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A Study on Perceived Social Support, Locus of Control, and Resilience among College Students

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Abstract: Background: The need for being psychologically resilient is ever increasing and emerging as a crucial factor in the lives of college students getting ready to step into occupational settings. Locus of control – internal and external and social support are two factors that can potentially have an impact and be impacted by resilience, and are relevant to explore further factors that can impact how college students perceive challenges. ***Objective:*** The present study aims to investigate the relationship between perceived social support, locus of control and resilience among college students. A sample of 57 college students aged 18-25 years was taken for the study. ***Methodology:*** For data collection, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Locus of Control, and Pettijohn Locus of Control Scale were administered to the sample. ***Results:*** The results of the study indicated that a significant positive relationship exists between resilience and total perceived social support. The students who perceived a higher overall social support showed a higher resilience and those who perceived lower support were less resilient in comparison. A significant positive correlation was also seen between resilience and perceived social support from friends and family sub dimensions of the scale. Students who perceived more support from their families and friends were seen to be more resilient and vice versa. ***Conclusion and Suggestions:*** The findings suggest that there is a need for programs for increasing the perceived social support for college students, and strengthen the support from their family and friends, to help them be more resilient to face challenges of life.

Keywords: *Perceived Social Support, Locus of Control, Resilience, College students*

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1. Introduction

College is a time where students have to juggle a series of new and challenging experiences, exciting growth opportunities, as well as uncertainty regarding the future, all the while balancing their academics, making new social connections, and finding their place in the world. Hence, there is an ever-increasing need to adapt and deal with the environment effectively. Resilience is often described as the ability to overcome challenges and setbacks, deal effectively with stressors and adapt well to changes. For college students, resilience has become a necessary skill to survive in all the new and complex experiences that early adulthood brings.

College students need a lot of guidance and support to overcome these novel challenges and to deal effectively with their environment. Previous studies indicated that resilience is increased among the students who feel they are supported by their environment and people around them. A study was conducted by Narayanan and Onn (2016) to investigate the influence of perceived social support and self-efficacy on resilience among first year Malaysian students. Results indicated that both perceived social support and self-efficacy were significant predictors of resilience. The interaction effect between these were also significant and positive.

Locus of Control is whether people perceive their life to be controlled by eternal circumstances (External Locus of Control) or Internal circumstances (Internal Locus of Control). A student with internal locus of control will perceive situations to be in their own control, which may help them deal effectively with the environment. Meanwhile a student with an external locus of control will perceive situations out of their control and may rely on external factors to deal with the environment, which can cause them to have lower resilience. A study was conducted by Sagone and Caroli (2014) to explore effects of self-concepts on Locus of Control and academic self-efficacy among university students. Results indicated that an internal locus of control indicated higher expression of positive self-concept in the present and future and more they were likely take everyday circumstances under their control, more efficient they perceived themselves in academic context. It was suggested that future research could deepen the relationship between locus of control and other psychological constructs, such as well-functioning, thinking styles, and resilience in university students, indicating these were not covered.

This study aims to explore the relationship between these three variable: resilience, perceived social support, and locus of control.

1.1 *Perceived Social Support*

According to American Psychological Association, social support is the provision of assistance or comfort to others, typically to help them cope with biological, psychological, and social stressors. Support may arise from any network, involving family members, friends, neighbors, religious institutions, colleagues, caregivers, or support groups. It may take the form of practical help (e.g., doing chores, offering advice), tangible support that involves giving money or other direct material assistance, and emotional support that allows the individual to feel valued, accepted, and understood.

According to Psychology Dictionary, social support is the psychological term for the psychological and physical consolation that comes from our connections with others. It is essential for preserving both mental and physical health and can come in the form of counsel, direction, understanding, or practical assistance.

A study was conducted by Abid et al. (2021) focusing on the mediating role of Perceived Social Support between Locus of Control and Assertiveness among 314 university undergraduates. It was found that perceived social support and internal locus of control positively predicted assertiveness. Perceived social support also positively mediated the relationships between internal locus of control and negatively between external locus of control and assertiveness.

A study was conducted by Hou et al. (2024) to investigate the relationship between perceived social support and psychological resilience among 1356 university students. It was found that perceived social support had a significant positive effect on psychological resilience and coping style partially mediated this relationship. Both the positive effect of perceived social support and mediating effect of coping style was found to be moderated by perceived stress. The effect of perceived social support on psychological resilience was more significant among university students with lower perceived stress than among those with higher perceived stress.

Yıldız and Öztemel (2025) conducted a study to examine whether career locus of control, career distress, and perceived social support predicted career adaptability among university students. It was found that career adaptability was positively associated with perceived social support and internality subdimension of career locus of control and negatively associated with career distress as well as helplessness, luck and powerful others subdimensions of career locus of control. It was further seen that career distress, internality, and perceived social support significantly predicted career adaptability.

1.2 *Locus of Control*

As per the American Psychological Association, locus of control is a construct used to categorize people’s basic motivational orientations and perceptions of how much control they

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have over the conditions of their lives. People with an external locus of control tend to behave in response to external circumstances and to perceive their life outcomes as arising from factors out of their control. People with an internal locus of control tend to behave on response to internal states and intentions and to perceive their life outcomes as arising from the exercise of their own agency and abilities.

According to Simply Psychology, Locus of Control describes how much you believe you control the events in your life. People with an internal locus of control believe their own actions driver their outcomes. Those with an external locus of control attribute outcomes to luck, fate, or other people instead.

A study was conducted by Norouzinia et al. (2017) to investigate the relationship between resilience and locus of control among 180 university students. Results of the study showed that there was a significant relationship between resilience and locus of control. The resilient individuals had an internal locus of control. It was also seen that males and off campus students were more resilient. In addition, academic performance of females and off campus students was higher.

A study was conducted by VanderZee et al. (1997) which focused on Locus of Control as a personality factor related to the amount of perceived social support and its effects on psychological wellbeing. It was found that individuals with an internal locus of control perceived more support than did individuals with an external locus of control. In a sample with mainly females, social support was related to the psychological well-being of individuals with an external locus of control. In a second study, this moderating effect of locus of control was replicated in women but could not be found among men.

Türk-Kurtça and Kocatürk (2020) conducted a study to investigate the role of internal-external locus of control, childhood traumas and emotional self-efficacy in predicting psychological resilience among university students. It was found that locus of control, childhood traumas and self-efficacy significantly predicted resilience. Also, a significant positive relationship existed between emotional self-efficacy, locus of control and resilience and childhood traumas and resilience were correlated negatively.

1.3 *Resilience*

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. A number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, predominant among them (a) the ways in which individuals view and engage with the worlds, (b) the availability and

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quality of social resources, and (c) specific coping strategies. Psychological research demonstrates that the resources and skills associated with more positive adaptation (i.e., greater resilience) can be cultivated and practiced.

As per Psychology today, resilience is the psychological quality that allows some people to be knocked down by the adversities of life and come back at least as strong as before, Rather than letting difficulties, traumatic events, or failure overcome them and drain their resolve, highly resilient people find a way to change course, emotionally healthy, and continue moving toward their goals.

Pidgeon et al. (2014) conducted a study to explore the characteristics of resilience among university students. Results revealed that perceived social support, campus connectedness, and psychological distress accounted for a significant proportion (36%) of the variance between the high and low resilience groups. Students with low levels of resilience reported significantly lower levels of perceived social support, campus connectedness, and higher levels of psychological distress, in comparison to those with high levels of resilience.

Arsini and Rusmana (2023) conducted a study to investigate the role of Locus of Control, Resilience, gender, talent, on student academic achievement and the relationship between these variables among 550 students. It was found that the students with internal locus of control had superior academic resilience and achievement as compared to the students with external locus of control. In the gender aspect, females were found to have better resilience compared to males and intelligence or IQ greatly contributed to student resilience.

Arsini and Rusmana (2023) conducted a study to investigate the role of locus of control, resilience, gender, talent, on student academic achievement and the relationship between these variables. It was found that students with internal locus had superior academic resilience and achievement than those with an external locus. The students who focused on internal aspects (internal locus of control) were found to be more resilient and better at overcoming difficulties, Females had better resilience, and intelligence contributes to resilience. In addition, resilience was seen to affect ability to solve student academic challenges.

1.4 *Purpose*

The purpose is to study Perceived Social Support, Locus of Control, and Resilience among College Students.

1.5 *Hypothesis*

H_1: There exists a significant positive relationship between Perceived Social Support and Resilience.

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H_2: There exists a significant positive relationship between Locus of Control and Resilience.

H_3: There exists a significant positive relationship between Perceived Social Support and Locus of Control.

2. Methodology

2.1 *Sample*

A sample of 57 college students between ages 18-25 was taken for the study through purposive sampling.

2.2 *Measures*

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support: Zimet et al. (1988), developed the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). The scale consisted of 10 items and included response rate as Very strongly disagree (1), Strongly disagree, Mildly disagree (2), Neutral (3), Mildly agree (4), Strongly agree (5), Very strongly agree (6). It measured Perceived Social Support in Significant Other (SO), Family (FAM), and Friends (FRI), as well as Total scores.

Pettijohn Locus of Control Measure: Pettijohn and Sacco (2005), developed the Pettijohn Locus of Control Measure. The scale consisted of 20 items and included a response rate as True or False. It was scored on a continuum with lower scores indicating an external locus control and higher scores indicating an internal locus of control.

Brief Resilience Scale: The Brief resilience scale, developed by Smith et al. (2008), is a 5 item scale with responses as Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5).

2.3 Procedure

The responses were collected online using a Google Form. The questionnaire link was created and shared with the participants online. Voluntary participation of the participants was ensured. The data were analysed using correlation analysis to understand the relationship between perceived social support, locus of control, and resilience.

3. Analysis of Data

3.1 Results

Table 1: N, Mean and Standard Deviation

	Locus of Control	Perceived Social Support	Perceived Social	Perceived Social	Perceived Social	Resilience

		(significant other)	Support (Family)	Support (Friends)	Support (total)	
N	56	56	56	56	56	56
Mean	59.6	19.2	21.5	20.3	61.0	18.6
Standard deviation	10.8	7.32	4.97	6.56	15.1	3.36

Table 2: Correlation matrix

	Locus of Control	Resilience	Perceived Social Support (significant other)	Perceived Social Support (Family)	Perceived Social Support (Friends)	Perceived Social Support (total)
Locus of Control	—					
Resilience	0.081	—				
Perceived Social Support (significant other)	0.073	0.252	—			
Perceived Social Support (Family)	-0.109	0.317*	0.419**	—		
Perceived Social Support (Friends)	-0.037	0.274*	0.431***	0.528***	—	
Perceived Social Support (total)	-0.016	0.346**	0.811***	0.762***	0.818***	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

4. Discussion of Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between perceived social support, locus of control and resilience. The results indicated a significant relationship between perceived social support and resilience, however, no significant relationship of locus of control was found with either of the variables.

Results indicated a significant positive relationship between Resilience and Total Perceived Social Support (r = 0.346, p < .01). This indicates that students who received high level of social support were more likely to have a higher resilience than those that perceived low social support. Therefore, the hypothesis that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived social support and resilience is accepted.

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Results indicated that there is a significant positive correlation between perceived social support from Friends and Resilience ($r = 0.27$, $p < .05$). People who had a higher resilience were seen to have higher social support from friends. It was also seen that there is a significant positive correlation between social support from family and Resilience ($r = 0.31$, $p < .05$). People having higher resilience also had higher social support from family. A previous study was conducted by Yildrim et al (2023) to investigate resilience and perceived social support as predictors of emotional well-being while controlling for age, gender, and personality traits. The results indicated that resilience was positively correlated with perceived social support from friends, family and significant others. In addition, both resilience and perceived social support exerted a significant influence on emotional well-being by explaining a significant amount of unique variance.

A positive significant relationship is seen between perceived social support from family and from significant other ($r=0.42$, $p<.01$). A positive significant relationship is seen between perceived social support from family and from significant other ($r=0.42$, $p<.01$). A positive significant relationship is seen between perceived social support from friends and from significant other ($r=0.43$, $p<.001$). A positive significant relationship is seen between perceived social support from friends and from family ($r=0.52$, $p<.001$)

Results indicated that there is positive significant relationship between total perceived social support and perceived social support from significant other ($r=0.81$, $p<.001$). People who reported higher overall social support also reported higher support from their significant other. Results indicated that there is positive significant relationship between total perceived social support and perceived social support from family ($r=0.76$, $p<.001$). People who were seen to have higher overall social support also had higher support from their family. Results indicated that there is positive significant relationship between total perceived social support and perceived social support from friends ($r=0.81$, $p<.001$). People having higher overall social support had higher social support from friends. A study was conducted by Bilgin & Taş to investigate the effects of perceived social support and psychological resilience on social media addiction among university students. A negative correlation was found between perceived social support and social media addiction. It was also found that the perceived social support significantly predicted the perceived social support from friends subscale.

The first hypothesis, stating that there exists a significant positive relationship between Perceived Social Support and Resilience was supported by the results.

The results did not support the second hypothesis, stating that there exists a significant positive relationship between Locus of control and resilience.

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The third hypothesis, stating that there exists a significant positive relationship between perceived social support and locus of control was also not supported by the results.

5. Conclusion

Research on resilience is rapidly spreading from specific settings like hospitals, or in survivors to general population, and among students. Locus of control, which is whether the person perceives that the situations in their life are controlled by external or internal circumstances. Social support in general, and from family, friends, and significant others also affects resilience. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between perceived social support, locus of control and resilience among 57 college students of age 18-25 years. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between resilience and total perceived social support, as well as between resilience and social support from friends and families.

The study had some limitations as well. The responses were collected through self-report measures having free choice rating, which meant social desirability could not be controlled. The sample consisted of about 80% females and 20% males. It is suggested that future studies should focus on strengthening the relationship between perceived social support and resilience, as well as explore other factors affecting student resilience. Gender differences should also be explored among resilience.

The findings also indicate a need for practices and programs in colleges to increase support to students, possibly from their teachers and faculty, and strengthen the perceived support from family and friends, to facilitate development of higher resilience.

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