

Original Research Article

Locus of Control, Dyadic Coping and Relationship Satisfaction: A Correlational Study in Married Couples

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Received: 10.01.2022

Accepted: 15.02.2022

Published: 19.02.2022

Journal homepage:<https://www.easpublisher.com>**Quick Response Code**

Abstract: Individuals' perceptions of stressful situations differ. Time and again one's stress gets spilled onto the partner and vice-versa, which eventually affects their relationship. This research was aimed at studying the relationship between locus of control, dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction among married couples. The sample consisted of 52 heterosexual married couples (104 individuals- 52 males and 52 females) from India. Locus of Control Scale by Terry Pettijohn, Dyadic Coping Inventory by Guy Bodenmann and Relationship Satisfaction Scale by David Burns were used in the study. Correlation analysis was completed using SPSS software. Results showed a high positive correlation between dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction, and low positive correlations between locus of control and relationship satisfaction; and locus of control and dyadic coping. The results were statistically significant. No significant differences were observed between genders.

Keywords: Locus of control, dyadic coping, relationship satisfaction, marriage, stress.

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INTRODUCTION

There are different ways in which people view a stressful situation. Some believe that they hold the ability to control and change the stressful situation and some don't. When married, one cannot stay in complete isolation from the stressors in partner's life. Ability to resolve a problem together or help is partner to find a solution one's one of the important factors of relationship satisfaction. Since stress spillover is common in relationships, individual's perception of the stressful situations also plays an important role in the amount of satisfaction that they derive from the relationship.

The concept of Locus of Control (LOC) was proposed by Julian Rotter (1954) which measures how people relate to certain situations in their lives. Locus of control is the tendency of people to believe that the control of situations lies either inside or outside of their control. These beliefs develop based on reinforcements and punishments. If doing a task a certain way leads to successful outcome, one maybe feel that he has control over the situation (Internal Locus of Control). But if the outcome is unpleasant, individual turns to look for factors outside of his control that led to such a result (External Locus of Control).

Locus of Control was developed as a part of Social Learning Theory (SCT). SCT was developed as a response to the psychoanalytic theory provided by Freud and has proposed some characteristics of people with internal and external locus of control. People with internal LOC are likely to take responsibility for their actions and believe that they hold control to change the situation. They are less influenced by the opinions of others and perform better when working at their own pace. They have higher self-confidence than people with external LOC in case of adversity and report being independent. Due to their problem focused style of working, people with internal LOC are better at handling stressful situations. In contrast, people with external LOC blame outside forces for their circumstances and often credit luck or chance for any success they achieve. They feel helpless and believe that they cannot change the situation. They are more prone to experiencing learned helplessness. The stressors in the environment are thus perceived different by people, at times based on their past experiences with it. When couples have different locus of controls, the decision making and problem solving process can get complicated as both perceive the situation very differently. The stressors that need to be dealt by both

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can thus be the pain points in the relationship leading to less satisfaction from the partner. The concept of dyadic coping primarily focuses on the way couples deal with situations where one or both the partners are stressed.

Dyadic coping has been extensively studied in last two decades as one of the core factors in relation to stress management in couples. 'Dyad' means group of two people. Dyadic couple is any couple who are in committed, intimate relationship. The Systematic Transactional Model proposed by Bodenmann (1995, 1997) defines dyadic coping as an interactional pattern - consisting of strains that affect one of the partners or the dyad as well as the efforts used by one or both partners to handle stressful events. It is a joint process of a couple responding to an individual stressor of one or both the partners. Bodenmann has given four aspects of dyadic coping- Cognitive (individual and dyadic appraisal of stress and coping resources, individual and dyadic goals), Emotional (shared emotions and co-regulation of emotions), Physiological (shared arousals, impact of dyadic coping on endocrine processes) and Behavioral aspects and processes (overt stress management activities, active listening to the partner's stress-related self-disclosure, and non-verbal support behaviors like holding each other, hugging, giving a massage, active joint problem solving) (Papp & Witt, 2010).

Dyadic coping is comprised of the stress signals of one partner, the verbal or nonverbal coping responses of the other partner, and joint coping efforts, and includes both positive and negative components (Bodenmann, 2005; Bodenmann & Cina, 2005). Strategies of positive dyadic coping have been explained as- first, Supportive dyadic coping- which involves one partner helping the other to manage the stressful event. This can consist of concrete help with tasks and showing empathy towards the partner's stress, showing attention and in helping to reframe the situation, showing belief in the partner's capabilities, etc. (Bodenmann, 1997). Second, Delegated dyadic coping where one partner takes over certain tasks and duties of the other in an effort to reduce the stress experienced by the partner. The partner is explicitly asked to give support, and a new division of contributions by both the partners to the coping process is established (Bodenmann, 1997). Third, Common dyadic coping, which refers to both partners jointly working to resolve the stressful situation together either in a problem-focused manner or emotion-focused manner (Bodenmann, 1997).

Negative dyadic coping strategies are Ambivalent Coping and Hostile coping. In ambivalent coping, one partner supports the other or involves in the process of dyadic coping but does so unwillingly, without any interest or motivation. The partner requiring support may be labeled as incompetent, inferior or less attractive. These cognitions and feelings

are not expressed verbally, but through non-verbal cues. Hostile coping occurs when the stress signals of one partner elicit hostile comments by the other which can take the form of disparagement, distancing mocking or sarcasm, open disinterest, minimizing seriousness, etc. (Bodenmann, 1997).

A good working relationship can be a significant resource to cope with difficult life situations and stress, and may contribute to partners' well-being and healthy lifestyle (Vajda & Makó, 2014; Dush, Taylor & Kroeger, 2008). Keizer (2014) defines relationship satisfaction as the subjective evaluation of one's relationship and not a property of a relationship. Members of the same couple may differ in how satisfied they feel from the relationship (Keizer, 2014). Researchers on close relationships recognize that relationship quality varies as a function of both people's individual dispositions and their relationship-specific behavior and feelings (e.g. Holmes & Rempel, 1985). Research has shown that relationship satisfaction is not a topic in isolation, but also a key component in life satisfaction (Heller, Watson, & Iles, 2004). The greater relationship satisfaction, the lesser the instability in relation (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Higher relationship satisfaction is also positively correlated to individual physical and mental well-being (e.g., Beach, Katz, Kim, & Brody, 2003; Kiecolt-Glaser *et al.*, 2005; Proulx, Helms & Buehler, 2007). Couples satisfied with the relationship are better at dealing with stressful situations and can extend support to their partner if needed. The quality of marriage or partnership has an impact on many areas of life. Consequently, a good working relationship can be a significant resource to cope with difficult life situations and stress, and may contribute to partners' well-being and healthy lifestyle (Vajda & Makó, 2014).

Wang-Sheng Lee conducted a longitudinal study during the years 2001-2017 on Australian sample to investigate the effect of one's own and partner's locus on control on marital satisfaction. He also examined the evolution of marital satisfaction over the years as dependent upon LOC. It was found that more internal LOC is associated with higher marital satisfaction and that own LOC matters more for marital satisfaction than spouse's LOC. Couples with more externally oriented husband experience decline in marital satisfaction over time relative to couples in which the husband is more internally oriented (Lee & McKinnish, 2019).

In the study conducted by Sawai *et al.* (2018) to examine the relationship between marital satisfaction and marital stability among newly-weds among Malaysian population, negative correlation was found between external locus of control and marital satisfaction but no significant correlation between external locus of control and marital stability was found and; internal locus of control was also found not to have

significant correlation with marital satisfaction and marital stability (Sawai et al, 2018). Sharma, Jasleen and Bharadwaj (2019) in their study found that wives reported more marital adjustment, internal and chance control as compared to husbands. Husbands have a more dominant others control. (Sharma, Jasleen & Bharadwaj, 2019). In the study conducted by Janvika Sheth (2015) in India, marital locus of control was seen to have significant correlation with marital adjustment among couples (Sheth, 2015). The internal locus of control may play a significant role in its relation to adjustment and coping. Researches aimed at studying the relationship between locus of control and relationship satisfaction have found a positive correlation between the two variables. (Saadat, M. *et al*, 2012; Shubina, I, 2017; Kliewer & Sandler, 1992).

Over the years, dyadic coping has been correlated with relationship satisfaction and stress and results have shown consistency in the correlation between these variables. In a two-year longitudinal study done by Pihet & Kayser (2006), to study the relationship between dyadic coping and marital quality, dyadic coping was found to be significantly associated with marital quality. For women, both their own and partner's dyadic coping were significant predictors whereas for men, only their own dyadic coping was a predictor (Pihet & Kayser, 2006). In the study by Wunderer & Schneewind (2006) on a German sample of 663 married couples, significant correlations were found between marital standards, marital satisfaction and dyadic coping processes. Supportive behavior played a mediating role between the two variables and differed for both the genders (Wunderer & Schneewind, 2008). In his study on 240 German couples, Herzberg (2012) found that dyadic coping is a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction than individual coping (Herzberg, 2012). Landis *et al.* (2013), in their study on older spouses (Mean age = 68) found that partner's subjective perception of their spouse's supportive behavior was more strongly linked to their relationship satisfaction than to their self-reported support (Landis *et al.*, 2013). Absence of dyadic coping strategies between partners to be might be one of the causes for marital dissatisfaction (Molgora *et al.*, 2018).

Patients of lung cancer and their partners have experience worse mental health problems due to low survivability. The results of a study conducted by Lyons & Miller (2016) show that dyadic appraisal of the patient's pain and fatigue was significantly associated with spouse's mental health, albeit in opposite directions. Dyadic coping was found to have significant correlation with the patients' mental health (Lyons & Miller, 2016). In case of chronic illness, financial strain can also affect the patient's and the spouse's mental health. Regan and colleagues (2014) studied dyadic coping, anxiety, depression and relationship satisfaction in patients with prostate cancer and their partners. They found relationship satisfaction to be significantly

associated with patients' and wives' use of positive and negative dyadic coping (Regan *et al.*, 2014).

It is not only the major stressors like medical condition that affect the coping and relationship satisfaction though. Karademas & Roussi (2017) studied the indirect impact of financial strain to partner's relationship satisfaction and psychological distress, using dyadic coping as mediator in Greek couples. The results supported the hypothesized mediated impacted of financial strain on partners' relationship satisfaction than on psychological distress among others (Karademas & Roussi, 2017). In the study conducted across thirty-five nations, Hilpert *et al.* (2016) the associations between dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction were found to be varying for every country. In some nations the association is higher for men and in other nations it is higher for women (Hilpert *et al.*, 2016). Cultural factors must play an important role by encouraging men and women differently. Past experiences can also differ for both the genders. Communication patterns and decision making processes can also be the possible causes for the difference in coping. Falconier & Epstein (2010) studied relationship satisfaction in Argentinean couples under economic strain: Gender differences in a dyadic stress model. Path analytic results indicated gender differences - greater male and female psychological aggression, and lower female positive behaviors - mediated the link between male economic strain and female relationship satisfaction (Falconier & Epstein, 2010).

Partners having different attitudes towards the relationship and the construct of romance can have an impact on their thoughts about the relationship. Vedes *et al.* (2016) studied the relation between love styles, coping and relationship satisfaction among 92 heterosexual couples. It was found that eros and agape love styles have positive direct effects on dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction; whereas ludus has a negative direct effect on dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction and dyadic coping partially mediated the association between love styles and relationship satisfaction. Overall, associations were stronger for women than for men (Vedes *et al.*, 2016).

The concept of dating is not as culturally accepted in India as in west and arrange marriages have a high prevalence. Despite of the type of marriage, interpersonal issues can rise if the partners have differing personalities. An individual's tolerance towards stressful situation and the ability to deal with it can be different from their partner. One of the partners might able the outside factors for the situation and feel helpless (external LOC) as opposed to the other who believes their actions make a difference and work incessantly towards their goal (internal LOC). The need of emotional support in difficult times from the partner

not being met can create dissatisfaction about partner and the relationship.

Based on the available literature, the present study set out the study the relation between the locus of control, dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction in the context of Indian population. It was hypothesized by the authors that people with internal locus of control will be high on dyadic coping; people with internal locus of control will have greater relationship satisfaction; and people high on dyadic coping will have greater relationship satisfaction. The next sections of the paper discuss the tools used in the study, statistical analyses obtained from the data, discussion of the results and then proceeds to discuss the limitations of the present study and concludes with suggestions for future studies.

Procedure

Participants

Participants in the study were 52 heterosexual married couples (52 males, 52 females) from India. There were no age restrictions. The participants' duration of marriage ranged from less than one year to 54 years. The average age of the sample was 47.67 years. The mean ages of males and females were 49.6 and 45.8 years respectively. The participants were selected through snowball sampling method. The participants filled out the research questionnaire through online and offline methods. Duration of marriage of participants ranged from less than one year to 54 years.

Method

Permission to conduct the study was acquired from the Head of the Department of Sir Parshurambhau College (Autonomous), Pune. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and ensured about the data confidentiality. Written consent was taken from all the participants before administering the questionnaire. The participants could fill the questionnaire through either online (Google link) or offline (printed questionnaire) method. To ensure that both the partners fill out the questionnaire, all couples were personally given a unique code by the researchers. In case of only one of the partners filled out the questionnaire, the data was discarded before the final data analyses.

Materials

Demographic Information

The participants were asked for demographic information like age, gender, duration of marriage, type of family, number of family members and number of children. Only the questions that were must for the study were mandatory to fill, like duration of marriage, age and gender. It was however pre-disclosed criteria that both husband and wife must fill the questionnaire.

If only one of the partners (husband or wife) filled the questionnaire, the response was discarded.

Locus of Control Scale (LoSC)

The Locus of Control Scale (LoSC) was developed by Terry Pettijohn in 1992. The scale was based on Julian Rotter's theory of locus of control (1966). The scale consists of 20 dichotomous items which require the subject to mark answer as 'True' or 'False'. Locus of control can be explained as an individual's belief in his ability of having control over the situation. People may internalize or externalize the control over situations around them. The responses are scored as 0 or 5 and the total score ranges from 0 to 100. High score on the scale indicates internal locus of control and low score indicates external locus of control. The interpretation of the score can be done in five categories-Very Strong External Locus of Control (0-15), External Locus of Control (20-35), Both External and Internal Locus of Control (40-60), Internal Locus of Control (65-80) and Very Strong Internal Locus of Control (85-100).

Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI)

Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI) was developed by Guy Bodenmann (2008) and consists of ten sub-scales. The concept of dyadic coping emerged in the 1990s. Bodenmann further developed the theory of transactional analysis proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The questionnaire consists of 37 items having 5-point Likert scale ranging from Very Rarely to Very Often. The total score in the scale ranges from 35 to 175. The last 2 items are not included in the scoring but are to be used for qualitative analysis. Construct validity has been used for DCI across various cultures. There are established cut-off scores for DCI which are as follows: DCI total score 145 dyadic coping above average. There are age and gender norms available for the scale in the manual that can be obtained after the author's permission. Authors of the present study had acquired permission to use the scale and obtained manual from the developer.

Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSAT)

The relationship satisfaction scale was developed by David D. Burns (1988), to measure relationship satisfaction not only in married couples but in any kind of relationship that two people share. The scale measures different aspects of relationship-degree of relationship satisfaction; communication and openness; degree of caring and affection; intimacy and closeness and satisfaction with roles in relationship. The scale is strongly correlated with other measures of relationship satisfaction. Construct validity has been established with other scales measuring depression, stress, etc. It includes 7 items that have to be rated on a 7-point Likert Scale ranging from 0 (Very Dissatisfied) to 6 (Very Satisfied). The total score on the test ranges between 0-42 and interpretations can be made based on the total score ranging from Extremely Dissatisfied to Very Satisfied.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Response sheets with missing responses were deleted before beginning the analyses. The statistical analyses of the data were carried out using the SPSS software. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was carried out to study the relation between the three variables. For initial summing of scores, MS Excel was used.

RESULTS

Gender-wise Descriptive Statistics

All the statistical analyses were conducted while using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). From the data obtained, the descriptive statistics were calculated for locus of control, dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction. The results of the analyses have been presented in Table 1.

Table-1

| Scale | Mean | Median | Mode | Std. Deviation |
|-------|--------|--------|-------|----------------|
| LoSC | 70.05 | 70.00 | 75.0 | 11.42 |
| DCI | 137.46 | 139.50 | 123.0 | 18.44 |
| RSAT | 37.63 | 39.00 | 42.0 | 5.08 |

Gender-wise Descriptive Statistics

Data was also analyzed to check if there were any gender differences between males and females on

locus of control, dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction. There were 52 males and 52 females (104 individuals). Table 2 shows the gender-wise data:

Table-2

| | | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------|---------|----|--------|----------------|
| LoSC | Females | 52 | 70.096 | 11.48 |
| | Males | 52 | 70.00 | 11.46 |
| DCI | Females | 52 | 137.48 | 19.27 |
| | Males | 52 | 137.44 | 17.77 |
| RSAT | Females | 52 | 37.23 | 5.43 |
| | Males | 52 | 38.02 | 4.72 |

As can be seen in the table above, no significant differences were observed in the mean and std. deviation of both the genders on three variables of the study. Hence, no further gender-based statistics were carried out for the data.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation

Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to study the relationship between the three variables. Since the hypotheses are directional, one tailed significance was checked for the correlation values. Table 3 shows the Pearson correlation values for the three variables and the significant levels of each.

Table-3

| Scale | | LOC | DCI | RSS |
|-------|-----------------|-----|-------|--------|
| LoSC | <i>r</i> | 1 | .193* | .196* |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | | .025 | .023 |
| DCI | <i>r</i> | -- | 1 | .726** |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | | | .000 |
| RSAT | <i>r</i> | -- | -- | 1 |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | | | |

p* < significant at 0.05 level

p** < significant at 0.01 level

The correlations between locus of control and dyadic coping; and locus of control and relationship satisfaction were found to be significant at 0.05 level and correlation between dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction was found to be significant at 0.01 level.

DISCUSSION

The study was aimed to study the correlation between locus of control, dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction among married couples. On analyzing the data obtained from the study, locus of

control was found to have low but significant positive correlation with dyadic coping and hence, the first hypothesis, stating people with internal locus of control will have high dyadic coping is accepted. Locus of control was also found to have a low but significant positive correlation with dyadic coping, and thus second hypotheses of people with internal locus of control have greater relationship satisfaction is accepted. Dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction were found to have a high significant positive correlation, leading to the acceptance of the third hypothesis which states that people with high dyadic coping will have greater

relationship satisfaction. Possible reasons for low correlation of locus of control with dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction are discussed below.

The sample size of the study was fairly small. More data from people with varying backgrounds may affect the results. Additionally, when asked to mark the relationship satisfaction with their spouse, people were observed to have high social desirability. In a study done by Sabatelli (1986), one's own and spouse's locus of control were examined with reference to the marital complaints of both the partners. Unlike the hypothesis, the results suggested that wives paired with relatively external husbands tend to have more complaints. The analysis did not support the presence of a personality match or mismatch effect on marital complaints (Sabatelli, 1986). In another study by Dimitrovsky, Schapira-Beck & Itskowitz (1994) on Israeli women, Locus of control, satisfaction and dyadic adjustment was measured. Mean depression scores for the total sample, and for women with internal, medium, and external locus of control (LOC) were significantly lower after marriage. Women with external LOC manifested significantly more change in depression scores before and after marriage and also rated themselves significantly less satisfied with their marriages. Depression prior to marriage was predictive of later marital dissatisfaction, and depression following marriage was highly correlated with concurrent dissatisfaction (Dimitrovsky, Schapira-Beck & Itskowitz, 1994). Adjustment issues prior to marriage added with differing personality than partner can add to the dissatisfaction from relationship. Additionally, factors other than dyadic coping need to be analyzed when the couples are found to have high interpersonal issues.

In the longitudinal study conducted over a span of 44 years and three months conducted by Kahler (2017), association was studied between locus of control and marital satisfaction throughout adulthood. During the span of the study, the data was collected thrice, 1966, 1980 and 2010. Locus of control as measured in middle adulthood predicted marital satisfaction measured contemporaneously. Long-term predictions were however not satisfactory. In the same study there was low correlation between the loci of control measures over time. It can be understood that, over the years locus of control may incline to the opposite end than before. Thought it might not to the extreme opposite end, it maybe shift a little. Not much research is available on this change of locus of control. In a longitudinal study conducted by Nowicki *et al.* (2018), it was found that stresses experienced in relationships with spouses, friends and family, financial stability and job security, and illness/smoking were associated with changes in LOC. Results suggest substantial variation of LOC within spousal/parent dyads and moderate stability of LOC over time for both men and women (Nowicki, 2018). The concept of

marital adjustment is closely related to dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction. In the study conducted by Ghumman A. Ghumman S. & Shoaib, M. (2013) respondents from nuclear family system showed higher difference in locus of control and marital adjustment as compared to respondents from joint family system (Ghumman A. Ghumman S. & Shoaib, M., 2013). Study by Nahar and Mohajan (2017) in Bangladesh found no significant effect of type of family and gender on locus of control but significant effect of type of family on marital adjustment (Nahar L. & Mohajan L., 2017).

In the present study, the responses were taken only once. It will be helpful to take these measurements at different times during the participants' lives to get an average of the scores on each variable. The situations in different points of time also might have an impact on the amount of satisfaction. People's situations in their personal lives like dispute within the family or with spouse may also have an impact on their responses. Locus of control can be situation specific. This study however, studied the correlation between general locus of control and relationship satisfaction. Limitations of the study can be stated as limited sample and high social desirability on the scale of relationship satisfaction. Offline data collection can be one of the reasons for high social desirability. Marriage specific locus of control scale could be a better tool to measure correlation between the three variables.

CONCLUSION

In the present study locus of control was found to have low but significant positive correlations with dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction. Dyadic coping was found to have a high significant positive correlation with relationship satisfaction. Not many studies have been conducted on the subject of dyadic coping in India. This study thus, contributes to the field of marriage counselling. Individual differences in locus of control affect the coping patterns and satisfaction experienced by the people in the relationship. Couples with different locus of control may experience friction in the relationship and can seek to work on the differences and develop healthy dyadic coping strategies. Positive dyadic coping strategies will also contribute to the relationship satisfaction that both the partners experience.

Suggestions for Future Research

A longitudinal study may be conducted on the Indian sample from various regions of the country. Researchers can also explore if the duration of marriage affects the locus of control and dyadic coping over the years. A study can also be conducted to study if type of marriage (Arrange and Love) has an impact on the dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction in India. Other variables like stress, anxiety, dyadic adjustment and personality can also be included in the study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express gratitude to the faculty members at Department of Psychology of Sir Parshurambhau College, Pune, for providing due permissions and timely guidance for this research. No funds were collected for any part of the study.

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Cite This Article: Tanvi P. Lad & Arvind T. Kakulte (2022). Locus of Control, Dyadic Coping and Relationship Satisfaction: A Correlational Study in Married Couples. *EAS J PsycholBehavSci*, 4(1), 15-23.