 51.99$, $SD = 4.287$) compared to females ($M = 43.19$, $SD = 5.097$). The t-test confirmed that the difference in means was statistically significant ($t(598) = 28.73$, $p < 0.001$). Higher PSS scores indicate greater perceived social support. These results suggest that males perceive significantly stronger social support networks compared to females in disaster-affected areas. This disparity might reflect gender-specific differences in the availability, perception, or utilization of social support resources.

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
LOC	Male	348	8.97	3.977	.120
	Female	252	14.28	3.869	.170
PSS	Male	348	51.99	4.287	.259
	Female	252	43.19	5.097	.262

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	Sig. (P)
Locus of Control (LOC)	Male	348	8.97	3.977	0.120	-24.12	0.000
	Female	252	14.28	3.869	0.170		
Perceived Social Support (PSS)	Male	348	51.99	4.287	0.259	28.73	0.000
	Female	252	43.19	5.097	0.262		

The significant difference in LOC scores between males and females suggests that gender plays a role in shaping the way adolescents perceive control over their lives. Females' more external locus of control may reflect heightened feelings of helplessness or lack of agency, which could be attributed to social, cultural, or situational factors prevalent in disaster-affected areas.

The significantly higher PSS scores among males indicate that they perceive stronger social support compared to females. This difference may result from gender norms and expectations that influence social support networks, with males possibly having greater access to or recognition of support from family, friends, and community.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed a strong and statistically significant negative correlation between Perceived Social Support (PSS) and Locus of Control (LOC) among adolescents in natural disaster-affected areas of Kerala ($r = -0.855$, $p < 0.001$). This result indicates that adolescents with higher levels of perceived social support are more likely to exhibit an

internal locus of control, while those with lower perceived support tend to have an external locus of control. These findings provide valuable insights into the psychological dynamics of adolescents in the context of disaster recovery. Social support is widely recognized as a crucial protective factor for psychological well-being, particularly in disaster contexts. Higher levels of perceived social support can buffer the negative effects of stress, foster a sense of belonging, and enhance coping capacities (Hostinar & Gunnar, 2015; Nowicki, 2008). In the current study, adolescents who perceived strong social support networks from family, friends, or significant others were more likely to believe in their ability to influence outcomes in their lives, reflecting a stronger internal locus of control. An internal locus of control is associated with greater resilience, self-efficacy, and adaptive coping strategies (Türk-Kurtça & Kocatürk, 2020). These traits are particularly important for adolescents navigating the challenges of post-disaster environments, where uncertainty and resource constraints are common. In contrast, adolescents with lower perceived social support may feel isolated and powerless, contributing to an external locus of control, which is linked to increased vulnerability to stress, anxiety, and depression.

The strong negative correlation observed in this study highlights the interconnected nature of perceived social support and locus of control. It suggests that social support interventions can significantly influence adolescents' psychological orientation. For example, providing consistent emotional, informational, and instrumental support can help adolescents feel more in control of their circumstances, even in the face of adversity. This relationship underscores the importance of strengthening support systems in disaster-prone areas. Programs aimed at bolstering community cohesion, fostering family support, and promoting peer networks can serve as a foundation for empowering adolescents and encouraging an internal locus of control. These initiatives not only enhance individual well-being but also contribute to community resilience in disaster recovery processes. Natural disasters often disrupt social structures and erode support networks, leaving adolescents particularly vulnerable to psychological distress (Bonanno et al., 2010). In such scenarios, the availability and perception of social support become critical determinants of mental health outcomes. This study's findings align with previous research, which emphasizes that social support mitigates the impact of trauma and enhances adaptive functioning in disaster-affected populations (Bonanno et al., 2007). The role of locus of control in disaster recovery also warrants attention. Adolescents with an internal locus of control are more likely to engage in proactive behaviors, seek solutions, and adapt to challenging situations (Gomez, 2003). Conversely, an external locus of control may hinder recovery efforts by fostering a sense of helplessness and reliance on external factors, which can prolong distress and impede adjustment.

Another output of this study revealed a significant gender differences in Locus of Control (LOC) and Perceived Social Support (PSS) among adolescents residing in natural disaster-affected areas of Kerala. The findings provide important insights into gender-specific psychological orientations and the dynamics of social support utilization in challenging environments. The study found that males exhibited a more internal locus of control ($M = 8.97$, $SD = 3.977$) compared to females, who showed a more external locus of control ($M = 14.28$, $SD = 3.869$). This difference was statistically significant ($t(598) = -24.12$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that gender plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of control over life events and outcomes. The observed gender disparity in locus of control may be influenced by sociocultural and environmental factors. In patriarchal societies like India, males are often socialized to take on leadership roles, make decisions, and assume greater autonomy, all of which reinforce an internal locus of control. On the other hand, females may face societal constraints that limit their decision-making power and independence, thereby fostering an external locus of control. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to empower female adolescents, fostering a sense of control and agency. Programs focusing on skill-building, leadership training, and decision-making abilities can help shift perceptions from external to internal locus of control, enhancing psychological resilience in disaster-affected contexts. The study also revealed that males reported significantly higher Perceived Social Support (PSS) ($M = 51.99$, $SD = 4.287$) compared to females ($M = 43.19$, $SD = 5.097$), with the difference being statistically significant ($t(598) = 28.73$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that males perceive stronger and more accessible support networks than females in disaster-affected areas. Higher levels of perceived social support are linked to lower psychological distress, better coping mechanisms, and improved adjustment outcomes (Roohafza et al., 2014). The gender difference observed in this variable may reflect differences in the availability, perception, and utilization of support resources. Males in disaster-affected areas might have greater freedom and opportunities to access support networks, whether through peer groups, community programs, or other social structures (Erman et al., 2021). In contrast, females may encounter cultural or structural barriers that limit their access to social support. Traditional gender roles often place greater expectations on females to prioritize caregiving and household responsibilities, which may leave them with limited time and resources to seek external support. These findings highlight the importance of addressing gender-based disparities in social support

systems. Interventions should focus on enhancing support networks for females, including community-based programs, peer support groups, and initiatives that address cultural barriers to help-seeking behavior. Family-centered approaches that emphasize shared responsibilities and equitable support can also help reduce the gender gap in perceived social support.

6. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical interplay between perceived social support and locus of control among adolescents in natural disaster-affected areas of Kerala, India. The findings highlight that adolescents who perceive higher levels of social support are more likely to exhibit an internal locus of control, enabling them to demonstrate greater emotional resilience and effective coping strategies in the face of adversity. This suggests that fostering supportive networks within families, schools, and communities can play a pivotal role in enhancing adolescents' psychological well-being and adaptive capacities during post-disaster recovery. The observed gender differences reveal that male adolescents tend to report higher levels of perceived social support and a stronger internal locus of control compared to their female counterparts. This disparity underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the specific challenges faced by female adolescents, ensuring equitable access to support systems and resources that bolster their resilience and self-efficacy. The study emphasizes the importance of nurturing social support systems and promoting internal locus of control as key strategies for empowering adolescents to navigate the challenges posed by natural disasters effectively. Policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals should prioritize these factors in designing interventions that address the unique needs of disaster-affected adolescents, thereby fostering their long-term psychological and social development.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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