

Coping Strategy and Hardiness in the folder of Belief in Just World: A Comparative Study Among Executives of Public and Private Sector Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The belief in a just world increases an individual's sense of security, self-control, life satisfaction, the ability to use functional coping strategy, sense of coherence, trust in people, sense of justice and thereby allowing effective functioning. The belief in a just world may be of two types: personal (the belief in a personal just world, where events in one's own life tend to be just) and the general (the belief in a general just world, where everybody is treated fairly). The aim of the present study is twofold: to explore the personal and general belief in just world among executives of junior and senior rank position of public and private sector organization and to find out the interrelationship among belief in just world (personal and general), coping strategy and hardiness of executives. Data were collected from randomly selected 238 executives (private and public sector). The result reveals that public and private sector executives depicted different levels of General and Personal belief in just world. Both just-world beliefs were found to correlate positively with functional coping strategy and negatively with dysfunctional coping strategy. Both just-world beliefs were found to correlate positively with hardiness.

Keywords: *Belief in Just World, Dysfunctional coping strategy, Functional coping strategy, Hardiness.*

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INTRODUCTION

The 'belief in just world' (BJW) theory was first described by Lerner (1970), who proposed that individuals with belief in a just world generally believe that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. This belief serves important adaptive functions in everyday life such as enhancing self-control, motivation, self-efficacy, self-worth, mental health and thereby reducing stress and anxiety. This belief contributes to the individual's sense of security and control and thus, allows effective functioning (Cubela Adoric, 2004). The just world hypothesis states that people need to believe in a just world in which everyone gets what they deserve and deserves what they get. This belief enables them to deal

with their social environment as though it were stable and orderly and thus serves important adaptive functions. As a result, people are motivated to defend their belief in a just world when it is threatened by injustices, either experienced or observed.

BJW is primarily observed in the Personal level BJW (P-BJW) that refers to the belief of justice in one's own world. In addition to personal BJW, the another dimension of BJW is General BJW (G-BJW), which refers to the belief of a general just world where everybody is treated justly (Cubela Adoric & Kwartuc, 2007; Dalbert, 2001). Personal belief in a just world (P-BJW) is an important factor in effective coping with unfairness than general belief in a just world (G-

BJW), because P-BJW is more personally relevant and therefore the need to defend it will be more pronounced (Dalbert, 2002). P-BJW is a personal resource that helps people to deal with various events effectively by keeping well-being intact.

Dalbert (2001) identified three major functions of BJW. First, it enables people to trust in others and thereby trust in the justice of their fate. This trust provides individuals confidence to invest in long-term goals (Dette, Stöber, & Dalbert, 2004; Otto & Dalbert, 2005), to trust others to treat them justly, and to be rewarded justly. Secondly, it helps individuals to restore justice both psychologically and behaviourally when confronted with injustice and stressful situations. Thirdly, it influences the behavior of an individual the motive function compels individuals to behave justly in order to maintain a just world. In this function, the BJW is indicative of a personal contract (Lerner, 1980), the terms of which oblige the individual to behave justly, and can be seen as an indicator of an implicit justice motive (Dalbert, 2001; Dalbert & Umlauf, 2009; Donat, 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Research has found that individuals high in BJW tend to believe that they will be treated fairly by others (Tomaka & Blascovich, 1994), and more likely to use adaptive functions when confronted with stressful life events (Dalbert, 2001; Furnham, 2003; Otto, Boos, Dalbert, Schops, & Hoyer, 2006). Fetchenhauer, Jacobs and Belschak (2005) found that belief in a just world is positively correlated with improved adjustment. It further appears that belief in a just world presents itself as an important factor in moderating the experience of challenges and threats in potentially stressful situations (Furnham, 2003). It specifically carries the potential of encouraging positive emotional responses in the face of injustice. Lench and Chang (2007) found that greater belief in an unjust world is related to greater anxiety,

depressive symptoms, neuroticism, denial and disengagement.

From these findings it may be assumed that BJW especially P-BJW personal facilitates functional/problem-focused coping strategy. Coping strategy refers to the specific efforts (behavioural and psychological) that people employ to deal with stressful events. Generally, there are two forms of coping strategy. Functional coping (problem-focused) aims to alter the source of the stress (a problem solving method), while dysfunctional coping (emotion-focused) aims to reduce or manage the emotion distress associated with the stress. Functional coping involves active thinking, positive reinterpretation and growth to deal with stressors and dysfunctional coping are thought to obstruct adaptive coping by facilitating behavioural disengagement (involves reducing efforts to deal with the stressor), mental disengagement (involves activities that distract the individual from thinking about the stressor), consuming alcohol / drug use and denial (involves denying when there is a problem). When people feel that something constructive can be done, problem-focused/functional coping methods are often used; while the stressors are something to be endured, emotion-focused/dysfunctional coping methods are often employed (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989).

In this context, several studies showed support for a relationship between hardiness and coping strategies. Kobasa (1979a) defined hardiness as a constellation of personality characteristics that function as a resistance resource while encountering stressful life events. Hardy individuals are active, goal-oriented people who are committed to themselves and the world around them. Hardy individuals are less inclined to notice troublesome situation or difficulties at work. In contrast, persons low in hardiness may prefer to use regressive coping strategies such as cognitive and behavioral withdrawal

and denial, which neither transform the situation nor solve the problem. High-hardy individuals use functional or problem-focused types of coping strategies and low-hardy individuals use more dysfunctional or emotion-focused coping strategies (Florian, Mikulincer & Taubman, 1995; Williams, Wiebe & Smith, 1992). Gentry and Kobasa (1984) discovered the buffering effect among hardy persons occurs through active, transformational coping,

which transforms stress into a benign experience by means of problem-focused strategies. In a study among male and female undergraduates, Banks and Gannon (1988), discovered high-hardy individuals reported fewer life events and hassles than did those lower in hardiness. Boyle, Grap, Younger and Thornby (1991) found a negative correlation exists between hardiness and emotion-focused coping but no relationship between hardiness and problem-focused coping.

These studies suggest that adopting different coping strategies may vary with respect to the belief in just world. The literatures in connection with the association among belief in just world, coping strategy and hardiness are relatively few. Therefore, a study related to belief in just world (P- BJW and G-BJW), coping strategy (Functional and dysfunctional) and hardiness among senior and junior executives of private and public sector banks of India could be both informational and useful. Largely, the working environment of private and public sector banks is the same. However, private sector banks are largely more competitive than the public sector banks. The job security in public sector bank is relatively higher than private sector bank. In a private sector bank, employees usually have to meet tough targets adhere to the deadlines whereas the environment is little bit relaxed in public sector bank because chances of personal and professional growth are relatively slow in public sector banks compared to private sector banks.

Keeping in view of the above differences, the present study aims at achieving the following **objectives**:

- (i) Explore the personal and general BJW of junior and senior executives of public and private sector organization.
- (ii) To determine the relationship between two dimensions of perceived BJW (personal and general) among executives.
- (iii) To find out the interrelationship among BJW (personal and general), coping strategy (functional and dysfunctional) and hardiness of executives.

METHOD

Sample:

Executives working in public and private sector banks in Kolkata constitute the population for the present study. Sample consists of 238 (130 from private sector and 108 from public sector) executives drawn from different public and private sector banks. Senior bank executives (male- 68 and female – 52) and junior bank executives (male – 64 and female – 54) working in different public and private banks were selected for the present study. Bank executives were classified as senior and junior bank employees based on their year of work experience at bank. The bank executives who have more than 10 years of experience were classified as senior and less than 5 years of work experience were classified as junior executives. Participants ranged in age from 30 to 45 years (mean age – 37.5 years, standard deviation – 9.01). A stratified random sampling method was used for the selection of sectors (public and private) in the banking unit. A random selection method (Simple Random Sampling without Replacement) was used for selecting bank branches from the selected banks (both the sectors) for the study.

Six banks (three each from public and private sector) were taken as sample for the present study. Selected private sector banks were ICICI bank, Axis bank and HDFC bank and from Public Sector, the banks included were State Bank of India, United Bank of India and Punjab National Bank.

Tools used:

The following instruments were used:

- **General Belief in a Just World Scale** (Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987): This is a six- item instrument designed to assess the belief that the world is generally just (*I think basically the world is a just place*). The Cronbach's alpha for general BJW for the present study was calculated and found to be 0.79.
- **Personal Belief in a Just World Scale** (Dalbert, 1999): This is a seven-item instrument designed to assess the belief in a personal just world, where events in one's own life tend to be just (e.g., *I believe that I usually get what I deserve*). The score ranges from 7 to 42. The Cronbach's alpha for personal BJW for the present study was calculated and found to be 0.77.
- **Occupational Stress Indicator Scale** (Cooper, Sloan & Williams, 1988): This scale is a popular instrument for the diagnosis of occupational stress. This instrument was developed by Cooper et al, (1988).

- **Hardiness Test** (Kobasa, 1979b): The Hardiness scale was developed by S.C. Kobasa (1979b). The higher score indicates high on hardiness. The Cronbach's alpha is found to be 0.93.

1.2. Procedure: The study is based on primary data. Data were collected from executives on questionnaire-cum-scales from public and private sector banks in Kolkata. The permission was taken from the manager of a randomly selected bank to fill the questionnaire from his bank (both senior and junior executives).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to test the first objective, three-way ANOVAs (type of organization x rank of executives x gender) were carried out separately for General and Personal BJW. Results indicated the significant effect of type of organization [$F(1,230) = 8.08, p < 0.01$; General BJW and $F(1,230) = 11.79, p < 0.01$; Personal BJW], rank in the organization [$F(1,230) = 27.78$; General BJW and $F(1,230) = 32.12, p < 0.01$; Personal BJW] and significant interaction effect of type of organization and rank of executive [$F(1,230) = 35.84, p < 0.01$; Personal BJW]. To examine the second objective, Product moment Correlation of Coefficients were carried out between perceived G- BJW and P- BJW of senior and junior executives working in private and public sector and the results are displayed in the Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Correlation of coefficient between General and Personal BJW of executives

Type of organization	Private (N = 130)	Public (N =108)
Rank Senior	0.51** (N=70)	0.42** (N=50)
Junior	0.43 ** (N= 60)	0.46** (N = 58)

Note: ** significant at 0.01 level

Table 4.1 displays that the correlation between the two BJWs was moderately significant for all the cases. This suggests that two BJWs represent different aspects of the same basic belief. The moderate correlation value in this study provides further support for the validity of the two BJW scales.

In order to examine the third objective, Product moment Correlation of Coefficients were carried out between BJW (General and Personal) and hardiness, coping strategy (functional and dysfunctional) of senior and junior executives working in different type of organization and the results are presented in the Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Correlation of coefficient between BJW (General and Personal) and hardiness, coping strategy (functional and dysfunctional) of senior and junior executives.

Variable	Rank	General BJW	Personal BJW
Functional Coping	Total (N=238)	0.21**	0.35**
	Senior (N=132)	0.26**	0.44**
	Junior (N=106)	0.28**	0.40**
Dysfunctional Coping	Total (N=238)	0.07	-0.11
	Senior (N=132)	-0.17*	-0.28**
	Junior (N=106)	-0.19*	-0.25**
Hardiness	Total (N=238)	0.11	0.15*
	Senior (N=132)	0.21*	0.47**
	Junior (N=106)	0.20*	0.31**

Note: ** significant at 0.01 level, * significant at 0.05 level

Table 4.2 depicts that functional coping style is found to be positively related to General and Personal BJW. This relationship is significant for all the cases. The relationship between dysfunctional coping strategy and General and Personal BJW is

significant and negative almost for all the cases. More interestingly, no significant relationship is evident between General and Personal BJW and hardiness for Total group of executives but while considering senior and junior executives separately, a significant and

positive relationship has been found. This finding is partially supported by the findings of Dalbert (2001) which indicates that individuals high in BWJ tend to adaptive functions when confronted with stressful life events. The possible reason behind this is that the stronger employees' beliefs in a just world, the more likely to reinterpret unpleasant events in their workplace in order to protect their beliefs in a just world. This may lead to active thinking, positive

reinterpretation and inner growth to deal with stressors effectively.

In order to assess the most significant predictors of G-BJW and P- B JW, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with qualitative variable (gender and rank) as control variable and quantitative variable (Functional, dysfunctional coping strate

gy and hardiness) as predictors. The results are displayed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Hierarchical Regression analyses of B JW (G-B JW and P- B JW), coping strategy (functional and dysfunctional) and hardiness

Dimension of B JW				
	General B JW		Personal B JW	
	Private	Public	Private	Public
Step 1				
Rank	0.08	0.06	0.06	0.03
Gender	0.05	0.07	0.04	0.006
R ²	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.03
Step 2				
Rank	0.008	0.05	0.08	0.04
Gender	0.07	0.04	0.09	0.07
Functional Coping	0.10	0.13	0.17	0.30*
Dysfunctional Coping	-0.14	-0.20*	-0.29*	-0.34**
Hardiness	0.11	0.21*	0.34**	0.36**
R ²	0.09	0.17	0.21	0.23
Step 3				

Rank	0.07	0.08	0.04	0.004
Gender	0.05	0.07	0.09	0.004
Functional Coping	0.12	0.14	0.16	0.29*
Dysfunctional Coping	-0.21*	-0.22*	-0.28*	-0.29*
Hardiness	0.12	0.20*	0.38**	0.36**
Functional Coping X Dysfunctional Coping	0.10	-0.06	0.08	-0.09
Dysfunctional Coping X Hardiness	0.05	0.03	0.07	0.09
Functional Coping X Hardiness	0.12	0.34**	0.41**	0.39**
R ²	0.10	0.19	0.30	0.27

Note: ** significant at 0.01 level, * significant at 0.05 level

Table 4.3 suggests that dysfunctional coping strategy is significantly and negatively associated with both the dimensions of BJW. Hardiness is significantly and positively related to both the dimensions of BJW. Functional coping strategy does not remain a significant predictor of G-BJW and P-BJW (except the perception of P-BJW by public sector employees). In the thirdstep, interaction effect of functional coping and hardiness is found to be significant predictor of G- BJW (public) and P-BJW. Closer scrutiny on significant interaction effect reveal that the relation between functional coping strategy and G-BJW (public) and P-BJW is dependent upon hardiness such that at higher levels of hardiness, the relation between functional coping strategy and G-BJW and P-BJW is more positive than at lower levels.

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