

Self-esteem as Predictor of Belief in Just World among University Students: The Moderating Role of Personality Factors

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The present study aimed at examining the moderating role of personality factors in the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world among university students. The present study was based on cross-sectional survey research design. The sample of the present study comprised 400 university students. Purposive convenient sampling technique was applied for data collection. Self-Esteem Scale, Mini Marker Personality Inventory, and Personal Belief in Just World Scale were used to collect the data. Multiple Moderated Regression analysis was applied to test the hypotheses. The findings indicate that self-esteem positively predicted belief in just world. Extroversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience positively predicted belief in just world whereas neuroticism negatively predicted belief in just world. Extroversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience positively moderated the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world whereas neuroticism negatively moderated the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world among university students.

Keywords: Self-esteem, personality factors, belief in just world

Justice has always been one of the major concerns for human beings. Belief in the just world phenomenon is an indicative of justice motive. People are motivated to believe in a just world stating that people generally get what they deserve (Lerner, 1965). Belief in just world enables individuals to confront their physical and social environment in an effective manner. Belief in just world helps individual to commit himself to pursuit long range goals and helps to the socially regulated behaviors of day to day life (Lerner & Miller, 1978). The predictors and outcome being studied in the current research are different aspects of positive psychology which is of the interest of the researchers in the recent decade. Belief in just world phenomenon is an important component of positive psychology because it is related to justice (Seligman, 2002). The belief will be higher in just world and will be proportionate to self-esteem (Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996).

Research studies on the relationship between belief in just world and personality was triggered

by the introduction of the first belief in a just world scale by Rubin and Peplau (1973, 1975) which assessed individual differences. This approach inspired researchers that the belief in a just world should be investigated within the framework of personality dispositions, and by this approach, positive associations were found particularly with internal locus of control and authoritarianism (Furnham & Procter, 1989). Researchers (Correia, Kamble, & Dalbert, 2007; Lipkus et al., 1996) found a positive relationship between personality dispositions and belief in just world. Thus, personality traits are directly correlated with belief in the just world. In studies conducted by Heaven and Connors (1988) and Rim (1983), a negative correlation between neuroticism and belief in the just world was found. In addition, women who scored low on belief in just world were found to be more introverted (Heaven & Connors, 1998). Extraversion and openness were positively correlated with general belief in a just world. The same results were found for belief in a just world

for self, which also correlated negatively with neuroticism (Dalbert et al., 1987).

Finally, the research provided evidence that the belief in a just world as a personality trait is correlated with global personality dimensions. Particularly, empirical findings indicate a negative association between personal belief in just world and neuroticism, consistent with the positive outlook that the belief in a just world provides (Lipkus et al., 1996). Nevertheless, studies controlling for neuroticism evidenced the increment validity of the personal just world belief (Dalbert & Dzuka, 2004). Just like personality, a good deal of research (Delbert, 2002; Correia, Kamble, & Dalbert, 2007) indicates self-esteem as positive predictor of belief in just world. As high self-esteem boosts the self-acceptance, self-competence, and self-concept levels of adolescents which results in positive psychological consequences and high belief in just world also breeds positive psychological consequences indicates that high self-esteem predict belief in just world. Therefore, lower self-esteem and lower belief in just world results in destructive outcomes like low anger and low fear of future (Correia, Kamble, & Dalbert, 2007; Delbert, 2002; Steensma & van Dijke, 2006).

Keeping in view the previous researches, in the current research, the moderating role of personality factors between self-esteem and belief in the just world has been investigated. The focus of previous research was on investigating the moderating role of belief in just world with different variables i.e. hostile attribution bias, victim blaming, etc (Begue & Muller, 2006). However, in the present research, it is investigated whether personality plays a moderating role between self-esteem and belief in just world. Past research focused more on investigating the outcomes of the belief in just world (Hafer & Begue, 2005; Mudrack, 2004; Otto & Dalbert, 2009; Sallay, 2004) but the present study focuses on examining the predictors of belief in just world. Another trend in the previous studies is that belief in the just world is studied with specific populations like the victims of various disasters, accidents (Fasel & Spini, 2010; Sleath & Bull, 2010), flood victims (Correia & Vala, 2004; Otto, Boos, Dalbert,

Schöps, & Hoyer, 2006), prisoners (Otto & Dalbert, 2005), bullying behaviour (Correia & Dalbert, 2008) that have explored the belief in just world among various disastrous and clinical populations and no single research to our knowledge have been conducted on normal population. It was the need of the time that normal population should be studied to investigate the problems related to normal population, especially adolescent students. In Pakistan, only one research has been conducted so far, on the clinical population that explored the relationship of belief in just world and subjective well-being in mothers of Down syndrome children. So, it was the need that normal population should be studied to explore the predictors of belief in just world. In this regard the present research is an attempt to bridge this gap. On the basis of the literature review, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Self-esteem is positively related to belief in just world among university students.

H2: Extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are positively related to belief in just world.

H3: Neuroticism is negatively related to belief in just world among university students.

H4: Personality factors will moderate the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world among university students.

Conceptual Framework

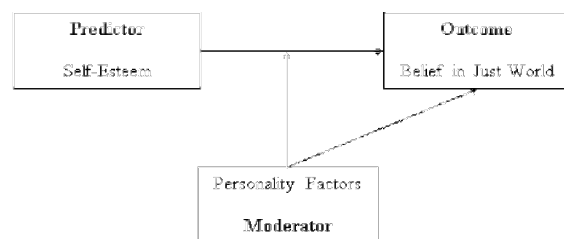


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the moderating role of personality factors in the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world

Method

Participants:

The present study is based on cross-sectional survey research design. The sample of

the present study consisted of university students ($N = 400$) with age range from 21 to 30 years. Both male ($n = 200$, 50%) and female students ($n = 200$, 50%) were included in this research. On the demographic information sheet, all students reported middle socio-economic status. All the students were Muslims. Purposive convenient sampling technique was employed to collect the data from university students.

Measures:

The self esteem scale developed by Rifai (1999) in Urdu was used in the current research. The scale consist of 29 items and it is five point likert scale. Response categories ranges from 1 to 5 with giving the score of 5 to 'strongly agree', 4 to 'agree', 3 to 'neutral', 2 to 'disagree', and 1 to 'strongly disagree'. The alpha reliability of the scale is .83. The Mini Marker Personality Inventory translated by Manzoor (2000) was used in the current research. The questionnaire consisted of five personality factors including openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. The scale consisted of 40 items and it was the Five point Likert scale. Each subscale comprised eight items respectively. There were no cut off scores in the scale. Response categories ranges from 1 to 5 with giving the score of 5 to 'strongly agree', 4 to 'agree', 3 to 'neutral', 2 to 'disagree', and 1 to 'strongly disagree'. Alpha reliability of the scale is .67. The Personal Belief in a Just World Scale developed by Delbert (1999) was used in the current research. The scale consisted of seven items and it was the four point Likert scale. The

response categories range from 1 to 4 with giving the score of 4 to 'strongly agree', 3 to 'agree', 2 'to disagree', and 1 to 'strongly disagree'. Alpha reliability of the scale is .82 to .87 and .93.

Procedure:

The researchers identified the universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad to collect the information. The researcher individually approached the participants and motivated them to participate in the study by providing required information regarding the nature, objectives and importance of the study. Thus the participants individually provided the information. A booklet containing three scales including Self-Esteem Scale, Mini-Marker Personality Inventory, and Personal Belief in Just World Scale respectively, were administered in a sequence on the participants without any time limit to complete the scales. However, the participants took an average of 25 minutes to complete the scales. Dual informed consent was obtained in a written form from the authorities in the universities and the immediate participants. In the end, participants were thanked for their voluntary participation.

Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics, alpha reliability coefficients, and zero-order correlation among study variables. The results indicate that all the scales have an acceptable internal consistency. Findings indicate that belief in just world has significant positive correlation with extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Alpha Reliability coefficients and Pearson Correlation coefficients for all study variables among university students (N = 400)

Variables	M	SD	á	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Belief in just world	18.94	4.92	.88	-	.14*	.31*	.19**	.31*	-.14**	.13*
2. Extroversion	17.90	4.57	.62		-	.28**	.37**	.49**	-.33**	.34**
3. Conscientiousness	19.90	4.18	.65			-	.38**	.44**	-.55**	.14*
4. Agreeableness	18.03	4.01	.63				-	.37**	-.41**	.15**
5. Openness	18.37	4.20	.70					-	-.17**	.15**
6. Neuroticism	23.71	4.07	.65						-	-.17**
7. Self-esteem	45.43	8.83	.80							-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

experience, and agreeableness. Belief in the just world has a significant negative correlation with neuroticism. Belief in just world has significant positive correlation with self-esteem. Extroversion has significant positive correlation with conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness, and self-esteem whereas significant negative correlation with neuroticism. Conscientiousness has significant positive correlation with openness to experience, agreeableness, and self-esteem whereas significant negative correlation with neuroticism. Openness to experience has significant positive correlation with agreeableness, and self-esteem whereas significant negative correlation with neuroticism. Agreeableness has significant positive correlation with self-esteem whereas significant negative correlation with neuroticism. Neuroticism has significant positive correlation with self-esteem.

conscientiousness, openness to experience and agreeableness positively moderated the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world whereas neuroticism negatively moderated the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world among university students.

Table 2. Moderating Multiple Regression analysis showing the effect of personality factors as a moderator of the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world (N = 400)

Model	\hat{a}	ΔR^2	ΔF
Self-Esteem	1.69**	.188	.09*
Extroversion	.68*		
Conscientiousness	.59**		
Agreeableness	1.97***		
Openness to Experience	.54*		
Neuroticism	-.82*		
Self-esteem x extroversion	.83*		
Self-esteem x conscientiousness	1.86**		
Self-esteem x agreeableness	1.07**		
Self-esteem x openness to experience	.57*		
Self-esteem x neuroticism	-.96*		

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

Table 2 shows the results of Multiple Moderated Regression analysis. The ΔR^2 value of .188 indicate that 18.8% variance in the dependent variable can be accounted for by the predictors $F(10, 389) = .09, p < .05$. The findings indicate that extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness are significant positive predictors of belief in just world whereas neuroticism is the significant negative predictor of belief in just world. Self-esteem is the significant positive predictors of belief in just. Extroversion,

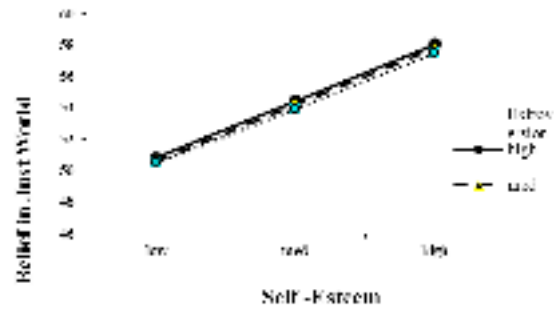


Figure 2. Extroversion as a moderator of the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world (N=400)

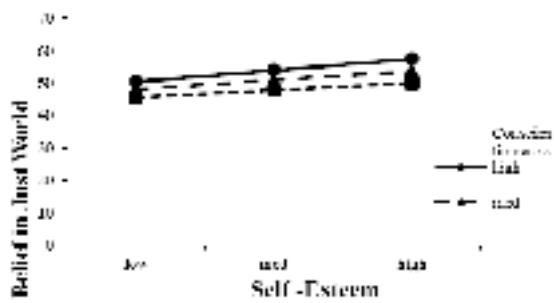


Figure 3. Conscientiousness as a moderator of the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world (N = 400)

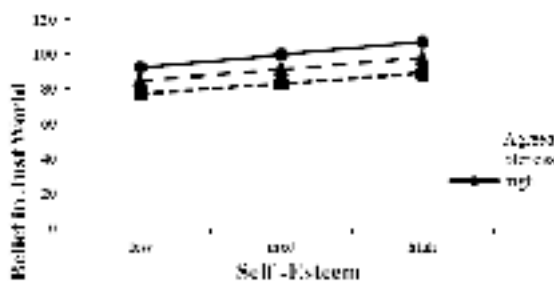


Figure 4. Agreeableness as a moderator of the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world (N = 400)

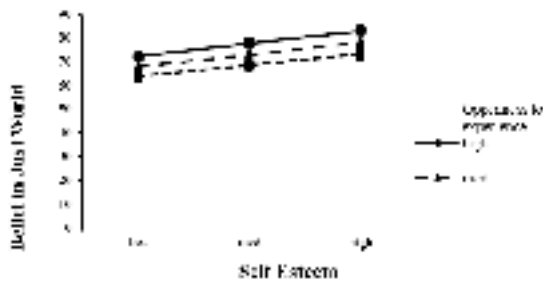


Figure 5. Openness to experience as moderator of the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world (N = 400)

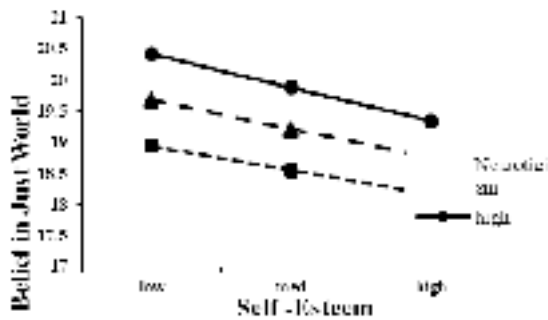


Figure 6. Neuroticism as moderator of the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world (N = 400)

Discussion

All the hypotheses are supported in the present study. The first hypothesis “self-esteem is positively related to belief in just world among university students” was supported. The current findings are consistent with the prior research evidence (Steensma & van Dijke, 2006) indicating significant positive relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world. Delbert (2002) discovered that high self-esteem is positively associated with belief in just world. Moreover, Correia, Kamble, and Dalbert (2007) found a positive relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world and furthermore with personality, quality of life and life satisfaction.

The second hypothesis “extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness is positively related to belief in just world” was supported in the present study. The current findings are in the line with the past research (Lipkus et al., 1996; Heaven & Connors, 1998; Kamble & Dalbert, 2007). A good deal of

research is evident that extroversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness and agreeableness is positively related to personal belief in just world (Rubin & Peplau, 1973, 1975). According to Dalbert et al. (1987), extraversion and openness are positively correlated with belief in just world. Lipkus et al. (1996) found that the “big 5” personality dimensions have strong relationship with personal belief in just world (Wolfradt & Dalbert, 2003). Correia, Kamble, and Dalbert (2007) studied personality factors and found a positive relationship between personality factors and belief in just world. Although substantive amount of research focused mainly on the maladaptive functions of the belief in a just world, such as contempt for the victim (Hafer & Begue, 2005), however, since the 1970s, another element of research has examined individual differences in the belief in a just world and found that it also helps important adaptive functions (Furnham, 2003). It is predicted that the individuals who scored high on these positive personality dimensions were more emotionally stable, extroverts, likable, helpful, and less neurotic and they also scored high on belief in just world, whereas they scored low on stress and depression (Dalbert, 2003). These relationships between personality factors and belief in just world were especially true for students and women (Heaven & Connors, 1988; Rim, 1983).

The third hypothesis “neuroticism is negatively related to belief in just world among university students” was supported in the present study. Wolfradt and Dalbert (2003) studied personality, values, and their relationship with belief in a just world. The results showed that extraversion was positively correlated whereas neuroticism was negatively associated with belief in a just world. Predominantly, empirical findings indicate a negative association between neuroticism and belief in just world, consistent with the positive outlook that the belief in a just world provides (Lipkus et al., 1996). Neuroticism is a strongly negative predictor of belief in just world whether it is personal, general and others (Dalbert & Dzuka, 2004). Dalbert et al. (1987) found the same results of neuroticism with personal belief in just world and belief in just world for

others. Heaven and Connors (1988) and Rim (1983) conducted the research on big five personality traits and its relationship with belief in just world and found that neuroticism negatively predicts belief in just world. A considerable amount of researches shows maladaptive and negative functions of neuroticism in relation with belief in just world (Hafer & Begue, 2005).

The fourth hypothesis “personality factors will moderate the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world among university students” was supported in the present study. The reason for the moderating role of personality is that personality dispositions often support and strengthen the personal belief in the just world with the contribution of self-esteem (Dalbert, 1999). Dalbert (2007) explained that personality dispositions are strongly associated with belief in just world. In the current research, it is found that extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience moderated the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world. For high-extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world is positive. The personality traits increase the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world. These results are consistent with previous research (Correia, Kamble, & Dalbert, 2007) illustrating that personality traits positively predict belief in just world.

Positive personality traits—extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience help people in coping events of their daily life and result in high belief in just world. Belief in just world serves as personal resource that affects only under specific adverse conditions. Individuals high on these positive personality traits is thought to reflect individual differences to be extrovert, kind, considerate, emotionally stable, likable, cooperative, and helpful, and have better coping against specific adverse conditions (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997). Belief in just world as personal resource helps to withstand the good psychological and mental health of people of all ages in diverse situations, victims, and non-victims, the personality

disposition can be seen as moderator between high self-esteem and belief in just world (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007).

Neuroticism also moderated the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world. Neuroticism and its elevated levels of negative emotions has been associated with low level of belief in just world, especially when the individual is high in neuroticism (Correia, Kamble, & Dalbert (2007). Thus, as neuroticism decreases, the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world becomes more positive. The results are consistent with the previous research (Lipkuset et al., 1996) showing that neuroticism negatively predicts belief in just world. According to Costa and McCrae (1991), individuals high on the neuroticism will show characteristics of worrying, fear, guilt, sadness, anger, embarrassment, disgust, and low well-being. On the other hand, individuals high on belief in just world result in high well-being (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007). Therefore, personality moderates the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world. The moderating role or personality factors in the studies of belief in just world is well-established (Bègue & Muller, 2006).

The present study has some limitations. First, the study has correlational design which prevents from drawing causal inferences. For the purpose to elicit the cause and effect relationships, longitudinal and experimental designs are recommended for future research. Secondly, the sample was selected through purposive sampling technique, thus each individual of the target population had not equal chance of selection as in case of random sampling. Similarly, the sample consisted of only the university students of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, thus the results cannot be generalized. The sample of the present research only consisted of the students of public sector universities but it would be better if the students of private sector universities were also included in the sample. Third, self-report measures were used in the present study and the students rated themselves on all the scales which can cause common method variance. Beside all these limitations, the findings have implications for educational

psychologists and mental health professionals.

Conclusion

The present study aimed at investigating the moderating role of personality factors in the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world among university students. All the hypotheses were supported in the present study. Findings indicated that self-esteem was the significant positive predictor of belief in just world. Extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness were positively correlated whereas neuroticism was negatively correlated with belief in just world. Personality factors significantly moderated the relationship between self-esteem and belief in just world. The findings have worthy implications in the higher education institutions of Pakistan.

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