

ECCE 2018
VII International Conference Early Childhood Care and
Education

BELIEF IN A JUST WORLD AS PREDICTOR OF WELLBEING
AMONG SUVOROV CADETS

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Abstract

The paper shows that the belief in the just world as a predictor of subjective wellbeing (SWB) is pronounced differently among adolescents depending on the conditions they find themselves in. It has been proved that specialized military socialization of Suvorov Military School adolescents greatly influences the formation of personality. The purpose of the study was to reveal specific features of Military School teenagers' subjective wellbeing. In order to realize this goal it was necessary to trace differences/similarities of the teenagers SWB indicators; to single out predictors of the teenagers' SWB shaping; and to define the role of beliefs in a just world for identifying the degree of the adolescents' SWB.

The study results revealed that Military School teenagers' SWB is a bit higher than that of the teenagers from secondary schools. The cadets are likely to be emotionally positive and rarely report psycho-emotional symptoms (anxiety, absent-mindedness, etc.). Specific SWB predictors of Military school cadets are the belief in a just world and satisfaction with their activity. Unlike them, secondary school teenagers demonstrate such specific SWB predictors as satisfaction with their social environment and positive image of their "self". It has also been found that military school cadets exhibit significantly stronger beliefs in a just world; moreover, this belief is a meaningful predictor of their SWB. Comprehensive school adolescents demonstrate significant inversely proportional relationships between indicators of SWB and the belief in a just world.

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Keywords: Subjective wellbeing, belief in a just world, predictors.



1. Introduction

The SWB investigations can rely on huge and inexhaustible resources left to resolve. There are still a lot of issues that researchers should put “at the service” of the science of psychology.

SWB has no boundaries. It is not tied up to certain people, territories and states. SWB is international in its essence and represents a universal value. Everything that brings satisfaction and makes people happy abroad can be used in Russia as well. And vice versa: the recent innovative findings of domestic scholars, their rich practical experience can be taken into account by their foreign colleagues.

At present psychologists study the relationships of SWB with personality traits (life strategies, sovereignty of psychological space, life-purpose orientations) and social characteristics: reliable and valid psycho-diagnostic tools are being developed for measuring SWB; the very SWB concept is being refined; effects of objective and subjective factors on SWB are being examined (M. Argyle, N.K. Bakhareva, N. Bradburn, M.V. Buchatskaya, A.V. Voronina, E. Diener, A.I. Dontsov, A.V. Rikel', C. Ryff, M. Seligman, A.E. Sazontov, P.P. Fesenko, T.D. Shevelenkova, R. Emmons, etc.).

«The “subjective” is what people feel and sense. Subjective well-being comprises both cognitive and emotional components. Interrelations between these two components attest that satisfaction at cognitive level is accompanied by sensing emotional well-being» (Zotova et al., 2016. P. 161).

The SWB conceptualization has encouraged researchers to pursue this interesting issue of predictors (Doğan, Sapmaz & Akıncı Çötök, 2013). This interest can be partly explained by the fact that the study into predictors is still of problematic character. The thing is that there has been no single universally recognized SWB model so far, and it stimulates further research efforts. Personal, psycho-physiological, socio-democratic, cultural characteristics have been considered as SWB predictors. Still, there is no unified model of this complex psychological phenomenon' predication.

Investigations into the role of cognitive constructs as SWB predictors are of great scientific interest. So, the construct “belief in a just world” formulated by M. Lerner (Lerner, 1980), represents a somewhat intellectual axis with the help of which people believe in a world of justice where people gain what they deserve. This faith allows them to deal with physical and social environment as if it were stable and ordered. That is why people suffer a lot facing injustice and do their best to avoid this state of things.

Numerous research efforts showed that the belief in a just world serves as a buffer that protects SWB (Dalbert, 1997; Dalbert, 1998; Dalbert, 2002; Dalbert & Dzuka, 2004; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2002; Libow & Doty, 1979; Lipkus & et al., 1996). It becomes even more important when it comes to preservation of SWB during adolescence.

Gage and Berliner found that experiencing injustice could have a negative impact on teenagers' personality, the feeling of coherence, lowering their motivation whereas the belief in a just world acts as a predictor of academic achievements (Gage & Berliner, 1996).

There is no doubt that the belief in a just world is an illusion, but this positive illusion contributes to the sensation of order and predictability and has an adaptive function which resides in the fact that the individual feels cognitively secure in the world around him. People with strong belief in a just world perceive this world as ordered and manageable. Thanks to cognitive protection the belief in a just world help avoid cognitive dissonance and discomfort (Lerner, 1980).

Tomaka and Blascovich demonstrated that as a rule, teenagers with the strong belief see complicated tasks as ones to be necessarily accomplished and not as menaces, which is the case with adolescents with disbelief in a just world (Tomaka & Blascovich, 1994). Therefore, one may assume that those schoolers whose belief is strong consider school assignments as a challenge to be met and hence, they are more motivated to work harder. In her work, Elizabeth A. Hepworth revealed that the belief in a just world is a defensive factor especially in case of severe discipline (Hepworth, 2005).

We expect the belief in a just world as a SWB predictor to have different degrees of pronouncement among teenagers depending on their life conditions.

Military-oriented socialization of Suvorov School cadets occur under specific conditions associated with a lot of restrictions, exposure to regulations, hierarchy of relationships and a number of other factors which effect personality formation. Intensive physical training, discipline, military culture, all these make military schools a pole apart from secondary schools with their relatively free way of life. The question that quite logically arises is to what extent such conditions determine SWB. It is obvious that the comparison of SWB predication under different conditions of socialization is required for studying reasons for these significant differences.

The thing is that the belief in a just world can function as a buffer protecting mental health of young people. Thus, faith can help assimilate unjust situations through cognitive coping. That is why we expect the belief in a just world to have positive correlation with SWB.

2. Problem Statement

In spite of the fact that over the last decades cultural, national and individual differences and invariants of wellbeing sources have been in the focus of research the question of the role of the belief in a just world in determining the degree of SWB in a military school environment remains open.

3. Research Questions

1. What are specific features of Suvorov military school cadets' SWB that differ them from secondary schools teenagers?
2. What role does the belief in a just world play in identifying the degree of military school cadets' SWB?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to reveal specific features of Military School teenagers' subjective wellbeing.

In order to realize this goal it was necessary to perform the following tasks:

1. To trace differences/similarities of the teenagers SWB indicators both for military school cadets and secondary school pupils;
2. To single out predictors of the both groups of teenagers' SWB shaping;
3. To define the role of beliefs in a just world for identifying the degree of the adolescents' SWB in the groups of cadets and secondary school pupils.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Subjects:

The sampling selected in line with the study's goal consisted of the two groups of male respondents. The first group (group 1) represented 63 cadets from Yekaterinburg Suvorov Military school (YSMS) aged 14-15 (average age = 14.42). The second group (group 2) involved 58 teenagers aged 14-15 from the city comprehensive schools.

5.2. Measures and tools:

The following methods were used in the course of the study:

- “Discomfort Assessment Scale” (E.B. Fantalova);
- “SWB Scale” (Perrudent-Badox, Mendelsohn, Chiche) modified by M.V. Sokolova;
- “World Assumptions Scale” (P. Yanov-Bul'man adapted by M.A. Padun and A.V. Kotel'nikova).

For the results' processing descriptive statistical method, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U Test, multiple regression analysis, and Pearson r correlation coefficient were applied. The data were processed and analyzed via SPSS 20.0.

6. Findings

For assessing the SWB' level the indicators of the respondents were balanced according to “Discomfort Assessment Scale” and “SWB Scale” (integral indicator). The result is the correlation between the given indicators (at the level of 0.0023).

The comparison of SWB in the two groups' revealed significant differences. Thus, mean value of subjective well-being among secondary school teenagers ($X_{av}=61.551$) is significantly higher ($U=1155.00$, where $p=0.000$), than mean value of subjective ill-being among military school cadets ($X_{av}=53.317$). However, both values reflect an average level of SWB by sten scale (5 and 4 stens accordingly).

Table 01. The Comparative Analysis of SWB Elements (n1=63, n2=58)

SWB Elements	Group 1	Group 2	U Mann-Whitney value	Significance level
Tension	M=11.95; SD=3.12	M=12.59; SD=3.58	1550.000	0.148
Psycho-emotional symptoms	M=9.65; SD=3.23	M=15.45; SD=5.11	658.000	0.000
Mood changes	M=5.095; SD=2.39	M=6.48; SD=2.67	1253.000	0.003
Significance of social environment	M=7.13; SD=3.05	M=8.59; SD=4.18	1501.000	0.089
Health self-esteem	M=5.81; SD=2.75	M=6.52; SD=3.03	1525.000	0.114
Satisfaction with activity	M=10.78; SD=3.46	M=11.93; SD=3.40	1428.000	0.037

The multiple regression analysis was conducted at the next stage of the study in order to identify SWB predictors. As a result, the two regression models were constructed: 1) for military school cadets, and 2) for secondary school teenagers.

Table 02. Regression Model of “SWB” variable (Group 1)

Dependent variable – SWB						
R2	Adjusted R2	F	Significant predictors	β	t	p-value
0.732	0.709	31.217	World justness	0.387	5.012	0.000
			Mood changes	0.211	2.447	0.018
			Satisfaction with activity	0.290	4.002	0.000
			Tension	0.261	3.656	0.001
			Health self-esteem	0.286	3.244	0.002

Table 02 shows that this model accounts for 70.9% of the variance. The variable “World justness” has the most significant impact on SWB of cadets as well as “Satisfaction with activity”.

Table 03. Regression Model of “SWB” variable (Group 2)

Dependent variable – SWB						
R2	Adjusted R2	F	Significant predictors	β	t	p-value
0.872	0.844	31.352	Significance of social environment	0.307	3.602	0.002
			“I”-image	0.329	3.677	0.001
			Mood changes	0.192	2.154	0.042
			Health self-esteem	0.234	2.118	0.045

It is clear from table 03 that the given model accounts for 84.4% of the variance. The two variables “I”-image” and “Significance of social environment” mostly effect SWB of secondary schools adolescents.

The results of the regression analysis demonstrate that in both groups the most significant are those SWB predictors that refers to internal personality perceptions of the world and oneself reflecting basic individual beliefs. At the next stage of the analysis the comparison of basic beliefs of the respondents from both groups was carried out. Similarity in the pronouncement of the belief relating to value and significance of “the self” was revealed (scales “I-image” and “Luck”). In the same way the respondents of the two groups evaluate their abilities to prevent failure.

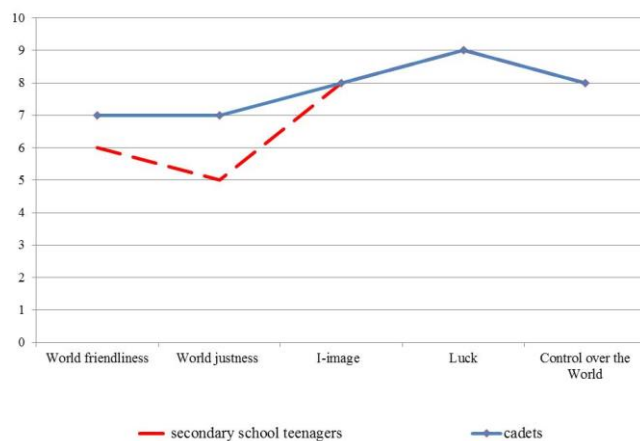


Figure 01. Basic beliefs of Teenagers from Groups under Study

Significant differences in the results of these two groups (at the level of $p < 0.001$) were documented by “World justness” scale. Positive correlation of SWB level and the belief in a just world among military school cadets which had been indicated earlier was later (at the next stage) complemented with similar correlation exhibited by the group of secondary school adolescents.

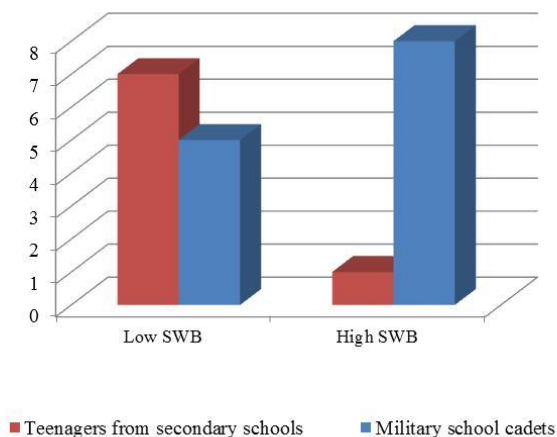


Figure 02. The Pronouncement of the Belief in a Just World among Both Groups Representatives with Different Level of SWB

However, the correlation found has an inversely proportional character: the stronger the belief in a just world, the lower SWB of adolescents from secondary schools (Pearson correlation coefficient $r = -0.321$, correlation is significant at the level of 0.003).

7. Conclusion

The consideration of the teenagers SWB specifics in the context of personality basic beliefs and the comparison of activity-driven environment allowed us to single out a number of specific features.

Firstly, differences in SWB of military school cadets and teenagers from secondary schools were indicated. So, cadets' SWB is a bit higher than that of adolescents from comprehensive schools. The cadets are likely to be emotionally positive and rarely report psycho-emotional symptoms (anxiety, absent-mindedness, etc.).

Secondly, teenagers SWB has universal predictors which do not depend on activity-driven environment. Such const predictors are teenagers' assessment of their health and mood. The belief in a just world and satisfaction with activity act as specific predictors of SWB among military school cadets, while for the teenagers from secondary schools such specific predictors are represented by satisfaction with social environment and a positive “I-image”.

Thirdly, irrespective of their activity environment the teenagers from both groups exhibit basic belief relating to the value and significance of their “self”, belief in control over events in their life and ability to avoid and cope with failures and unfavorable situations.

Fourthly, significant differences were found in the assessments of the world justness documented by the groups under study. The Suvorov military school cadets exhibit significantly stronger beliefs in a just world; moreover, this belief is a meaningful predictor of their SWB. Comprehensive schools'

adolescents demonstrate significant inversely proportional relationships between indicators of SWB and the belief in a just world.

It has been established that activity-driven environment of the teenager (public secondary school and boarding military school) determines the specifics of his SWB as well as the formation of his basic beliefs. Thus, the stable environment of Suvorov military school characterized by fixed rules, requirements and prescribed consequences of certain actions contribute to the teenager's organizing his life by the principle of merit and his shaping the belief in a just world. Subsequently, the given confidence in the world justness will allow the teenager to make a sacrifice of prompt desire satisfaction (due to limited opportunities to be realized within the environment of a boarding school) just to achieve the "best possible" result in the future. Therefore, the belief in a just world performs a compensatory function enhancing the cadet-teenager's SWB. At the same time the environment in which the formation of the secondary school adolescent occurs is characterized by instability, dynamic and uncertainty. Diverse, indefinite and often contradicting requirements on the part of social environment do not add to the formation of clear understanding of interrelations between one's own efforts, contributions and merits with the desirable reward. Moreover, the adolescents from city comprehensive schools who do not share the belief in a just world have a considerably higher level of SWB. It is very likely that they do not expect the world to be just for them, and it allows them not to feel disappointed facing its unfairness, which contributes to their SWB.

The data obtained in the study make it possible to forward a recommendation to include diagnostics of basic beliefs development and, separately, the belief in a just world into the assessment of socio-psychological preparedness of the teenager for education in a boarding military school. Since it is the belief in a just world (as it has been shown) that directly identifies the teenager's SWB in the course of training.

Acknowledgments

The authors of the article express their sincere gratitude to The Russian Science Foundation for providing the project (№ 16-18-00032) funding.

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