

## Research Articles

## Locus of Control and Its Relationship With Some Social-Demographic Factors

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### Abstract

The main purpose of the research is to find out the relation of social-demographic factors (education, family status, professional activity and place of residence) and the type of locus of control. Participants for the present study were 608 persons ranged between 15 and 65 years of age. The majority of the participants (472, 77.7%) indicated an external locus of control. Three of four factors – family status, professional activity, and education – had a significant relationship, and place of residence was the only factor without a significant relationship with the locus of control.

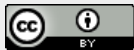
*Keywords:* locus of control, socio-demographic factors, education, family status, professional activity, place of residence

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## Introduction

In this paper, the term "Locus of Control" represents attribution of reasons that the people determine for the events in their life, which are regarded as independent or not from personal volitional action (Phares, 1965). According to the social learning theory by Rotter (1975), behavior potential is influenced hardly in the way the people accept the situation and the stimulus, but also it is based on the expectations of realization of actions that satisfy the needs. Rotter focuses in his work on the content of two generalized expectancies – internal and external control of reinforcement, which describe the perception of human's life events as contingent upon one's own behavior or as under the control of unpredictable others. One of the basic suggestion in Rotter's theory is that people aim to keep up their positive self-image (in Thompson, Davidson, & Barber, 1995), that is why their expectations to challenge are mostly bonded with one's efforts and possibilities to deal with. On the other hand, when the people expect failure or bad dealing, they believe it depends on factors which they cannot control. These generalized expectations are supported by certain beliefs – the world is well-intentioned and the life has a meaning, and the Self has a value and deserves respect (Velichkov, 2001). The necessity of inner conviction for existence of a better world is connected with the need for believing that all people become what they deserve. This expectation allows the individual to accept the physical and social environment as steadily, secure and in good order (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

In his studies of behavior, [Rotter \(1975, 1982\)](#) pointed out that locus of control had a close relation to the theory of social learning and he didn't investigate the interrelation with the individual differences, personal characteristics, neither gender, age, and religious affiliation. The accent in his work was to find out which of all learned actions from a repertoire with many behavioral models would be manifested in an exact situation and how the social learning would be influenced.

In contrast to Rotter, other researchers ([Eisner, 1995](#); [Furnham & Steele, 1993](#)) from a social-psychological direction discuss the locus of control through attribution theory. According to this theory, we attribute to other persons certain characteristics or motives and this makes us more confident that we know better our partners. The difference between the two theoretical frameworks is the conceptualization of the locus of control. Rotter's theory accounts for impending events exactly because of prognostic purpose in his elaboration. The attribution theory is about past events ([Furnham & Steele, 1993](#)). As reported by [Eisner \(1995\)](#), the attribution of success or failure depends on locus of control that is separated by its personal characteristics into inner and external, and by its permanence into stable/typical and unstable/by chance, and by the pervasiveness into global /specific.

Other researchers in the area of social psychology also elaborated and enriched with their studies the relation between attributive disposition internal-external control and other psychological constructs. According to [Lynch, Hurford, and Cole \(2002\)](#), the two generalized dispositions (internal and external locus of control) are formed through childhood. They are influenced by the learning experience and by the abilities' assessment from the family. The parental behavior as giving warmth and concerned about other family members determines the internal locus of control. According to [Lynch et al. \(2002\)](#), the children cultivate internal locus of control because the father encourages their independence. In addition, [Lynch et al. \(2002\)](#) found out that the parent's overprotection led to the high level of the external locus of control.

[Marks \(1998\)](#) demonstrated in his studies that the existence of certain group affiliation, as gender and ethnical affiliation was a factor that influenced the type of locus of control. As the affiliation increases so the group dependency grows further and at the same time the internal locus of control goes down. There is a dynamic related to the age also - with increasing of the age, people acquire in a great degree an internal locus of control by comparison to the younger age ([Kiskinov & Velichkov, 1984](#); [Virmozelova, 2011](#)). According to [Mamlin, Harris, and Case \(2001\)](#), the individuals who hold a high position in the organizations indicate more internal locus of control. Many authors reported an absence of gender differences in locus of control ([Schultz & Schultz, 2005](#); [Stoyanova, 2004](#); [Virmozelova, 2011](#)), even among people with learning disabilities ([Mamlin et al., 2001](#)).

This study takes place in the conceptual framework of attribution theory, which belongs to social-psychological school in psychology, because of the purpose to investigate events as the occupational status, marital status, educational level and place of residence and their relation with locus of control. Generally said, the social-demographic factors often were left out from the studies as main variables that influenced the development of the internal-external locus of control. The research tradition took into account only the age ([Kiskinov & Velichkov, 1984](#); [Virmozelova, 2011](#)) and gender ([Mamlin et al., 2001](#); [Schultz & Schultz, 2005](#); [Stoyanova, 2004](#)) among them, the others factors were rarely examined. Therefore the present study is focused on the following social-demographic factors that were not frequently studied – educational degree, marital status, place of residence and professional activity. This study examined the differentiation by the mentioned social-demographic factors (educational level, occupational status, marital status and place of residence) among Bulgarians with internal and external locus of control.

We investigated the occupational status in view of the fact that the job attitudes and perceptions of the work in the same environment could be viewed very differently from different workers, because of the effects of internal and external locus of control. Generally said, internals have better social skills and better interpersonal relationships with colleagues and supervisors than externals (Kapoor, Ansari, & Shukla, 1986; Lefcourt, Martin, Fick, & Saleh, 1985; Phares, 1965; Ringer & Boss, 2000) and that influences the way they attribute the success or failure in workplace. A number of researchers (Erez & Judge, 2001; Hollenbeck, Williams, & Klein, 1989; Yukl & Latham, 1978) pointed out that the internals were more likely than externals to set a goal, to pursue it, and to have career success. Likewise, internals have higher work satisfaction than externals and that influences the job performance and the motivational processes (Wang, Bowling, & Eschleman, 2010).

Recent reviews of the locus of control literature revealed a good number of studies about the relation between the type of control and marriage (Doherty, 1981; Sheth, 2015). According to Miller, Lefcourt, and Ware (1983), locus of control is related to a variety of variables, such as marital problem solving. According to Lundberg (2012) stable partnership is bounded to higher incomes, improved health and happiness, and positive child outcomes. Many pieces of research (Camp & Ganong, 1997; Pervin & John, 1998) showed that the growth of the internal locus of control both in men and women was related to the increase of marital satisfaction and compatibility. On the other side, Sheth (2015) stated that external locus of control was associated with higher marital adjustment in comparison to the people with internal locus of control. Markman, Floyd, Stanley, and Storaasli (1988) claimed that people with internal locus of control were likely to change their behaviors easily to reach their desires when they believed that personal efforts were effective for their sexual and marital satisfaction. From a scientific point of view, the results are interesting because they indicated that the partnership determined the high degree of internal locus of control. Through the relatedness, the people can learn to expect the more efforts they invest the surer the success is. Coleman and DeLeire (2003) reported that locus of control could affect individuals' education decisions mostly as a result of the change in expectations of return of invested efforts. The literature review indicated (Crandall, Katkovsky, & Crandall, 1965; Kaiser 1975) that the academic achievement was associated with high level of internal locus of control and the students with an internal locus of control received higher tests scores and related their academic success to internal factors rather than luck.

## Aim

The main aim of the study is to investigate the relations between social-demographic factors (education, marital status, occupational activity and place of residence) and the locus of control, particularly (a) to specify the prevalence of internal or the external locus of control; (b) to reveal the relations between the social-demographic factors: education, marital status, occupational status and place of residence on the one hand and the type of locus of control on the other hand.

## Hypotheses

The main hypothesis is that social-demographic factors such as education, marital status, occupational status and place of residence will differentiate the type of locus of control.

- a. Place of residence (village, small town, city, and capital) will differentiate the type of locus of control, i.e. the people who live in a village and small town will have an external locus of control, unlike the people who live in a city and capital and who will have an internal locus of control.

- b. Type of education will differentiate the locus of control, i.e. the respondents with higher education and college will have an internal locus of control, compared with people with lower (elementary and secondary) education who will have an external locus of control.
- c. Type of marital status will differentiate the locus of control, i.e. the people with a family story (married or in cohabitation, divorced, widowers) will have an internal locus of control in comparison with the people that declare the absence of partner relationships (singles), they will have an external locus of control.
- d. Occupational status will differentiate the locus of control, this means the respondents who are self-employed (i.e. people with own business), the staff on a high position and the employees will have an internal locus of control in comparison with workers, secondary school students, university students, retirees and jobless who will have an external locus of control.

## Method

### Sample

Participants for the present study were 608 persons ranged between 15 and 65 years old ( $M = 26.36$ ,  $SD = 11.69$ ). The main sample characteristics are presented in [Table 1](#).

### Procedure and Measures

The study was conducted on the territory of Republic of Bulgaria in the period March – October 2010. Convenience sampling was used. People from 50 towns and 20 villages were informed about the study and asked to participate and to fill out two questionnaires. The participants were informed that there were not correct or wrong answers and they should try to be as honest as possible in their responses.

The participants filled out the demographic questionnaire and the questionnaire “The Method of Locus of Control” together and anonymously. Respondents were asked to report demographic characteristics such as age, gender, educational level, marital and occupational status, and place of residence.

The adapted Bulgarian version of the questionnaire “Locus of Control” (Shishkov & Vitanova, 2004) was used. This questionnaire consists of 44 items which describe the expectations for success and control about the daily events. The items are distributed on seven scales – (a) locus of control (the general scale), which consists of all other subscales, (b) locus of control by success, (c) locus of control by failure, (d) locus of control by family relations, (e) locus of control by professional activity, (f) locus of control by social relations, (g) and locus of control by health. The main scale and its subscales consist of six-point Likert response scale ranging from strongly disagree -3 to strongly agree +3. The high scores imply an internal locus of control and the low scores show an external locus of control.

In relation to the aim of the study, the general scale was used – locus of control that describes the general tendency in human behavior to an internal or an external attribution.

Analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 16. The data collected was analyzed by chi-square.

Table 1

*Distribution of the Respondents by Social-Demographic Factors (N = 608)*

Characteristic	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	199	32.7
Female	409	67.3
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	427	70.2
Married/cohabitation	158	26.0
Divorced	15	2.5
Widowed	8	1.3
<b>Education</b>		
Secondary education	332	54.6
Elementary education	164	27.0
Higher education	105	17.3
College	7	1.2
<b>Occupational status</b>		
University and college student	161	26.5
Secondary school student	158	26.0
Employee <sup>a</sup>	92	15.1
Worker <sup>b</sup>	87	14.3
Jobless	72	11.8
Staff in a high position <sup>c</sup>	21	3.5
Self-employed	11	1.8
Retirees	6	1.0
<b>Place of residence</b>		
Village (<= 5,000 residents)	40	6.6
Town (<= 35,000)	133	21.9
Large Town (<= 100,000 residents)	300	49.3
City (<= 300,000 residents)	85	14.0
Capital (> 1,000,000 residents)	50	8.2

<sup>a</sup>The employees worked as office manager, system operator, secretary. <sup>b</sup>The workers had a profession as waiter, shop assistant, cashier, builder, hairdresser, mechanic, dressmaker. <sup>c</sup>Participants who worked as director, manager, medical doctor, engineer, chief financier.

## Results

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  obtained in this study for the questionnaire "Locus of Control" had a coefficient of .750.

The majority of the participants,  $N = 472$ , 77.7%, demonstrated an external locus of control and the remaining participants,  $N = 136$ , 22.3%, had an internal locus of control.

The data showed that three of the four social-demographic factors differentiated significantly the compared groups by the type of locus of control: education, marital status and occupational status. Place of residence was the only factor without a significant relation to the internal-external locus of control,  $\chi^2(4, N = 608) = 7.658, p = .105$  and Phi and Cramer's  $V = .112; p = .105$ .

## Education

The results indicated that the generalized expectations related to the locus of control distinguished between the participants with different educational degree,  $\chi^2(3, N = 608) = 96.043, p < .001$ , Phi and Cramer's  $V = .397, p < .001$ , which indicated an average level (Liebetrau, 1983) of difference between the groups (see Table 2).

Table 2

Frequency of the Internal-External Locus of Control by the Types of Education ( $N = 608$ )

Type of education	Locus of control			
	Internal		External	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Elementary education	5	0.8	159	26.2
Secondary education	73	12.0	259	42.6
College	6	1.0	1	0.2
Higher education	52	8.6	53	8.7

From the results we saw in Table 2, in our sample the prevalent locus of control was external. Despite the small and unequal groups, the results revealed that there were some significant differences between the people with a different educational degree in their general expectations of success and failure in their life. And the most of the people often believed their performance didn't depend on themselves and they tended to suppose they couldn't control the current events in their life.

## Marital Status

The group differences by the marital status in the locus of control were statistically significant,  $\chi^2(3, N = 608) = 346.4, p < .001$ , Phi and Cramer's  $V = .755, p < .001$  showed a high level (Liebetrau, 1983) of difference between the groups.

Table 3

Frequency of the Internal-External Locus of Control by the Types of Marital status ( $N = 608$ )

Family status	Locus of control			
	Internal		External	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Singles	9	1.5	418	68.8
In cohabitation/married	106	17.4	52	8.5
Divorced	13	2.1	2	0.3
Widowers	8	1.3	0	0.0

Table 3 showed the differences in the number and percentages of the people in the groups (singles, in cohabitation/married, divorced, widower) with an internal and an external locus of control. The external locus of control prevailed in the group of singles. This means the singles had the general expectation that their own life and successes were determined by the other persons, external events and they didn't depend on their efforts to manage or control them.

## Occupational Status

The data presented in Table 4 revealed the differences between the groups by occupational status in their internal-external locus of control,  $\chi^2(7, N = 608) = 246.6$ ;  $p < .001$ ; Phi and Cramer's  $V = .637$ ;  $p < .001$  showed a high level (Liebetrau, 1983) of difference between the groups.

Table 4

*Frequency of the Internal-External Locus of Control by the Types of Occupational Status (N = 608)*

Occupational status	Locus of control			
	Internal		External	
	N	%	N	%
Secondary school students	0	0.0	158	26.0
Students	0	0.0	161	26.5
Workers	46	7.6	41	6.7
Employees	51	8.4	41	6.7
Staff in a high position	15	2.5	6	1.0
Self-employed	3	0.5	8	1.3
Jobless	15	2.5	57	9.4
Retirees	6	1.0	0	0.0

The results indicated that the profession or the activity was an important aspect of the human life where people could learn to take the responsibility to assigned tasks as well as to take the punishment for unsuccessfully dealing with them. The data in the Table 4 showed that the actively occupied people had an internal locus of control compared to the secondary school students and the university students. The results showed the persons from the secondary school student group and these ones from university student group had obviously external locus of control. Nobody from both groups had an internal locus of control.

The results revealed that the most people with own business and the jobless people had an external locus of control. This could mean the people from the both groups tended to accept that the events in their life didn't depend on them.

The most of the respondents from the group "staff on high position" showed an internal locus of control. Here we had participants who worked as a director, a manager, a medical doctor, an engineer, a chief financier. All these people took a big responsibility in their work and in the activity characterized with a big responsibility, a transparent implementation and some high expectancies focused on them, the individuals tended to have an internal locus of control to manage effectively the work and to lead their subordinates.

## Discussion

In the context of our culture and in accordance with the requirements in our world, the education is an important factor that influences and helps the individual to recognize his/her potential and to realize his/her life by the life's demands. The most people with college education in our survey had an internal locus of control and it seems that the people with a college education believe more in their capabilities to deal with the life than the others groups.



People who have a partnership or have a family history (as in the case with divorced and widowers) get knowledge of the controlling and the changing events in their own life. The singles have the freedom and the mobility to affiliate into different and more groups and that hold up the expectations, that the people depend on the group to which belong and they have not control to the events they take place in. Marks (1998) proved that the more affiliation increased the more group dependency grew and at the same time the internal locus of control went down and the external locus of control heightened. A data from another research (Virmozelova, 2012) confirmed a negative significant relationship between the locus of control and the group affiliation suggesting that a higher level of the group affiliation experienced by the singles was related to low internal locus of control and to high external locus of control ( $r = -.303$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The family affiliation is a typical group affiliation due to the partnership and the results of this study demonstrated that the partnership was very important by developing of internal locus of control.

The findings from our research confirmed the assumption that there was a relationship between the occupational status and the type of locus of control, but the supposition that the respondents in a high position, the respondents who were employees and the respondents with own business (self-employed) would demonstrate more internal locus of control in comparison with the workers, the secondary school students, the university students, the retirees and the jobless who would demonstrate the external locus of control, was not proved. The presented data provoked debates what kinds of reasons could explain the similarity between such different groups like jobless and self-employed people. Considering high unemployment (Troyanski et al., 2015), the narrowing job market (Troyanski et al., 2015) and the whole socio-economic conditions in Bulgaria, the people from the group of the jobless and from the group of the self-employed were inclined to have an expectation that their success and the results of their endeavors didn't depend on them. The study did not aim to explore deeply this connection because the group size was not equal and the participants were not many and this was an important factor that influenced the reliability and validity of the data.

## Conclusion

The results we described may not generalize beyond the sample from which they were obtained. We didn't receive statistically significant data to prove the hypothesis that the place of residence (village, small town, city, and capital) influenced the type of locus of control but we proved partly that the degree of education differentiated the locus of control and the respondents with higher education and college education had an internal locus of control, compared with people with lower (elementary and secondary) educational degree who had an external locus of control. Also, our findings showed that the type of family status differentiated the locus of control and the people with a partner history indicated an internal locus of control in contrast to the most singles that had an external locus of control. And finally, the results confirmed the occupational status differentiated the type of locus of control. The most of the workers, employees, staff of the high position and retirees showed internal locus of control, the others groups – self-employed, jobless, secondary school students and university students demonstrated external locus of control.

The family background, however, the occupational activity and the education as a part of the social environment and the group involvement could be related to some changes in the behavioral patterns. Because of the nature of the differences between the aims, tasks and the demands of the familial, professional and educational environment, different behavioral models may influence in different ways some personality aspects as the locus of control. Thus, the personal interaction with different groups leaves a stamp on the change of the point of view in the people's believes in their abilities and it determines their expectations. In this sense, the prognosis of the success based



on the conviction that all depends on the personal efforts is the most reasonable for the people with internal locus of control.

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## Competing Interests

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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