

**EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP OF BELIEF IN JUST  
WORLD WITH SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AMONG  
STUDENTS**

**Saba Yasien\***

Islamia University of Bahawalpur

**ABSTRACT**

*The objective of present study was to explore the relationship of personal belief in a just world with happiness, optimism and life satisfaction in students. The sample of 250 students including 131 males and 119 females between age ranges from 18 to 25 years (mean age of 21.8 & SD=2.2) were randomly selected from different higher education institutions situated in Karachi, Pakistan. Personal Belief in Just World Scale (Fatima & Khalid, 2007), Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), Life Orientation Test (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994) and Life Satisfaction Scale (Mughal & Khanam, 2013) were administered. Pearson Product Moment Coefficient of Correlation reveals significant positive correlation of personal belief in just world with happiness ( $r=.31$ ,  $p<.05$ ), optimism ( $r=.20$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and life satisfaction ( $r=.40$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Our findings support the view that personal belief in a just world is an important resource for students in Pakistan as it seems to preserve their subjective well-being.*

---

**Keywords:** Just World Beliefs; Students; Well-being; Happiness; Optimism; Life satisfaction

---

<sup>\*</sup>Correspondence Address: Saba Yasien, PhD., Assistant Professor, Islamia University Bahawalpur, Bahawalpur, Pakistan. Email: [sabayaseen\\_ryk@hotmail.com](mailto:sabayaseen_ryk@hotmail.com)

## **Yasien**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Life is full of adversities and hurdles though human's perception of world as just place and their good or bad deeds will always payoff, give strength to confront with stressors and accept their fate. This belief in just world (BJW) conceptualized as human's view that world is just place where people obtain what they deserve and de-deserve what they get (Lerner, 1980). Just world belief is further categorized in two dimensions; *the personal BJW* which refers to the belief that incidence occurred in individual's life are just; *the general BJW* which refers to the view that the world is a just place in general (Xie, Liu, & Gan, 2010). These beliefs on just world facilitate people to feel confident and to invest on long term future goals as evident from studies conducted on students who are in phase of transition from school to work (Dette, Stober, & Dalbert, 2004), prisoners (Otto & Dalbert, 2005), and young adults who are living in supportive residence (Sutton & Winnard, 2007).

Just world beliefs work as adaptive functions and personal resource that help to sustain the well-being of people in all ages and in diverse situations as well (Dalbert, 2001; Dalbert, 2009). Dalbert (2001) has identified three main functions of the BJW which shows that it has buffering effect on well-being. First high believers of just world are motivated to attain their goals through just means by behaving fairly that give them assurance of fair reward. Second function is to enhance trust on fairness of one's destiny and on others. Third function is to give framework to interpret life in a way that protects just world believers from unforeseeable catastrophe. As a result these functions of BJW and its impact on behavior allow coping with critical life events in better way and people also are reluctant to give it up in contradicting evidence of everyday life (Maes, Tarnai, & Gerlach, 2008). Consequently it leads towards a sense of well-being in distressing or unfair situations and also in routine life.

According to the buffer hypothesis, BJW is contributing to more adaptation for people who face injustice (Dalbert, 1998, 2001, 2002). Personal resource hypothesis recommended BJW adaptive in all conditions of life (see; Correia, Kamble, & Dalbert, 2009; Cubela & Kvartuc, 2007). This hypothesis supports the notion that BJW helps people to handle various life circumstances successfully as a result increase their well-being.

Beliefs about the benevolence and justice in the world may be highly essential for the well-being of people. Just world beliefs lower the levels of

## **Pakistan Journal of Psychology**

rumination (Dalbert, 1997) consequently reduce the occurrence of psychopathological symptoms and general psychological distress (Otto, Boos, Dalbert, Schops, & Hoyer, 2006). Individuals who possess beliefs about justice in world have better abilities to deal with distressing life events and have sense of well-being than non-believers of just world (Nasser, Doumit, & Carifio, 2011). Another study conducted by Xie, Liu, and Gan (2010) found that earthquake victims having strong personal beliefs of just world were more future oriented or hopeful and have reduced level of depression, anxiety and feelings of uncertainty. These beliefs also enhance and strengthen subjective well-being in general (Dalbert, 2001).

Subjective well-being is an umbrella term that is defined by Diener, Sapyta, and Suh (1998) as person's evaluation of life and its domains (marriage, work, income, housing and leisure), evaluations of moods and emotions (feeling pleasant emotions and moods most of the time as well as absence of negative emotions or unpleasant affect) on cognitive and emotional level. Subjective well-being (SWB) deals with questions of how and why individuals view life in positive way and experience good feelings (Diener, 1984). As Dalbert and Maes (2002) found significant positive correlation of just world beliefs with life satisfaction, satisfaction with school experience, and school performance in students of 10 to 21 years old. The results of other studies showed that individuals who have strong beliefs on just world have high self-esteem (Feather, 1991) satisfaction with life (Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996), and feel competent with optimistic outlook about future (Lerner, 1978; Littrell & Beck, 1999). Other studies showed that students with strong BJW have more feelings of happiness than students with weak believers (Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001) and positive associations of these just beliefs were also found with life satisfaction (Dalbert & Katona-Sallay, 1996).

To sum up, just world beliefs are considered as stable and generalized across culture (Furnham & Procter, 1989) and act as a personal resource to motivate individuals for achievement and to promote sense of well-being (Dalbert, 1998; Hafer & Olson, 1998). Therefore, there is need to understand the role of BJW specifically in context of well-being among students in Pakistan.

This study was aimed at testing the following hypotheses:

The high level of beliefs that world is a just place would be associated with (1) happiness; (2) optimism and (3) satisfaction with life among students.

## **Yasien**

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

In the present study, 250 randomly selected students (males=52.4% & females=47.6%) from different Higher Education Institutions/ Universities situated in the city of Karachi, participated as sample. The age range of the students was from 18 to 25 years with the mean age of 21.8 years ( $SD=2.2$ ). Only fulltime students, who do not have any type of physical disability, were included in the study.

### ***Measures***

#### **The Personal Belief in a Just World Scale**

The Pakistani Version of Personal Belief in a Just World Scale (Fatima & Khalid, 2007) was used to measure the belief that world is just place for the one's self. It has been originally developed by Dalbert (1999). High scores indicate high personal beliefs by averaging the score across the items. The Alpha reliability of Pakistani version of Scale was .90 (Fatima & Khalid, 2007).

#### **Subjective Happiness Scale**

The Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) is a 4-item Scale that assesses global subjective happiness. Answers were given on a 7-point Likert scale. The items show excellent internal consistency with Cronbach's Alpha ranging between .79 and .94. This scale has been validated in 14 studies that confirmed high internal consistency.

#### **Life Orientation Test-Revised**

The Life Orientation Test-Revised (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994) is a 10-item scale that assesses expectancies for positive outcomes versus negative by using 5-point scale. Participants were asked to report the expectancies for positive outcomes versus negative. This scale has good internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha .70 to .80) and found to be relatively stable overtime.

## **Pakistan Journal of Psychology**

### **Life Satisfaction Scale**

The Subscale of Life Satisfaction from ICP-Subjective Well-Being Scale (ICP-SWB; Mughal & Khanam, 2013) was used in the present study. ICP-SWB consists of three subscales namely Positive Affect (12 items), Negative Affect (12 items) and Life Satisfaction (5 items). The answers on subscale of Life Satisfaction are given on 5 point Likert scale. Cronbach's Alpha and test-retest reliability of Life Satisfaction Subscale was .80 and .82, respectively. Regarding convergent validity, life satisfaction scale has been correlated with self-esteem (.28), interaction anxiousness scale (-.36) and fear of negative evaluation scale (-.30).

### ***Procedure***

Data for current study was collected from at least two regular classes of four higher education institutions, situated in different localities of Karachi, Pakistan to ensure the variability in responses. Participants were given an explanation of the objectives of this study and informed that their participation is voluntary. Personal Information Form, Personal Belief in a Just World Scale, Life Orientation Scale, Subjective Happiness Scale and Life Satisfaction Scale were administered respectively. At the end of administration, they were thanked for their time and cooperation.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

In order to explore the correlation between the variables, Pearson Moment Coefficient of Correlation was computed. Descriptive Statistics was also used.

## **RESULTS**

The descriptive statistics of percentages and frequencies were calculated for gender, age and family structure presented in Table 1. Means and SD for measures used in study are presented in Table. 2.

## Yasien

**Table 1**  
*Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 250)*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Males	131	52.4
Female	119	47.6
<b>Family Structure</b>		
Nuclear	167	66.8
Joint	83	33.2
<b>Age</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Total Sample	21.8	2.2
Male	21.8	2.3
Female	21.8	2.2

**Table 2**  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Measures (N=250)*

<b>Scales</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Personal-Belief in a Just World	2.71	.66
Subjective Happiness Scale	18.05	4.49
Life-Orientation Test	14.17	2.96
Life Satisfaction Scale	16.66	4.23

## Pakistan Journal of Psychology

As expected, having Belief in Just World found to be associated with higher level of satisfaction with their lives ( $r=.40$ ,  $p<.05$ ), optimism ( $r=.20$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and happiness ( $r=.31$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The results are summarized in Table 3.

**Table3**

*Pearson Correlations of Personal Belief in a Just World with Measures of Subjective well-being*

Variables	r	p
Happiness	.31	.000
Optimism	.20	.001
Life Satisfaction	.40	.000
$p<.05$		

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of current study was to explore the relationship of personal belief in a just world with dimensions of subjective well-being in Pakistani students. As evident from the findings of current study, personal belief in a just world is consistently positively related with life satisfaction, optimism and happiness. Moreover, it corroborates the assumption that the more strongly the students endorse the beliefs in a just world, the more they would be optimistic, happy and satisfied with their lives. Results of this study are consistent with findings of previously published studies on just world beliefs and subjective well-being conducted on western sample (Dalbert & Katona-Sallay, 1996; Dalbert, Lipkus, Sallay, & Goch, 2001; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2002; Lambert, Burroughs, & Chasteen, 1998; Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996; Maes, 1998; Sutton & Winnard, 2008).

Adolescents and young adults who have strong just world beliefs are satisfied with their life and have better social and psychological resources in terms of optimism and self-esteem to cope with tasks of life than non-believers (Correia & Vala, 2004). Likewise, Dalbert and Dzuka (2004) found individuals believers of just world have satisfaction with their life and experience positive affect after controlling personality dimensions such as neuroticism and

## **Yasien**

extraversion. On the other side, people who believe that world is an unjust place, they were expected to be less optimistic, believing that negative events to happen and experience greater anxiety, depressive symptoms, neuroticism, and use defensive coping (Lench & Chang, 2007). As expected BJW provide framework to interpret life in meaningful way which also confirmed by an experimental study that believers of just world were less distressed when they were allowed to find reasons for an event (Lupfer, Doan, & Houston, 1998). The more people believe that they are treated fairly and believed in a world as just place reports more happiness than weak believers of just world (Bulman & Wortman, 1977; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001).

Moreover, findings explain that people hold the justice beliefs, beyond the fact that they get justice now or later regarding events experienced or observed by them and use it as resource to maintain sense of well-being. A reason behind these findings can be that sample of current study consisted on Muslim students and concept of expecting justice is inherited in Muslims due to Islamic philosophy. As Allah speaks to humankind “And We place the scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection, so no soul will be treated unjustly at all. And if there is (any deed even) the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And sufficient are We to take account” (al-Quran 21:47). Therefore, it can be inferred from findings that religious doctrine might be a factor that promote the orientation to perceive the events happened in one’s life or observed by him.

In conclusion, present study indicate beliefs in a just world associated with sense of well-being, in turn add to knowledge that perception of being treated fairly works as important psychological resource to promote mental health in youngsters. These findings will also help to develop set of skills that helps to deal with injustice subjectively. Findings will help mental health professional to take in account the beliefs system of people to preserve their sense of well-being.

## **REFERENCES**

Bulman, R. J., & Wortman, C. B. (1977). Attributions of blame and coping in the real world: Severe accident victims react to their lot. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35, 351-363.

Correia, I., Kamble, S. V., & Dalbert, C. (2009). Belief in a just world and well-being of bullies, victims and defenders: A study with Portuguese and

## Pakistan Journal of Psychology

Indian students. *Anxiety, Stress & Coping: An International Journal*, 22, 497-508.

Correia, I., & Vala, J. (2004). Belief in a just world, subjective well-being and trust of young adults. In C. Dalbert & H. Sallay (Eds.), *The justice motive in adolescence and young adulthood: Origins and consequences* (pp. 189-214). London: Routledge.

Correia, I., Vala, J., & Aguiar, P. (2001). *Are strong believers in a just world happier than low believers in a just world*. Paper presented at the tenth European Developmental Conference, Uppsala, Sweden.

Cubela, V., & Kvartuc, T. (2007). Effects of mobbing on justice beliefs and adjustment. *European Psychologist*, 12, 261-271.

Dalbert, C. (1997). Coping with unjust fate: The case of structural unemployment. *Social Justice Research*, 10, 175-189.

Dalbert, C. (1998). Belief in a just world, well-being, and coping with an unjust fate. In L. Montada & M. J. Lerner (Eds.), *Responses to victimizations and belief in a just world* (pp. 1-7). New York: Plenum Press.

Dalbert, C. (1999). The world is more just for me than generally: About the Personal Belief in a Just World Scale's validity. *Social Justice Research*, 12, 79-98.

Dalbert, C. (2001). *The justice motive as a personal resource: Dealing with challenges and critical life events*. New York: Plenum.

Dalbert, C. (2002). Beliefs in a just world as a buffer against anger. *Social Justice Research*, 15, 123-145.

Dalbert, C. (2009). Belief in a just world. In M. R. Leary & R. H. Hoyle (Eds.), *Handbook of Individual Differences in Social Behaviour* (pp. 288-297). New York: Guilford Publications.

Dalbert, C., & Dzuka, J. (2004). Belief in a just world, personality, and well-being of adolescents. In C. Dalbert & H. Sallay (Eds.), *The justice motive*

## Yasien

*in adolescence and young adulthood: Origins and consequences* (pp. 101-116). London: Routledge.

Dalbert, C., & Katona-Sallay, H. (1996). The "belief in a just world" construct in Hungary. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 27(3), 293-314.

Dalbert, C., Lipkus, I. M., Sallay, H., & Goch, I. (2001). A just and unjust world: Structure and validity of different world beliefs. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 30, 561-577.

Dalbert, C., & Maes, J. (2002). Belief in a just world as a personal resource in school. In M. Ross & D. T. Miller (Eds.), *The justice motive in everyday life* (pp. 365-381). Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

Dette, D., Stober, J., & Dalbert, C. (2004). Belief in a just world and adolescents' vocational and social goals. In C. Dalbert & H. Sallay (Eds.). *The justice motive in adolescence and young adulthood: Origins and consequences* (pp. 101-116). London, UK: Routledge.

Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95, 542-575.

Diener, E., Sapyta, J. J., & Suh, E. (1998). Subjective well-being is essential to well-being. *Psychological Inquiry*, 9, 33-37.

Dzuka, J., & Dalbert, C. (2002). Mental health and personality of Slovak unemployed adolescents: About the beliefs in a just world's impact. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32(4), 732-757.

Fatima, I., & Khalid, R. (2007). Some aspects of reliability and validity of Beliefs in a Just World Questionnaire. *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 5, 15-24.

Feather, N. T. (1991). Human values, global self-esteem, and belief in a just world. *Journal of Personality*, 59, 81-107.

Furnham, A., & Procter, E. (1989). Belief in a just world: Review and critique of the individual difference literature. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 28(4), 365-384.

## Pakistan Journal of Psychology

Hafer, C. L., & Olson, J. M. (1998) Individual differences in the belief in a just world and responses to personal misfortune. In L. Montada & M. J. Lerner (Eds.), *Responses to victimizations and belief in a just world* (pp. 1-7). New York, NY: Plenum.

Lambert, A. J., Burroughs, T., & Chasteen, A.L. (1998).Belief in a just world and right-wing authoritarianism as moderators of perceived risk. In L. Montada&M. J. Lerner (Eds.), *Responses to Victimization and Belief in a Just World*, New York: Plenum Press.

Lench, H. C., & Chang, E. S. (2007). Belief in an unjust world: When beliefs in a just world fail. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 89(2), 126–135.

Lerner, M. J. (1978). “Belief in a just world” versus the “authoritarianism” syndrome...but nobody liked the Indians. *Ethnicity*, 5, 229-237.

Lerner, M. J. (1980). *The belief in a just world: A fundamental delusion*. New York: Plenum Press.

Lipkus, I., Dalbert, C., & Siegler, I. (1996). The importance of distinguishing the belief in a just world for self versus others: Implications for psychological wellbeing. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22(7), 666-677.

Littrell, J., & Beck, E. (1999).Perceiving oppression: Relationships with resilience, self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and reliance on God in African-American homeless men. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 26(4), 137-158.

Lupfer, M. B., Doan, K., & Houston, D. A. (1998). Explaining unfair and fair outcomes: The therapeutic value of attributional analysis. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 37, 495-511.

Lyubomirsky, S., & Lepper, H. S. (1999). A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation. *Social Indicators Research*, 46(2), 137-155.

## **Yasien**

Maes, J. (1998). Immanent justice and ultimate justice: Two ways of believing in justice. In L. Montada & M. J. Lerner (Eds.), *Responses to victimizations and believing a just world* (pp. 1-7). New York: Plenum Press.

Maes, J., Tarnai, C., & Gerlach, T. (2008). The Janus-faced justice motive: Consequences of BJW for self and others. Poster presented at the 12th Biennial Conference of the International Society for Justice Research (ISJR), 14th to 17th August 2008, Adelaide / Australia.

Mughal, F., & Khanam, S. J. (2013). Convergent validity of ICP Subjective Wellbeing Scale (SWBS). *Pakistan Journal of Psychology*, 44(2), 69-79.

Nasser, R., Doumit, J., & Carifio, J. (2011). Well-being and belief in a just world among rest home residents. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 39(5), 655-670.

Otto, K., Boos, A., Dalbert, C., Schops, D., & Hoyer, J. (2006). Posttraumatic symptoms, depression, and anxiety of flood victims: The impact of the belief in a just world. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 40, 1075-1084.

Otto, K., & Dalbert, C. (2005). Belief in a just world and its functions for young prisoners. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 39, 559-573.

Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (1994). Distinguishing optimism from neuroticism (and trait anxiety, self-mastery, and self-esteem): A reevaluation of the life orientation test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 1063-1078.

Sutton, R. M., Douglas, K. M., Wilkin, K., Elder, T. J., Cole, J. M., & Stathi, S. (2008). Justice for whom, Exactly? Beliefs in justice for the self and various others. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(4), 528-541.

Sutton, R. M., & Winnard, E. J. (2007). Looking ahead through lenses of justice: The relevance of just-world beliefs to intentions and confidence in the future. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 46(3), 649-666.

Xie, X., Liu, H., & Gan, Y. (2010). Belief in a just world when encountering the 5/12 Wenchuan earthquake. *Environment and Behavior*, XX(X) 1-21.