Research Article

Investigating Relational Patterns of Belief in a Just/Unjust World, Satisfaction with Life and Mental Health in Female Students

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Abstract: The present study was conducted to investigate the relational patterns of belief in a just/unjust world, satisfaction with life and mental health in female students at Islamic Azad University of Ahwaz. To this end, a sample of 132 female students was randomly selected from among the female students. The instruments used to collect the data included (Rubin and Peplau, 1975) Belief in a Just World Scale (BJWS), Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12). Pearson correlation formula and multiple regression analysis were run to analyze the data. The results showed a significant correlation between belief in a just/unjust world and mental health as well as between satisfaction with life and mental health. The results of multiple regression analysis revealed that, from among the predictive variables, only could life satisfaction predict mental health.

Keywords: Belief in a just/unjust world, mental health, satisfaction with life

INTRODUCTION

Human life consists of a set of beliefs that determine the quality of his/her thoughts and that contribute to his/her achievements. As all stimuli and events are interpreted in mind, no event may cause psychological turmoil in human except his/her thoughts and beliefs. In this regard, many a psychological disorder originates from incorrect human beliefs about the self, others and environment. Belief in a just world, as one of the crucial beliefs, has always been a serious concern for human being. Since inequality and injustice surface in various shapes such as unequal distribution of wealth, inequality in access to medical care and monopoly over certain educational facilities for certain people, they induce variable reactions in different people (Dalbert, 2009). Thus, whereas some people may feel fury in response to inequities and try to restore justice (Montada *et al*., 1986), others may respond by humiliating the victims (Lerner and Miller, 1978) or react by justifying political, social and economic conditions (Jost *et al*., 2004). It seems that once people are exposed to hard-to-remedy injustice, they may try to restore justice through blaming the victims or justifying the current situation (Dalbert, 2009).

To account for justice-oriented reactions, a few psychological theories have been proposed. Lerner (1965, 1980) is one of the most influential theories in this regard, whereby belief in a just world is considered as an index of motivation for justice (Correia and Dalbert, 2007). The theory holds that people tend to be motivated over the belief that the world is a place where individuals usually achieve what they deserve (Dalbert, 2002). Increasing research evidence shows that belief in a just world bear adaptive functions such as contributing to people's inner commitment to behaving fairly, offering a touchstone to interpret what happens to people, and creating a sense of security for goal-orientation in life (Dalbert, 2001). It is through these functions that such beliefs may correlate with the indices of mental health so that life satisfaction, as one of these indices that may be affected by such beliefs, is a concept that equates with happiness and mental well-being, involving a positive evaluation of life (Yamawaki *et al*., 2011).

Diener (1984) defined life satisfaction as the individual's cognitive judgment of life, which may be influenced by emotions though it is not an emotional scale per se (Berg, 2008). According to Myers and Diener (1995), life satisfaction refers to acceptance of living conditions and realization of needs so that it provides an internal estimation of the quality of life (Bakhshi *et al*., 2005). As a predictor of mental health, satisfaction with life is independent of other psychological constructs such as positive and negative emotions, self-esteem and optimism (WHO, 2005).

Mental health is an instance of well-being whereby the individual may understand his own and others' abilities, work effectively, bear life pressures and cooperate with the society (Hosseini *et al*., 2009). It is a

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broad concept that may be influenced by a variety of factors under different circumstances so that a single aspect of mental health may not define the term comprehensively. Thus, a thorough understanding of this concept requires due attention to all its dimensions. Not only is mental health bound to the explanation of various causes of behavior but also it primarily aims at avoiding worries (Golparvar *et al.*, 2007b).

Golparvar *et al.* (2007b) investigated the relationship of belief in a just word for oneself and others with general health, satisfaction with life, positive and negative emotions and automatic thoughts. The results showed a significant negative relationship between the subscales of general health and belief in a just word for oneself and others. In addition, there was a significant negative correlation of belief in a just world for oneself and others with life satisfaction as well as of belief in a just word for oneself with positive emotions. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between automatic thoughts and belief in a just word for oneself and others.

Begue and Bastounis (2003) showed a positive correlation between beliefs in a just world for oneself and lower scores on depression inventories and more ambitious goals in life.

Lipkus *et al.* (1996) reported a significant correlation between belief in a just word for oneself but not for others and indices of mental health such as positive emotions, satisfaction with life and lower stress.

The findings of Bakhshi *et al.* (2005) on the relationship between life satisfaction, social support and mental health in students showed that both life satisfaction and social support were significant predictors of mental health.

Hesam *et al.* (2011) conducted a study on 102 students and reported a significant relationship between life satisfaction and mental health.

With regard to the fact that women are considered as the most essential element in a society playing a crucial role in social motivations, causes and formation of personality and behavior, their mental health may exert a determining effect on society. In this regard, the present study poses the question "Is there a significant correlation of the belief in a just/unjust world and life satisfaction with mental health in female students?" Accordingly, the following hypotheses were developed:

Hypotheses 1: There is relationship between belief in a just/unjust world and mental health in female students

Hypotheses 2: There is relationship between satisfaction with life and mental health in female students

Hypotheses 3: There are multiple relationships between belief in a just/unjust world, satisfaction with life and mental health in female students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study adopts a descriptive-correlational method to investigate the correlational patterns between belief in a just/unjust world, satisfaction with life and mental health in female students at Islamic Azad University of Ahwaz.

Participants: The population of the study consisted of all female students at Islamic Azad University of Ahwaz. Considering the population size and representativeness of the sample, the primary sample size was calculated to be 108 participants using Morgan table. The sample size was obtained through random selection. Due to likely exclusion of some subjects, the number of participants was increased to 132 students.

Instruments:
Belief in a Just World Scale (BJWS): Developed by Rubin and Peplau (1975), the scale consists of 20 items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Eleven items address belief in a just world and nine items address belief in an unjust world. The reliability and construct validity of the scale have been approved in different studies (Ambrosio and Sheehan, 1990; Caputi, 1994; Couch, 1998; Mohr and Luscri, 1995; O'Quinn and Vogler, 1990; Whatley, 1992). The reliability of the questionnaire was reported to be 0.672 and 0.678 for belief in a just and an unjust world, respectively, using Cronbach alpha formula (Golparvar, 2007a).

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12): The scale was developed by Goldberg (1972) to diagnose non-psychotic mental disorders. The items are on a 4-point Likert scale. It bears acceptable indices of reliability and validity. Banazadeh (2003) obtained the reliability of the scale to be 0.89 using split-half method while Ebadi *et al.* (2002) reported a reliability of 0.87 using Cronbach alpha formula. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated to be 0.71 in the present study.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS): Diener *et al.* (1985) developed the questionnaire to measure life satisfaction in individuals. The questionnaire consists of five subscales each comprising seven items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) . Schimmack *et al.* (2002) reported a correlation of 0.46 and 0.48 between scores on this scale with extroversion and introversion, respectively. They reported the reliability of the scale on American, German, Japanese, Mexican and Chinese samples to be 0.90, 0.82, 0.79, 0.76 and 0.61, respectively, using Cronbach alpha formula. Roshani (2012) calculated the reliability of the scale to be 0.82 and 0.81 using Cronbach alpha formula and split-half method,

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum scores across the research variables

Variable		Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Mental health		4.18	3.33	0.00	16.00
Belief in a just/unjust world	Belief in a just world	51.00	7.63	22.00	69.00
	Belief in an unjust world	42.13	6.31	23.00	60.00
Satisfaction with life		22.44	6.63	5.00	35.00

Table 2: Simple correlation coefficients of belief in a just/unjust world with mental health

Criterion variable	Predictive variable		R	p
Mental health	Belief in a just/unjust world	Belief in a just world	-0.24	0.006
		Belief in an unjust world	0.15	0.080

respectively. The reliability of the scale was calculated to be 0.86 using Cronbach alpha formula in the present study.

RESULTS

Table 1 illustrates the descriptive data including mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum scores as well as the number of subjects. As shown in the table, the mean and standard deviation of mental health in the female students were found to be 4.18 and 3.33, respectively. The maximum and minimum scores on this variable were 16.00 and 00, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the subscale of belief in a just world were 51.00 and 7.63, respectively. The maximum and minimum scores on this subscale were 69 and 22, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the subscale of belief in an unjust world were 42.13 and 6.31, respectively. The maximum and minimum scores on this subscale were 60 and 23, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of satisfaction with life were 22.44 and 6.63, respectively. The maximum and minimum scores on this variable were 35 and 5, respectively.

Table 2 illustrates simple correlation coefficients of belief in a just/unjust world with mental health. As shown in the table, there is a significant reverse correlation between belief in a just world and mental health (r = -0.24, α = 0.006). However, there is no significant correlation between belief in an unjust world and mental health (r = 0.15, α = 0.08).

Table 3 illustrates the results of testing the third hypothesis to examine the relationship between mental health and satisfaction with life. As shown in the table, there is a significant reverse correlation between these two variables (α = 0.01).

Table 4 illustrates the results of multiple correlations between belief in a just/unjust world, satisfaction with life and mental health. In order to examine the effect of life satisfaction, just world and unjust world on mental health variance, life satisfaction and belief in a just/unjust world were considered as the predictive variables and mental health was considered as the criterion variable. Then the correlations were calculated using stepwise regression analysis. The results of variance analysis and regression between the mean scores of mental health and predictive variables

Table 3: Simple correlation coefficients between satisfaction with life and mental health

Criterion variable	Predictive variable	R	p
Mental health	Satisfaction with life	-0.30	0.01

Table 4: Multiple regression coefficients between belief in a just/unjust world, satisfaction with life and mental health using stepwise multiple regression analysis

Criterion variable	Predictive variable	MR	RS	F for p	Regression coefficients (B)	
Mental Health	Satisfaction with life	0.30	0.09	11.94	-0.15	B
				0.001	-3.45	T
					0.001	p

showed that satisfaction with life could account for 9% of the variance of mental health. The regression coefficient of predictive variables showed that only could satisfaction with life account for the variance of mental health statistically. However, none of the other predictive variables could statistically account for the variance of mental health so that they were excluded from the equation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study set to investigate the relationship between Belief in a just/unjust World, Satisfaction with Life and Mental Health in Female Students. The results of statistical analysis supported the first hypothesis so that a significant correlation was found between beliefs in a just/unjust world with mental health. This is consistent with the findings of Golparvar *et al*. (2007b), Begue and Bastounis (2003) and Lipkus *et al*. (1996).

Considering this research hypothesis, one can contend that belief in a just world is not only a necessity but also an unconscious source of reaction to injustice (McClelland *et al*., 1989). The research on this topic has shown that human needs the belief in a just world and seeks justice to achieve such belief. Lerner and Miller (1978) contend that belief in a just world enables the individual to cope with his/her social and physical environment as orderly and consistent as he/she thinks they are. Without such belief, it would be difficult for the individual to commit to long-term goals or even appropriate social behavior. The reason is that belief in a just world is an important adaptive behavior so that people may not tend to abandon this belief. When people come across evidences that show the world is unjust and irregular, they may be seriously

disturbed (Fatima, 2010). Indeed, belief in either a just or an unjust world tends to consider the world as a meaningful place. Since the meaningfulness of the world helps people live a more orderly life and feel safe in the face of accident-related attributions, people who believe in a just world enjoy higher mental health.

The results supported the second research hypothesis so that a significant reverse correlation was found between satisfaction with life and mental health. This is consistent with the findings of Hesam *et al.* (2011) and Bakhshi *et al.* (2005). Also, the results of multiple regression analysis showed that only could satisfaction with life account for the variance of mental health statistically. This result also, is consistent with the findings of Golparvar *et al.* (2007b).

In fact, satisfaction with life is one of the human reactions in both personal and social life, which focuses on the ongoing evaluation an individual, conducts on his/her life. As satisfaction with life originates from personal and social growth as well as adaptive resources, it is a relative concept that depends on local, temporal and personal conditions (Borna and Savari, 2008). It indicates the positive cognitive-affective evaluation of life (Kajbaf *et al.*, 2012). As it is considered as an internal experience involving the presence of positive emotions and lack of negative ones, people with higher satisfaction with life tend to be more optimistic. This would adjust life pressures like a filter, hence the betterment of mental health.

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