

Vulnerability of school students believing in lucky charms- an exploratory research study

Abstract

Lucky charms refers to the idea that objects, actions, thoughts, experiences, and people can bring about good future outcomes. Even in today's scientifically advanced world, this study provides crucial insights into the functioning and persistence of belief systems among young people. The sample population for the study consisted of 102 students of class 9, including both girls and boys from a private school. A questionnaire and a Lucky Charm Symbol was prepared to assess the vulnerability to believe in lucky charms, in the students. Even in today's scientifically advanced world, this study provides crucial insights into the functioning and persistence of luck related belief systems among young people. The findings suggest that the luck related belief systems continue to have a significant psychological impact on young minds, even though the modern era is marked by a proliferation of rational, evidence-based thinking and scientific education. The striking gender difference in vulnerability to lucky charm beliefs is one of the important findings of this study. However considering a research gap in the area of role of belief systems more robust exploration is needed in this domain.

Keywords: belief, lucky charm, school, students, performance

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Puja Singh,¹ Manju Agrawal,² Kamini C Tanwar³

¹Ph.D Scholar, Amity University, India

²Professor Emeritus and Director RACESPH, Amity University, India

³Professor and HOI, Amity University, India

Correspondence: Puja Singh, Ph.D Scholar, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow Campus, UP, India

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Introduction

Millions (perhaps billions) of people around the world believe in luck, the concept of bad and good fortune despite being not much scientific explanations and justifications to it. Despite the lack of a precise definition, many people believe that luck is best described as people's faith and expectations of good fortune.¹ The Cambridge Dictionary,² defines luck as "the force that causes things, especially good things, to happen to you by chance and not as a result of your own efforts or abilities" whereas the Britannica Dictionary³ describe the same as "the things that happen to a person because of chance: the accidental way things happen without being planned". There are some age old concepts that the sentiment of luck can also be shared via objects, some specific behaviour, rituals or practices, especially done on important occasions to bring in good luck, good results, prosperity and happiness. These object(s), behaviour(s), ritual(s) or practice(s) when used in the anticipation of getting good results are called the Lucky Charm(s). Lucky charms therefore refers to the idea that objects, actions, thoughts, experiences, and people can bring about good future outcomes.^{4,5} Anything and everything, be it living or non living could be a lucky charm, as long as they can give the be a good luck.⁶ People around the world, who wants to get good luck has been using the lucky charm(s) since long, be it Irish belief in 4 leaved clover or the modern day practice of wishing good luck or crossing fingers for expecting good things to happen.⁷

In Indian culture, especially in Hinduism which is the most relevant, ancient and mainstream religion of the country, the importance of using Lucky Charm in any of the forms are deeply rooted. For example- wearing stones as ornaments to bring good luck, having dahi cheeni before important events, singing bhajans (hymes) or mantras to bring good omen, or drawing symbols like swastika to anticipate things going well. These beliefs are practiced since generations and is carried forward, and all those who are brought up in Indian households are sure to come across some of these practice for at least once in their lives. People have seen or heard from their parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, teachers or anyone known

about the importance of these lucky charms in bringing good results in lives since childhood. If not in the house holds, children do not fail to notice or hear celebrities having some lucky charms. Michael Jordan, the former famous basketball player, for example, always wore his fortunate blue college shorts underneath his NBA franchise outfit for the sake of fortune during the matches. Taking another example of one of the biggest superstars of India, Shah Rukh Khan's fixation with the number '555' has been talked about for years now. He not only refuses to drive a car with a number plate that does not include 555, but he also made sure that his bike's licence plate in film "Chennai Express" was stamped with this number which he considers to bring him luck and success.⁸ These examples somewhere leads young people to believe that many so-called "fortunate person" use lucky charms very frequently, thus strengthening the believe that that having a good luck charm would bring them good luck and prosperity, and that it will make their day just a little bit better than usual with their good fortune improving on a daily basis and with each task and event.¹

A person's inability to understand, control and predict natural event may arise a fear in them, which in turn threaten his/her wellbeing and places him/her in a confused state. For such a person, using Lucky Charm(s) is a way to feel control over a situation especially when it is tough and predict the forthcoming outcomes.⁹ It is seen day by day that students in high school education settings face a wide range of stress and fear because of ongoing academic demand, where India houses up to 21% population of the world adolescents who are in the high school.¹⁰ According to an article published in Times Of India¹¹ many students believe that carrying a particular object or wearing a certain clothing so called to be lucky can influence the potential outcomes of their test or results. Many confessed feeling positive and more confident in the presence of their lucky charm(s). A similar survey study conducted by Hindustan Times stated that the students follow some traditions and rituals to remain cool and ensure good marks. The rituals like having dahi shakkar (curd and sugar), putting tika on forehead, raksha sutra (red thread) on wrist are widely used all over India as an omen of good luck. Further research by¹² supports the previous literature's findings by showing that the use of lucky charm(s) is a common phenomenon among both school and college

students. Furthermore, research indicates that behaviours, such as wearing a lucky charm, can enhance overall performance and protect against negative outcomes, particularly under stressful conditions.¹³ The use of lucky charms among students has been a topic of interest in various academic disciplines, including psychology, education, and even sociology and though it might sound illusionary, the good luck associated luck charms were found to improve persistence among the subjects, through enhancing self-perceived efficacy as seen in the research of¹⁴ where the participants who were in the presence of a personal luck charm set a higher goal for the tasks assigned to them during the study.

This is an era of scientific knowledge, scientific explanations and scientific explanations. The young population tends to question and wants to understand the logic behind every single happening and not just happening but even beliefs. Beliefs are an important part of human cognitions and a belief formation or change is highly influenced by our observation of the surrounding⁽¹⁵⁾ for e.g. seeing our parents having dahi cheeni before going to work everyday, and at some level we give up our logical reasoning and surrender to the belief that this practice will bring good luck and good results. Therefore the researcher in this study wanted to explore that whether in this era of scientific orientations are the young generation still believing in the concept of luck and lucky charms or rather are prone to believing in a lucky charm if indicate so. In past there have been a lot of researches on superstitious beliefs, rituals etc. and according to then following objectives were made for this study-

Objectives of the study

1. To explore the vulnerability of the private school students believing in Lucky Charms
2. To explore the vulnerability of private school girl students believing in Lucky Charm
3. To explore the vulnerability of private school boy students believing in Lucky Charms

Hypothesis of the study

1. There will be vulnerability of the private school students believing in Lucky Charm
2. There will be more vulnerability in the private school girl students believing in Lucky charm as compared to the private schools boy students

Method

A structured questionnaire was prepared to assess the belief related to the lucky charms in the students. A symbol was designed with the help of an artist keeping in mind strictly that it does not represents any religious sign, any symbol, or a company logo. The symbol was designed carefully as to not to represent any particular type of art or painting. The symbol was named as the "Lucky Charm Symbol". The study employed a survey based descriptive design to study the prevalence of belief in lucky charm among private school adolescent students. In addition the researcher also aims to study any difference in belief system across gender. Obtained responses were analysed according to descriptive statistics and presented into graphical format using MS- excel.

The sample population consisted of the students of class 9 (age 14 years, +- 1 year) from a private school. Proper consent was taken from the school authorities before approaching the students for the activity, the author produced a reference letter issued by the University

requesting to allow for the data collection. The data was collected from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh by visiting the schools physically and getting the hardcopy of the questionnaire filled by the students. An average time taken to complete the activity was 10 minutes. A total of 102 samples were collected.

The researcher introduced herself to the students followed the purpose of her visit which was to conduct a study on a Lucky Charm Symbol " Dear students, I am exploring how students perceive the role lucky charms in achieving goals or enhancing performance like getting good marks in class test. Luck refers to the good fortune that comes your way unexpectedly. You must have yourself experienced or seen people using a Lucky Pen during exams, or eating dahi cheeni before important events to attract good luck. These are called Lucky Charms. These can be any Object (amulets) /Ritual (putting tika on forehead)/Practice (crossing fingers) that are believed to bring good luck. Belief in Luck and lucky charms are very valid part of cultural, traditions and personal belief systems and not a taboo, as we see so many celebrities openly talking and flaunting their luck related beliefs. We approach to this topic with respect and confidentiality."

The students were asked to fill in their basic demographic details carefully in a form provided. The "Lucky Charm Symbol" images were given to the students to look at it carefully, followed by the instructions that said "The symbol that you see is believed to be a lucky charm symbol by some tribes in different part of the world. Look at the symbol carefully, feel its positivity and then answer the questions in the questionnaire. There are no right or wrong answers, but your personal views and experiences is what that matters the most and will contribute fruitfully towards this study. You are required to tick on the option that suits your opinion the most. You are very welcome to ask and doubts or any clarification at any time." The questionnaire consisted of 7 questions but this paper is intended to present the findings of the first 3 questions. The questions required the students to select the most appropriate option that applied to them. First question was a three-point likert scale for simplified attitudinal responses, followed by a dichotomous (Yes/No) item for direct classification of belief presence and finally a five-point Likert scale to assess the intensity of belief. This combination of evaluation enabled both gradation and clarity in capturing participants' responses, while there being no right or wrong answers or any positive or negative scoring for any answers they select.

The Questions were as follows-

1. How do you feel looking at this symbol?
A. Good B. Neutral C. Bad
2. This symbol is used by some tribes for luck enhancement, do you think if you are allowed to keep it with you it will enhance/improve your performance?
A. Yes. B. No
3. If the answer to the above question is **Yes**, please rate on the scale of 5, up to what extend you feel your performance could be improved, (if the answer to the above question is **No** tick on **NA**)
A. Average B. Good. C. Very Good D. Excellent E. Outstanding F. NA

Students were given a minute time to look carefully at the Lucky Charm Symbol and there were asked to come up with any doubts that may arise. It was also made sure that the questions were clear to students, if any doubts they were answered. It was best ensured that the students were provided a comfortable, no distraction environment

to help them focus on the “Lucky Charm Symbol” properly and the answer the questions that were asked.

After the conduction of the activity the students were thanked for participating in the study. The students were also demystified that the Lucky Charm Symbol is originally an artist designed image and has no luck/good fortune beliefs attached to it anywhere in the world. It was just a study and the data would be kept confidential and would be used only for research purpose. The researcher also thanked the school authorities for allowing the research to conduct the study.

Result and discussion

We look at the results with the help of some descriptive graphs that are as follows:-

Figure 1 shows that the number of females in the sample is slightly higher than the number of males but the sample is comparable. The sample of 102 individuals, with 54 female and 49 male individuals is fit for gender based comparison in this study as the gender distribution is nearly balanced with only a small difference of 6 individuals which are unlikely to introduce any large significant biases. Both the gender groups have adequate sample size, well above the minimum threshold of 30 individuals per group ensuring adequate statistical power to conclude a result. Therefore, this sample is able to provide a reliable result while examining the gender difference according to the context of the study.

102 Students



Figure 1 Description of the sample population.

For **Hypothesis 1-** There will be vulnerability of the adolescents believing in Lucky Charm, we consider exploring the responses for question 2 and question 3 of the questionnaire to answer this hypothesis. (Figure 2)

Symbol 1

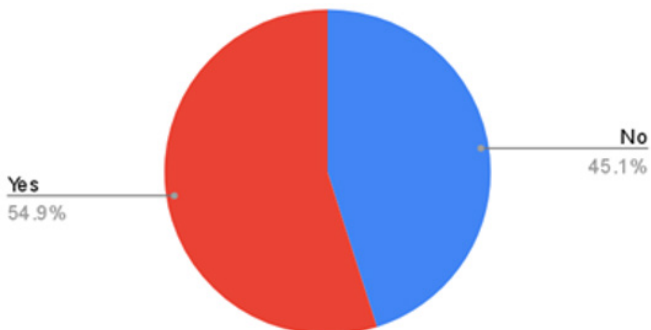


Figure 2 Descriptive answer of Question 2 of the questionnaire.

The question 2 of the questionnaire states- This symbol is used by some tribes for luck enhancement, do you think if you are allowed to

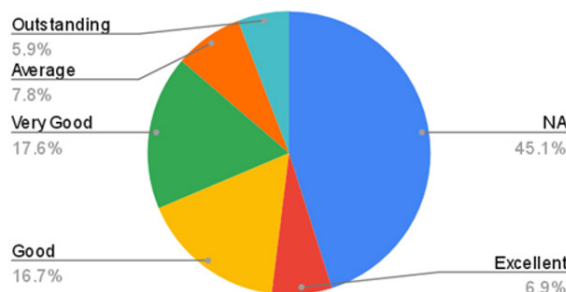
keep it with you it will enhance/improve your performance? A. Yes. B. No

It is shown in Figure 2, that 54.9% students choose the option A. Yes, indicating their belief that if for a particular tribe it can bring good luck and better results it will be help them in bringing luck and good results as well.

Also to dwell in deeper we consider exploring the answer for question 3 of the questionnaire i.e. If the answer to the above question (question 2) is Yes, please rate on the scale of 5, up to what extend you feel your performance could be improved, (if the answer to the above question is No, tick on NA).

Figure 3, shows the distribution of rating that the students who believed that the Lucky Charm shown to them will enhance their performance as well. As evident from the rating scale 17.6% students felt that they would get Very Good enhancement of their luck and therefore their performance would also be improved/ increased.

Symbol 1



A. Average B. Good. C. Very Good D. Excellent E. Outstanding F. NA

Figure 3 Descriptive result of Question 3 of the questionnaire.

For **Hypothesis 2-** There will be more vulnerability in the private school girl students believing in Lucky charm as compared to the private schools boy students we consider exploring the responses for question 2 and question 3, separately for boys and girls data. (Figure 4)

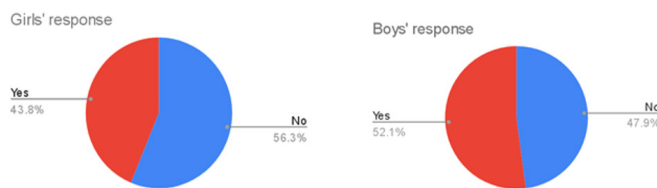


Figure 4 Descriptive result of question 2 of the questionnaire, separately for boys and girls.

It shows comparison between the responses of boys and girls for the question number 2 of the questionnaire- This symbol is used by some tribes for luck enhancement, do you think if you are allowed to keep it with you it will enhance/improve your performance? A. Yes. B. No.

It is evident that boys with 52.1% Yes responses were more vulnerable to believe in the lucky charm as compared to the girls with 43.8% Yes response.

Furthermore to dwell deeper we look into the responses for question 3 of the questionnaire, If the answer to the above question (question 2) is Yes, please rate on the scale of 5, up to what extend you feel your performance could be improved, (if the answer to the above question is No, tick on NA). (Figure 5)

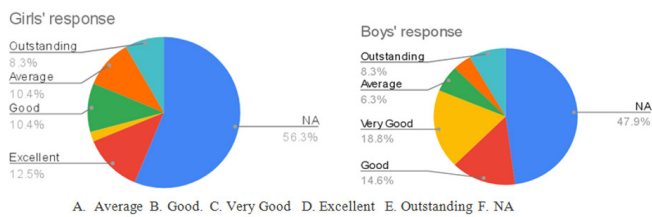


Figure 5 Descriptive result of question 2 of the questionnaire, separately for boys and girls.

It shows comparison between the responses of girls and boys who believed that the lucky charms will enhance their luck and performance. It is evident from figure 4 that boys were more prone to believing that lucky charm shown to them will bring good luck and enhanced results whereas figure 5 shows about 18.8% boys rating the lucky charm would improve their performance up to a Very Good level.

In addition to the above results the Figure 6. below shows the responses of the students to question 1 of the questionnaire i.e. How do you feel looking at this symbol? A. Good B. Neutral C. Bad.

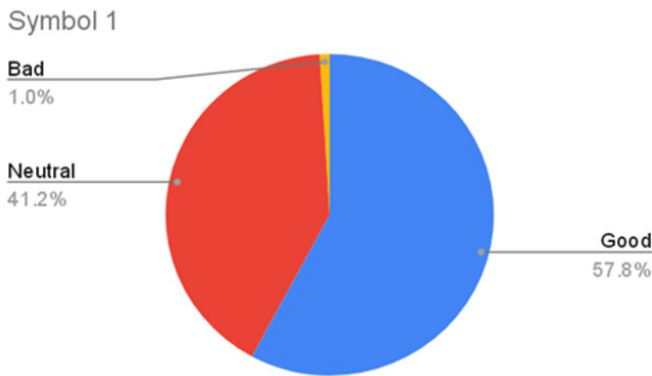


Figure 6 Descriptive result of question 1 of the questionnaire.

It shows that 57.8% students felt good and positive by looking at the Lucky Charm Symbol given to them.

From the results above it is evident that, **Hypothesis 1 is accepted** as 54.9% students including both boys and girls believe that the lucky charm shown to them will surely bring good luck and enhance their performance if they were allowed to keep it with them. To strengthen their belief and establish the authenticity of the lucky charm the scholar instructed the students that the lucky charm is ancient and used by some tribes to bring luck, this statement could have brought out the pre existing beliefs in the students related to rituals and luck related beliefs and practices. The use of lucky charms, can alleviate stress, especially in situations like exams or tests in the schools. Having lucky charms may provide a sense of control, reducing stress and enhancing performance, as it may enhance self-efficacy—the belief in one’s ability to succeed.^{15,16} **Hypothesis 2 is rejected**, as evident from the result above 51.1% boys have believed that the lucky charm symbol shown to them will enhance their luck and performance. This percentage is higher as compared to that of 43.8% of girls who believed the same. A study¹⁷ found that belief in lucky charms positively affected girls’ performance, while boys’ performance remained unaffected, but it is evident in this particular report that the beliefs of boys were higher than that of girls. If talking particularly about Indian context, the belief that luck is an important contributing factor in success apart from hard work, maybe related to

societal norms or gender role socialization process, where males are more comfortable in attributing success to external factors and female might internalize success in a different manner.¹⁸ Men in Indian society have greater freedoms to take risk- whether in education, jobs or business, but this risk taking opportunities also brings uncertainty thus making them more inclined towards believing that success is not just efforts but also a matter of luck or connectivity or good time/fortune. On the other hand in the society girls have limited opportunities that too mediated by family and societal frameworks. This makes women believe more into the concept that persistent hard work (within the societal constraints) and not luck will get them any success.^{19,20} There are very few researches and discussion on this topic, but few theories believe that boys often may exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy, they are generally more inclined to risk taking tasks and may be more susceptible to cognitive biases, such as the illusion of control over the future events, thus the use of lucky charms may serve as a coping mechanism to mitigate the perceived risks and reassure the illusion of control associated with academic challenges.²¹

Conclusion

This study has tried to highlight the persistence of belief systems among young school students even in today’s scientifically advanced world. This modern era is characterised by finding scientific justifications, rational and having an evidence-based thinking, but our findings indicate that lucky charm belief system still continue to significantly impact the young minds. As we can understand from the study beliefs are governed by emotional and social factors rather than dominant empirical evidence and also can affect a person’s perception and behaviour towards a situation. The belief in lucky charm (belief systems) may reflect human need for psychological reassurance and comfort, and a feeling of control and certainty over a stressful or uncertain future situation. In case of school students who are at an important juncture of their social, emotional and intellectual development (especially class 9 students were selected in this study keeping these developmental milestones in mind and also the perceived stressful situations students are in at this stage because of the upcoming board examination, stream and career selection) the luck related beliefs can provide a way for reducing stress, increasing self confidence and creating an illusion of control over the future events like an exam, surprise tests, or other social situations. Belief in lucky charm thus acts not only as a practice but also as a coping mechanism and even subtle clues could be persuasive. As seen in this study that just a mere suggestion about a particular symbol being a “Lucky Charm” was enough to make students believe that actually it will bring good luck for them and also improve their performance, thus also proving that suggestibility and psychological priming can affect young minds.

Another important finding of this study is the gender difference in the vulnerability to believe in the lucky charm as according to the descriptive data, boys as compared to the girls were more vulnerable to believe in the lucky charm and its power to bring good luck and increased performance. This finding of gender differences in belief however requires more detailed investigations about various internal and external factors leading to it. It may also provide an insight into how role, responsibilities and expectations from men in society, might make them vulnerable to look for psychological reassurance from an external factor. To summarize, this study provides a primary insight on how psychological and social factors may interact to shape one’s belief system. However there is a huge research gap in the area to understand the belief systems and thus more robust exploration is required to scientifically describe the phenomenon and its impact.

Declaration

The article is an original research work by the authors and not submitted elsewhere for consideration:

1) All authors have read the submitted version of the manuscript and agreed to submit the work to IRJMS;

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Authors' contribution: 1. Puja Singh wrote the manuscript 2. Dr. Manju Agrawal has given the conceptual framework of this study 3. Dr. Kamini C. Tanwar has helped design tools.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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