

Relationship Between Perceived Childhood Socioeconomic Status and Adulthood Sense of Control

Mridula Sharma, Bhavana Arya & Sharmistha Shekhawat

Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to see predictive power of perceived childhood socioeconomic status in adulthood sense of control. Past researches found that perceived childhood environmental had an impact on responding towards uncertainty in the current environment. Drawing from the life history theory, the current study examined the psychological mechanism driving such diverging responses to uncertainty. The sample consisted of 100 males between the age ranges of 45 to 55 years, selected from Jaipur city. The psychological test used were Sense of Control Scale (Lachman & Weaver, 1998), a standardized, five-item measure and Childhood socioeconomic status (Griskevicius et al., 2013). The results indicated a negative correlation between perceived poverty and sense of control during uncertainty. Thus, it can be said that the perceived sense of control over the environment is altered by uncertainty, which in turn effects their reaction in such circumstances.

Keywords: Sense of Control, Economic Uncertainty

Self control has always been a much desired aspect in any one's life. Psychologically, one's belief as well as the ability to exercise control over situations and to cope with challenges, can be termed as sense of control (SA) or sense of agency.

Sense of control (SA) can be understood as a subjective sense of self awareness that one's voluntary action is initiated, executed and controlled by oneself (Jeannerod, 2003). Sense of control is an attribute of a person being in active state, who wish to plan out and execute the various actions. The sense of control is an important element of cognitive development, especially, in the development of self awareness. The self recognizes itself as the agent of behavior paves the way for building of an entity independent from the external world. Sense of control can be behaviourally implied in experiencing and practicing autonomy. It has two important aspects: *Personal mastery and Perceived constraints*. Personal mastery is the extent to which an individual perceives himself to be efficacious in carrying out goals. Perceived constraints is the extent of one beliefs that the barriers to reach the goal are beyond one's control. The two dimensions correspond to Skinner's (1996) conceptualization of sense of control comprising competence and contingency.

The roots of development of sense of control can be traced in the childhood years of an individual. Many researchers have found in their extensive work the effect of childhood years, the family environment during those years of life and the experiences of that period on shaping one's future adulthood years. The family socioeconomic status as perceived by children may have great implications in the later years of their life. Socioeconomic status (SES) is a combined measure of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation.

In the face of a difficult or unpredictable situation, one of the factors which shapes the responses is how one perceives his/her childhood environment. For example, during economic uncertainty people from perceived poorer childhoods tend to behave in a more impulsive manner and seek immediate gratification, whereas people who perceive their childhood as wealthy are less impulsive and delay gratification (Griskevicius et al., 2013).

Research by Bradley and Corwyn (2002), studied the linkages between socioeconomic status (SES) and well-being in children. The results showed that SES is associated with a health, cognitive, and socioemotional outcomes in children.

Life history theory provides an evolutionary explanation to these assumptions as well as research findings (Kaplan & Gangstad, 2005; Stearns, 1992). It states that the environment that an individual gets in childhood years is an important determinant in the individual's decision to adopt a fast or slow life history strategy.

Thus, the present study is an attempt to examine the roots of sense of control (in adulthood years) in the perceived socioeconomic status in the childhood years.

Objective

To study the relationship between perceived childhood socioeconomic status and current sense of control.

Hypothesis

Perceived childhood socioeconomic status will be significantly related with the current sense of control.

Method

Sample

The sample of the present study comprised of 100 males with an age range of 45 to 55 years, who are not in a regular salaried job and falling in lower middle and lower socioeconomic class. The education level was kept below graduation. They were married with minimum one and maximum two children. It was assured that they and any of their family member were not suffering from any chronic and/or terminal illness.

Measures

- Sense of control scale (Lachman & Weaver, 1998) is a four-item measure. Responses are obtained on a 7-point scale (1 - strongly disagree, 7 - strongly agree). The aggregate score on four items gives a composite score on sense of control.
- Childhood SES (Griskevicius et al., 2013) is a measure to assess childhood SES, participants have to indicate their agreement with three statements. Participants have to respond in terms of agreed or disagreed. They also have to indicate their household income when growing up.

Procedure

In the study, the above mentioned questionnaires was given to the subjects after setting a rapport with them and instructions were given on how to fill them. Queries were cleared as soon as the subjects faced doubt in filling up the questionnaire. The importance of the study was talked about to the subjects. Then required statistical measures were applied and results were obtained.

Results

Table 1 : Depicting relationship between Sense of Control & Childhood Socio-Economic Status

		Sense Of Control	Childhood Socio-Economic Status
Sense Of Control	Pearson Correlation	1	.411**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results indicates a positive and significant relationship between childhood socioeconomic status and sense of control in adulthood years. The coefficient of correlation has been found to be 0.411, which is significant at 0.01 level of significance.

Discussion

The present research is an attempt to examine the relationship between perceived childhood socioeconomic status and sense of control in adulthood years of one's life.

Sense of control is an important variable in adaption, coping, and well being. A strong sense of control leads individuals to believe that their experiences are caused by their own actions rather than being caused by external factors like chance, fate, or other people. The belief of control influences one's perceived competence to achieve personal goals and influence outcomes in their life.

The results of the current study shows that perceived socioeconomic status in childhood years of one's life has a strong and positive association with sense of control one develops in adulthood years of life. The findings are in line with few past researches. Griskevicius et al., (2013) found that a sense of economic uncertainty leads people from poorer childhoods to become more impulsive

and seek immediate gratification, whereas it leads people from wealthier childhoods to become less impulsive and delay gratification.

Perceived lower subjective socioeconomic status is associated with multiple aspects leading to various outcomes. Being of lower SES implies having fewer resources, and sometimes working at one or the other subordinate rank. This would automatically influence one's sense of power, status, interdependence, a self perception of diminished resources available, which subsequently trigger a curtailed sense of control.

A study found linkage of social class to control support this interpretation, as upper class individuals experience more positive health outcomes because of their increased sense of personal control (Johnson & Krueger, 2005; 2006).

The research findings also gets support from the life history theory proposed by Stearns (1992) and modified by Kaplan & Gangstad, (2005). This theory postulates that that the environment that an person get in childhood years sway that individual to embrace a fast or slow life history strategy. It also proposed to spot the psychological processes that make people with different childhood backgrounds to respond differently to the same stressor.

Thus, the childhood years seems to be very crucial time of one's life time and it has its effects on each and every corner of one's life.

Conclusion

The present research was conducted in order to study the effect perceived childhood SES has on one's sense of control over the various situations in life. The results indicated towards a significant relationship between the two variables, which is further supported by earlier researches and life history theory.

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