

Research Paper

Correlational Study on Subjective Well-Being, Belief in Just World and Conscientiousness

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the current study is to explore the relationship between General Belief in Just World, Conscientiousness and Subjective Well-Being. The study employed a survey method wherein standardized questionnaires were administered to participants from different cities of India. Findings indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between General Belief in Just World and Subjective Well-Being ($r = 0.169$, $p < 0.001$) and between Conscientiousness and Subjective Well-Being ($r = 0.255$, $p < 0.0001$). The study also explores the association between Subjective Well-Being and other demographic factors such as Marital Status, Age, Gender and Affiliation to Religion. The current study provides evidence that there exists a significant relationship between religiosity and Subjective Well-Being and marital status and Subjective Well-Being.

Keywords: *Conscientiousness, Subjective Well-Being, Belief in Just World, General Belief In Just World, Correlation*

Subjective well-being (SWB) is defined as ‘a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life’ (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2002). A three-component model of SWB was developed by Ed Diener in 1984. It contains cognitive judgments and emotional reactions of individuals. It also illustrates how individuals experience the quality of their lives (Diener, 1984). The 3 components of the model are distinct and yet related components of well-being which are frequent positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and cognitive evaluations such as life satisfaction. Positive Affect is defined as, “the internal feeling state (affect) that occurs when a goal has been attained, a source of threat has been avoided, or the individual is satisfied with the present state of affairs”. Negative Affect

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is defined as, “the internal feeling state (affect) that occurs when one has failed to achieve a goal or to avoid a threat or when one is not satisfied with the current state of affairs” (APA Dictionary, 2021). Life-satisfaction is “the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as-a-whole” (Saris, 1995).

There are a few factors that influence the SWB of individuals, one of which is life events. Life events show a modest but consistent relation with SWB. In general, it is known that good events are related to positive affect and bad events to negative affect. Apart from this, one’s ability to act or control also impacts SWB, therefore due to lack of control, even pleasant events can reduce SWB. Age is another factor though there is mixed evidence, the general trend is that as age increases there is a slow rise in life satisfaction. A modest interaction is found between gender and SWB. It is seen that young females are happier compared to their male counterparts. However, older men seem to be happier as compared to older females. But when this crossover occurs (i.e., around age 45), the difference is not significant (Batz-Barbarich, Cassondra & Tay, Louis, 2017). Yang et al., (2019) had also found a relationship between SWB and traumatic events. It was reported that those adults who had reported at least one traumatic experience in their adult life predicted depressive symptoms and worse life-satisfaction. Religion is also connected to SWB. Though religious faith, traditions, etc are positively correlated to SWB, because religiosity is being operationalized differently, the findings are mixed (Villani et al., 2019). Marriage, Family, Race, Biological factors, Income, Personality, Social Contact, etc., are other factors that also have some influence on SWB. Similarly, SWB is also significantly impacted by the self-esteem and resilience of the individual. These variables also act as mediating factors for Belief in Just World and SWB (Nartova-Bochaver et al., 2019)

According to Lerner (1980) the Just-World theory assumes that people want to believe that they live in a world where good things happen to good people and bad things only happen to bad ones and therefore everyone harvests what they sow. This belief is essential for people to feel safe and positive. It helps to perceive the world as a predictable and manageable place (Lerner, 1980; Dalbert, 2009; Hafer and Sutton, 2016). So, when a threat of injustice is observed or experienced, people try to defend their BJW and try that justice could be cognitively restored by blaming and compensating victims, justifying the status quo or re-evaluating the situation so that it resonates with their BJW. It can be expected that Belief in Just World would have a positive impact on Subjective Well-Being as the important properties of Just World Hypothesis provides a framework within which the events of life could be interpreted, establishes trust with respect to fairness in the world and so on.

Belief in Just World (BJW) has two dimensions i.e., Personal Belief in Just World, reflecting the belief that events in one’s own life are generally just, and General Belief in Just World, reflecting the belief that the world is basically a just place (Kamble & Dalbert., 2012). Numerous studies have provided ample evidence for relationship between BJW and the components of SWB. In a representative sample of Irish adults, Ritter, Benson, and Snyder (1990) observed that those high in BJW were less depressed than those low in BJW, and that this relationship remained stable even when controlling for effects such as the economic situation or the belief in internal control over one’s life. Schmitt and Maes (2000) also reported a significant negative relationship between BJW and depression. Correia and Dalbert (2007) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between BJW and SWB at a school level. 9th to 12th graders were tested on BJW and Satisfaction with life. The correlation between Personal BJW and Life Satisfaction was 0.56 ($p < 0.001$). Thus, the personal BJW was important in explaining justice experiences and wellbeing.

The second component of BJW, is the General BJW. In the study by Correia and Dalbert (2007), the correlation between General BJW and Life satisfaction was 0.38 ($p < 0.001$). A study that focused on the relationship between BJW and SWB was conducted by Yu, Ren, Huang, et al., (2018) with undergraduate students. They were measured on both Personal and General BJW, SWB and Sense of control. The correlations between the two types of BJW, that is, General and Personal with Life satisfaction was approximately the same, that is, 0.35 and 0.32 ($p < 0.01$) respectively. There also exists a relationship between the General BJW and the personality trait of Conscientiousness. Bollman et.al., (2015) conducted studies to assess the relationship between just world belief both general and personal with the HEXACO and five-factor models of personality. It was found that General BJW was positively correlated to Extraversion and Conscientiousness ($r = -0.09$ to 0.10) and negatively correlated to Neuroticism and Openness. Similar evidence of a positive correlation between General BJW and Conscientiousness was found by Wolfradt and Dalbert (2003).

Conscientiousness is a strong predictor of quality of life but the predictive power of Conscientiousness on SWB is not studied widely (Steel Schmidt and Shultz, 2008; Albuquerque et al., 2011). Boyce, Wood, & Brown (2010) suggest that conscientious people tend to be satisfied with life because of their aspiration to make progress in life and which in turn could make conscientiousness a predictor for the cognitive evaluation of subjective well-being. Conscientiousness is defined as, “the propensity to follow socially prescribed norms for impulse control, to be goal directed, to plan, and to be able to delay gratification” (Robert et. al., 2009). Conscientiousness concerns the way in which one controls, regulates and directs one’s impulses. People high on conscientiousness tend to be organized and efficient, self-disciplined, have high need for achievement, act dutifully and thorough which makes them dependable and responsible individuals but extremely conscientiousness may be seen as boring and conventional (Sathe, et al., 2020). On the contrary, people low in conscientiousness tend to be disorganized, relaxed, laid back, impulsive, less goal-oriented, and are less driven to succeed and are more likely to engage in antisocial and criminal behaviour (Waude, 2017; Ozer, 2006).

There have been few studies which investigated the direct relationships between conscientiousness and SWB. However, studies show that the SWB components are strong predictors of Personality traits (Abdullahi et al., 2020). A study done by Hayes and Joseph (2002) examining The Big 5 personality dimensions found that lower Neuroticism, higher Conscientiousness, and greater Extraversion were correlated with higher scores on all SWB measures determining that these dimensions of personality are associated with SWB. Furthermore, life satisfaction was better predicted by conscientiousness. A similar study on a Turkish sample revealed that SWB was positively predicted by Conscientiousness and Extraversion (Asude Malkoç, 2011). It was found that Conscientiousness and other personality traits have specific and differential role in explaining the variance between the components of SWB (Albuquerque et al., 2011).

With respect to life satisfaction, it is seen that conscientiousness independently influences life satisfaction (Mayungbo, 2016). A study was done on Indian population by Deepa Tanksale in 2015 which reported that conscientiousness was the most significant predictor of life satisfaction as it accounts for 13%, 6%, and 2% of variance in life satisfaction, positive, and negative effect respectively. Hence, Conscientiousness trait specifically and personality seem to be an important predictor of subjective well-being in India. Abdullahi et al., (2020) also found conscientiousness to be significantly positively associated with

happiness, life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Conscientiousness had the strongest relationship with happiness and life satisfaction. In general participants who were high on the traits of conscientiousness reported higher levels of life satisfaction than their counterparts who reported being low on conscientiousness (Mayungbo, 2016).

Majority of the above findings are restricted by several factors. First, most of the SWB research comes from studies conducted in western countries. The research studies exploring SWB in Asian countries are limited in number. Secondly, most of the studies consider the whole personality dimension unlike the present study which explicitly focuses on Conscientiousness. A search of the literature revealed that the Personal BJW was more correlated to SWB as compared to General BJW. Thus, this study attempted to examine the relationship between SWB, General BJW, and Conscientiousness in the Indian context.

METHODOLOGY

Objective

The objective of the current study was to explore the relationship between General Belief in Just World, Conscientiousness and Subjective Well-Being.

Hypotheses

- There is a significant positive correlation between scores on General Belief in Just World and Subjective Well-being.
- There is a significant positive correlation between scores on Conscientiousness and Subjective Well-being.

Participants

Pre-screening was done to exclude the participants who were outside the range of 18 – 40 years (4) and who reported any recent traumatic experience (7). Convenient sampling was used wherein 321 participants were finally administered the questionnaire for this study. The data was checked for any outliers and 5 outliers were found which were then eliminated from the study. Thus, the sample size was 316. Other demographic variables that were considered were Age Range (18-24 years = 205, 25-40 years = 111), Gender (Males = 144, Females = 172), Affiliation to Religion (Religious = 249, Non-Religious = 67), Marital status (Married = 62, Unmarried = 254, Divorced = 0, Widowed = 0).

Instruments

An offline survey method was employed containing the demographic questionnaire and three standardized psychometric tools.

Procedure

Participants were first given an informed consent. Following which they were screened with respect to the exclusion and inclusion criteria. The pre-screening form included demographic details such as Age, Gender, Educational Qualification, Affiliation to Religion, Marital status and Any Recent Traumatic Experiences. After which the questionnaire containing the three scales were administered to the participants which took approximately 7-10 minutes to complete. All participants received the three scales (General Belief in Just World Scale, Big Five Inventory, and Satisfaction with Life Scale) in a counterbalanced order. At the end, participants were thanked for taking part in the study.

Scales

General Belief in Just World (BJW) was measured using the General Belief in Just World Scale by Dalbert (1987). There were six items ($\alpha = 0.91$; e.g., “I think basically the world is a just place”). Participants responded to all items on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Conscientiousness was measured using the Big Five Inventory (BFI) by John & Srivastava (1999). The BFI is a 44-item inventory which measures the Big Five Factor of personality. Out of the 44 items, the experimenters measure the dimension of conscientiousness using 9-items from the BFI which are independently rated with alpha value BFI – NEO = 0.96, BFI - PDA = 0.94 (John, O. P., & Srivastava, S., 1999). Out of the 9 items (e.g., “I see myself as someone who does a thorough job”) 4 items are reversely scored. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale that ranges from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly).

Subjective Well-Being was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by Ed Diener (1985). The SWLS is a 5-item instrument ($\alpha = 0.88$; e.g., “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”). It is designed to measure global cognitive judgements of satisfaction with one’s life. The five items of the SWLS were answered using a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Data Analysis

All the statistical analyses were performed on the IBM SPSS Statistics Subscription available for windows version. Data normality was assessed using scatterplots. Descriptive statistics was reported using means and standard deviations. Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between Subjective Well-Being and Conscientiousness as well as Subjective Well-Being and General Belief in Just World. An Independent Samples t-test was done to examine the demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status and affiliation to religion as ancillary observations.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Pearson's correlation between the variables.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3
1. SWB	316	22.73	5.49	-		
2. BJW	316	4.16	0.76	0.169**	-	
3. C	316	31.8	5.21	0.255**	0.147**	-

SWB = Subjective Well-Being, BJW = Belief in Just World, C = Conscientiousness

** $p < 0.01$

Table 1 indicates descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Pearson's correlation between the variables. Pearson's coefficients (r) were computed for all the three variables - subjective well-being, general belief in just world and conscientiousness. A significant, low positive correlation was found between general BJW and SWB with $r = 0.169$, $p < 0.001$. a significant, low positive correlation between conscientiousness and SWB was also found with $r = 0.255$, $p < 0.0001$.

Ancillary observations

Additionally, multiple independent sample *t*- tests were conducted to find the mean differences in the SWB scores with respect to gender, religiosity and marital status.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Independent Samples *t*-test between Gender and Subjective Well Being.

	Male		Female		t (314)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
SWB	22.29	5.31	23.11	5.64	1.32	0.188	5.49

Table 2 indicates an independent sample *t*-test which revealed no significant difference between males ($n = 144$, $M = 22.29$) and females ($n = 172$, $M = 23.11$) on the SWB scale: $t_{(314)} = 1.32$, $p = .188$.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Independent Samples *t*-test between Religiosity and Subjective Well Being.

	Religious		Non-Religious		t (314)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
SWB	23.07	5.28	21.49	6.12	2.10	0.037	5.47

Table 3 indicates an independent samples *t*-test which revealed significant difference between participants who identified themselves as religious ($n = 249$, $M = 23.07$) and participants who identified themselves as non - religious ($n = 67$, $M = 21.49$) on the SWB scale: $t_{(314)} = 2.10$, $p = .037$.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Independent Samples *t*-test between Marital Status and Subjective Well Being.

	Married		Unmarried		t (314)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
SWB	25.06	5.89	22.17	5.25	-3.80	0.000	5.38

Table 4 indicates an independent *t*-test which was conducted for marital status of participants in the study. It showed a significant difference between unmarried ($n = 254$, $M = 22.17$) and married ($n = 62$, $M = 25.06$) on the SWB scale: $t_{(314)} = -3.80$, $p = 0.000$.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to explore the relationship between General Belief in Just World, Conscientiousness and Subjective Well-Being. It was expected that both conscientiousness and Belief in Just world would be positively correlated to the subjective wellbeing. The results indicated that a positive correlation does exist between Belief in Just World, Conscientiousness and Subjective Well-Being.

The influence of conscientiousness on subjective wellbeing is consistent with the previous studies which have found conscientiousness to be a strong predictor of life satisfaction (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Joseph & Hyes, 2003; Schimmack, Schupp, & Wayner, 2008). Boyce, Wood and Brown (2010) reported that conscientious individuals have a greater tendency to be satisfied which is attributed to their aspirations of making progress in life. In addition to this, Hayes and Joseph (2003) state that conscientious people are more likely to

effectively function in society and achieve the goals in their life. This leads them to have greater happiness in life. The underlying reason for such a relationship, as proposed by Mayungbo (2016), stems from the fact that people high on conscientiousness are more organized and efficient and are against being disorderly. They showcase planned rather than spontaneous behaviours which make them more dependable in nature.

The results of the current study showed a significant positive correlation between General Belief in Just World and Subjective Well-Being which is consistent with previous findings (Correia et al., 2009; Wu et al., 2011). The framework provided by Belief in Just World helps in explaining how events occur in a meaningful way (H. Jiang, Chen, & Wang, 2017). When people have a strong belief in just world, it can help them deal with the negative outcomes caused by unfavourable situations and successfully achieve psychological balance. On being encountered by unfair situations, they use strategies to integrate the unfairness in their Belief in Just world. Doing so, improves their abilities in coping with pressure (Gou, Jiang, Rui, Miao, & Peng, 2013; Yu et al., 2016). People with a strong Belief in Just World have a tendency to follow social norms and work hard in order to attain satisfactory results. Hence, these individuals are active in solving problems and have a higher likelihood in succeeding at problem solving as compared to their peers. Furthermore, they discern greater happiness and strive for goals which are long term.

The current study also focused on other variables such as religiosity, marital status and gender to find their influence on Subjective Well Being. Firstly, the focus was to see whether identifying oneself as religious or non-religious had an impact on a person's Subjective Well Being. People who identified themselves as religious were positively associated with Subjective Well Being. Empirical evidence by Abdel-Khalek and Singh (2014) suggest that religiosity was significantly correlated with scales of religious belief, physical health, mental health, happiness, satisfaction with life in men while religious belief, self-esteem, optimism (positively), and anxiety (negatively) in women. Positive influence of religious certainty on well-being is direct and substantial, that is individuals with strong religious faith report higher levels of life satisfaction, greater personal happiness, and fewer negative psychosocial consequences of traumatic life events (Ellison, 1991). According to Ramsay et al. (2019), an important mechanism that can explain the relationship between religiosity and well-being is that of emotional regulation, which consists in the modulation of emotional states functionally to the environment's demands to the extent that religion constantly trains people to reassess emotional events, religious individuals may become more used to cognitive reappraisal. These hypotheses have recently been confirmed by studies by (Vishkin et al. 2016; Vishkin et al., 2019). Although the findings of the current study are consistent with the existing literature, the results in the current study could also be due to the difference between the number of participants in the two groups who identify themselves as being religious and non-religious.

With respect to marital status, married individuals have generally been found to have more positive appraisal of their Subjective health, emotional feeling, and Social Well Being than individuals who are divorced or single, because of their greater economic resources and more social support (Can, Krause, Saunders & Clark, 2015; Mastekaasa, 1993; Ndayambaje, Pierewan, Nizeyumukiza & Nkundimana, 2020; Saphire-Bernstein & Taylor). In a meta-analysis by Haring-Hidore, Stock, Okun & Witter (1985), a mean correlation of 0.14 was found across all studies, which indicated that being married was positively and significantly associated with Subjective Well Being. The study also examined the influence of age on the relationship between marital-status and Subjective Well Being ($r = -.54$); the relation was

stronger in younger samples as compared with older ones. In a similar study conducted by Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener (2003), married women are somewhat happier than their unwed counterparts for several years. Dush and Amato (2005) found that the correlation of marital status with a single-item global measure of “life happiness” was positive but modest (i.e., $r = .15$), whereas “relationship happiness” had a considerably stronger correlation with life happiness ($r = .42$). Marriage is considered to be a significant predictor of well-being as it provides emotional, social and economic support between the two people in a marriage, which increases their happiness, and in turn expands their life satisfaction (Ndayambaje, Pierewan, Nizeyumukiza & Nkundimana, 2020). Like Religion, although the findings of the current study are consistent with the existing literature, the results in the current study could also be due to the difference between the number of participants in the two groups who are married and unmarried.

Across samples, there have been mixed results with respect to Gender and Subjective Well Being. On one hand, research has found that men have significantly higher levels of Subjective Well Being (e.g., Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009; Haring, Stock, & Okun, 1984), on the other hand, other studies have shown that women have significantly higher levels of Subjective Well Being (e.g., Fujita et al., 1991). Contrary to both these findings, some studies have found no significant differences between men and women with respect to Subjective Well Being (Okun & George, 1984; Clemente and Sauer, 1976). In the current study as well, no significant difference between males ($n = 144$, $M = 22.29$) and females ($n = 172$, $M = 23.11$) on the Subjective Well Being Scale: $t_{(314)} = 1.32$, $p = .188$ were found. One of the plausible explanations for such a result could be a hypothesis proposed by Hyde (2005) which states that many gender differences are extremely small, if not totally non-existent. In review of many meta-analysis of gender differences with respect to various characteristics, she found that most mean difference effect sizes are small, if not non-significant. She proposes that these effect sizes may not be inherently small, instead they are minimised by other psychological processes that influence the evaluations that people make in determining their well-being levels. Apart from this, Batz and Tay (2018) have explained that no gender differences in Subjective Well Being may be due to the fact that women's in-group comparisons consist of only other women, thereby, not perceiving themselves to be less satisfied in life compared to other women. However, women who belong to the working population might include men in their in-group social comparison. Comparatively, due to inequalities or social expectations, they may have decreased levels of well-being from making this comparison with men. Unfortunately, in the current study there is no inclusion of the current occupation of the respondent which may have contributed to a non-significant difference between males and females with respect to Subjective Well Being.

Limitations and Suggestions

One of the limitations of the current study is that the Just World Scale employed in the current study is relatively old and future researchers could use a newer scale to measure the same construct. Another limitation is that the current study does not account for the Locus of control of the respondents. In a study by Dave, Tripathi, Singh et. al., (2011), it was found that scores on internal locus of control were positively and significantly correlated to that on Subjective Well Being. Also, the current experiment does not consider the role of income on subjective well-being. Agarwal et al. (2010) found that income had a positive correlation with positive affect and life satisfaction. Thus, future research can consider the influence of locus of control and income as well. The current study did not have equal sample size for the various factors that affected Subjective Well Being. The number of participants in the religious and non-religious, married and unmarried groups were unequal. The further studies

can aim to have equal sample size in the groups. Future researchers can consider the difference between two different age groups such as young adults and old adults to draw a comparison between the subjective well-being of the two groups. Additionally, researchers could also measure religion on a continuum rather than categorically to consider a wider spectrum.

CONCLUSION

On assessing the relationship between Subjective Well-Being, Belief in Just World and Conscientiousness, the study demonstrates that General Belief in Just world and Conscientiousness are positively correlated to Subjective Well-being. Additionally, variables such as religiosity and marital status also have an influence on the Subjective Well Being of an individual.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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