

## Patience as a Mediator between the Just World Belief and Subjective Well-being

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**Abstract:** As one of the fundamental topics in positive psychology, subjective well-being is essential to individuals' mental health and quality of life. The current study was designed to explore the association between the just world belief, patience and subjective well-being, and to examine the potential mediating role of patience between just world belief and subjective well-being. Two hundred and twenty-six college students in the capital city of China completed the Just World Belief Questionnaire, Buddhist Patience Questionnaire, and measures of subjective well-being. The results indicated that (1) just world belief had a significant positive relation with subjective well-being; (2) patience was positively correlated with both just world belief and subjective well-being; (3) patience partially mediated the relationship between just world belief and subjective well-being. Overall, the results revealed a possible path through which subjective well-being can be promoted.

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### 1. Introduction

With the flourishing of positive psychology, subjective well-being (SWB) has gradually proved its importance (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Subjective well-being comprises one's momentary mood or affect within a period of time, and his or her own evaluations of the quality of life (Diener & Scollon, 2003). A growing body of evidence suggests that subjective well-being is closely related to one's meaning in life (Doğan, Sapmaz, Tel, Sapmaz, & Temizel, 2012; Ho, Cheung, & Cheung, 2010; Moomal, 1999; Shek, 1992; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992), and is essential for one's psychological and even psychical health (Easterlin, Wang, & Wang, 2017; Friedman, Kern, & Reynolds, 2010; Keyes, 2006; Okun & George, 1984; Røysamb, Tambs, Reichbornkjennerud, Neale, & Harris, 2003).

According to a recent worldwide survey, one of the most reliable predictors of subjective well-being is social trust (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017), which indicates that people are happier living in places where the social environment is more trustworthy. In other words, the belief that one can always get what he or she deserves may facilitate one's subjective well-being. To some degree, this finding supported the fact that individual's strong belief in a just world is associated with a higher level of subjective well-being (Dalbert, 1998; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2006; Khera, Harvey, & Callan, 2014; Nasser, Doumit, & Carifio, 2011). The present study was designed to confirm this relation in a Chinese context and to reveal the interplay of the two variables by examining the potential mediating role of patience in this link.

#### 1.1. Just world belief and subjective well-being

Just world belief is individual's belief that the world he or she lives in is a just world. In general, belief in a just world can help people better cope with a variety of events that happen in their daily lives, and can assure them that the world they live in is secure and in order (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). Lack of just world belief could lead to dysfunction of social activities and maladaptation of social changes (Lerner & Miller, 1978). In other words, just world belief predisposes people to be more adaptive, and more likely to lead a better life. Unsurprisingly, the positive effect of just world belief on SWB was found in numerous studies. For example, Khera, Harvey, and Callan (2014) found that the just world belief of social workers working in refugee camps positively correlated with their life satisfaction; Nasser, Doumit, and Carifio (2011) found that the more the elderly people in nursing homes believed in a just world, the better they were in coping with negative events, and the more satisfied they were with their lives. Similarly, another study found that just world belief was positively associated with positive emotion and life satisfaction, and was negatively related to negative emotion among the elderly group (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2006).

Nevertheless, as many studies as there may be, the inner mechanism of this relationship is rarely explored. So far, knowledge of the interplay between just world belief and SWB is limited, for only a few researchers have set out to uncover potential mediators between these two variables. Among these studies that did examine the inner mechanism, Li, Zhang, and Li (2017) found that altruistic behavior

partially mediated the link between just world belief and SWB; Li and Li (2016) found that self-esteem and resilience were also partial mediators in this relationship. Evidently, there are more mediators yet to be found, for all the mediating variables discovered so far were partial mediators. One possible mediator can be patience, which is similar to resilience (Deng & Li, 2017), and a strong predictor of SWB (Li, Li, Zhang, & Liu, 2016).

### 1.2. Mediation effect

Patience is defined as a concept that emphasizes the individual's ability to endure challenges and suffering in life which are brought about by others or by nature (Deng & Li, 2017). According to Wright (2009), patience includes three dimensions: (1) the patience to endure suffering willingly (PES), namely to accept suffering without disturbance in emotions; (2) the patience to not retaliate harm (PNH), which means responding to the challenges and afflictions brought about by others with forgiveness and loving-kindness; and (3) the patience to thoroughly scrutinize phenomena (PTS), which means calmly seeing things as they truly are, and being able to withstand uncertainties in life.

Theoretically rooted in Buddhism, patience is beneficial to people's SWB, for it was initially developed as a way to extinguish suffering and help people obtain the ultimate happiness through patience-related practices (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). Additionally, patience equips people with the ability to go beyond all fear and pain in the quest for personal growth and happiness under any circumstances (Shonin, Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014). Although still underexposed, the contribution of patience to SWB has already been empirically proved (Li, Li, Zhang, & Liu, 2016).

Moreover, according to Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), enduring suffering and challenging life events can result in various positive outcomes and a boost in one's overall growth and well-being. Further, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) argue that the cause behind the positive effect of one's endurance on well-being can be traced back to personality factors, including people's beliefs about themselves and the outside world. In line with their argument, just world belief was indeed proved to have an impact on the way individuals handling threats (Zuckerman, 1975), and can buffer psychological distress after a traumatic experience (Fatima & Suhail, 2010; Schaafsma, 2013).

For instance, Strelan and Sutton (2011) found that the stronger one's just world belief was, the more tolerable he or she would be when offended by others, and less likely to react with anger and violence (Dalbert, 2002). Their findings somehow suggest that just world belief may have a positive relation with the patience to not retaliate harm (PNH). In a similar vein,

Bègue and Muller (2006) found that when caught in frustrating situations, individuals with a higher just world belief would be less likely to lose temper and act aggressively, which indicates that just world belief may have a positive relationship with the patience to endure suffering willingly (PES). Also, Hafer & Olson (1998) found that when encountered with misfortune, individuals with a higher level of just world belief would react more rationally, and feel less threatened. In other words, just world belief may be positively correlated with the patience to thoroughly scrutinize phenomena (PSP). Therefore, it is logical to speculate that patience would be influenced by just world belief. And as mentioned earlier, both just world belief and patience were reported to have a positive association with subjective well-being. Thus patience may be a mediator between just world belief and SWB.

### 1.3. The current study

In summary, the present study was designed to investigate the relationship among just world belief, patience, and SWB. Based on previous studies and the post-traumatic growth model, we hypothesized that (1) just world belief would be positively correlated to patience; (2) patience would positively correlate with SWB; (3) patience would serve as a mediator between just world belief and SWB.

## 2. Material and Methods

### 2.1. Participants

Participants in the present study were 226 college students in their early adulthood, and they ranged from 18 to 32 years in age ( $M = 21.93$ ,  $SD = 2.57$ ). All participants in this study (77% male) were students from universities in Beijing, China, and the majority of them were from Han ethnic group, others were from minority groups (8.0%).

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. The Just World Questionnaire

The just world questionnaire comprises the six items of General belief in a just world scale and seven items of the personal belief in a just world scale (Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987). Su, Zhang, and Wang (2012) translated it into a Chinese version and tested its reliability and validity, the Cronbach's coefficients of the scales were 0.794 and 0.845 respectively, the two-week test-retest reliabilities were 0.860 and 0.736. Responses were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = extremely disagree to 6 = extremely agree, the higher the score, the higher level of one's just world belief is. In the present study, the two subscale scores yielded adequate Cronbach's alphas: .941 for global just world belief, and .905 for personal just world belief.

#### 2.2.2. Buddhist Patience Questionnaire

Patience was measured using the Buddhist Patience Questionnaire (BPQ; Deng & Li, 2017). The BPQ is an 18-item scale that comprises three dimensions including patience to endure suffering (PES), patience of not retaliating harm (PNH), patience to thoroughly scrutinize phenomena (PSP). The BPQ is a scenario-based measure, and each dimension includes six items. Participants' responses were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = *extremely unlikely* to 6 = *highly likely*. The 14-day test-retest reliabilities of the BPQ scores were .72, .72, and .68 for PES, PNR, and PSP, respectively (Deng & Li, 2017). In the present study, the Cronbach's alphas were .825, .799, and .917 for PES, PNR, and PSP respectively.

#### 2.2.3. Positive and Negative Affect Scale

Positive and negative affect are components of SWB, which were measured by Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The Scale contains 20 items, participants' responses were rated on a 6-point-Likert scale ranging from 1 = extremely low to 6 = extremely high, the higher the score, the higher level of one's positive or negative affect. In the present study, the two subscale scores yielded adequate Cronbach's alphas: .891 for positive affect, and .906 for negative affect.

#### 2.2.4. The Satisfaction with Life Scale

Life satisfaction is a component of SWB, which was measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Pavot & Diener, 1993). The Scale contains five items, participants' responses were rated on a 6-point-Likert scale ranging from 1 = extremely disagree to 6 = extremely agree, the higher the score, the higher level of one's life satisfaction. In the present study, the scale scores yielded an adequate Cronbach's alpha of .726.

#### 2.3. Procedure

Pen-and-paper questionnaires were administered in person at the university. Participants were told that they were expected to answer the questionnaires anonymously within one hour, and not to talk to each other during the process. To reduce socially desirable

responding, participants were ensured that the data of the survey would only be used for research.

#### 2.3. Statistical Analyses

SPSS 21.0 and AMOS 22.0 were employed to analyze the data.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 displays the correlation coefficients among just world belief, patience, and subjective well-being. As shown in the table, all variables were significantly correlated. First, the two dimensions of just world belief were positively correlated with all three dimensions of patience, positive affect, and life satisfaction, with coefficients ranging from .476 to .680,  $ps < .001$ . Second, the three dimensions of patience were all positively correlated with positive affect and life satisfaction, coefficients ranging from .395 to .567,  $ps < .001$ . Third, negative affect negatively correlated with the two dimensions of just world belief and all three dimensions of patience with coefficients ranging from  $-.397$  to  $-.587$ ,  $ps < .001$ .

#### 3.2. Structural Equation Model

To investigate the mediation effect, we tested a structural equation model using AMOS 22.0 program and maximum likelihood estimation with just world belief as the independent variable, SWB as the dependent variable, and patience as the mediating variable. Results indicated that just world belief significantly predicted patience and SWB. In addition, patience partially mediated the link between just world belief and SWB.

Moreover, As displayed in Figure 1, the partially-mediated model fits the data well, for  $\chi^2 (7, N = 226) = 24.409$ ,  $p = 0.109$ ;  $\chi^2 / df = 1.436$ , NFI = 0.979, TLI = 0.989, CFI = 0.993, RMSEA = 0.044. To further examine the mediation effects, we used PROCESS macro for SPSS to perform bootstrap analysis (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013). We generated 2000 bootstrap samples from the original sample set ( $N = 226$ ) by random sampling. As shown in Table 2, the results indicated that patience exerted significant indirect effect on SWB from just world belief.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation matrix of study variables ( $N = 226$ )

	PNH	PES	PSP	G-JWB	P-JWB	LS	PA	NA	$M \pm SD$
PNH	1	.701***	.605***	.680***	.585***	.490***	.567***	-.482***	4.63 ± 1.09
PES	.701***	1	.559***	.616***	.546***	.428***	.542***	-.459***	4.56 ± 1.11
PSP	.605***	.559***	1	.620***	.476***	.395***	.547***	-.397***	5.03 ± 1.11
G-JWB	.680***	.616***	.620***	1	.819***	.559***	.663***	-.584***	4.81 ± 1.12
P-JWB	.585***	.546***	.476***	.819***	1	.547***	.630***	-.587***	4.58 ± 0.99
LS	.490***	.428***	.395***	.559***	.547***	1	.622***	-.529***	3.82 ± 0.92
PA	.567***	.542***	.547***	.663***	.630***	.622***	1	-.629***	4.36 ± 0.93
NA	-.482***	-.459***	-.397***	-.584***	-.587***	-.529***	-.629***	1	2.12 ± 0.97

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; G-JWB = Global just world belief; P-JWB = Personal just world belief; PSP = The patience to thoroughly scrutinize phenomena; PES = The patience to endure suffering willingly; PNH = The patience of not retaliating harm; PA = Positive affect; NA = Negative Affect; LS = Life satisfaction.

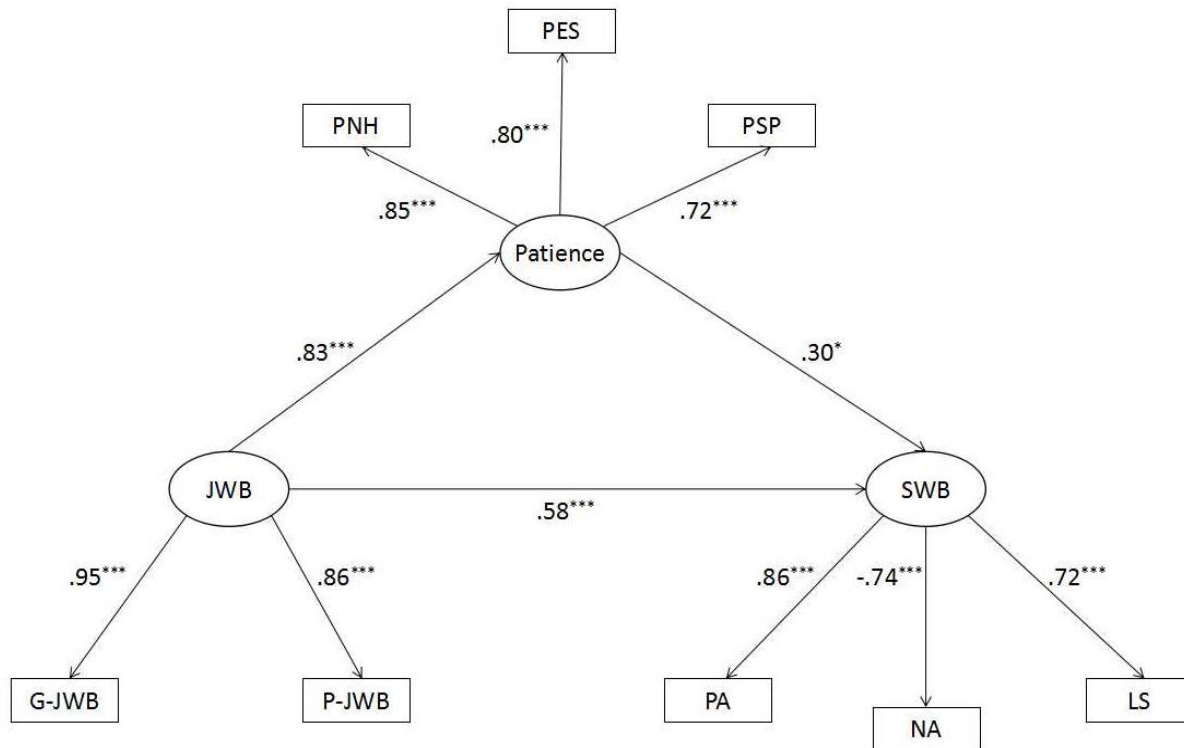


Figure 1. The partially-mediated model of patience between just world belief and subjective well-being.

Table 2. Results from bootstrap analysis

Pathway	Standard indirect effect	SE	95% Confidence interval	
			LL	UL
JWB → Patience → SWB	.194	.094	.050	.363

Note: JWB = Just world belief; SWB = Subjective well-being; LL = Lower Level; UL = Upper Level.

**4. Discussions**

Consistent with the first hypothesis of the current study, the results indicated that higher levels of just world belief correlated with higher levels of patience, suggesting that individual with a stronger just world belief may be more patient and lenient. This finding is in line with previous studies on the relationships between just world belief, impulsivity (Lucas, Young, Zhdanova, & Alexander, 2010), and forgiveness (Strelan, 2007). A possible interpretation of this finding may be that people with a stronger just world tend to use positive reappraisal to lower the threat of the suffering and transgressions (Hafer & Correy, 1999; Hafer & Gosse, 2011). Hence, challenging

situations may be more tolerable for these people, and in turn, higher levels of patience were observed.

Results from the current study also supported the second and the third hypotheses, for patience was found to positively correlate with SWB, and have a partial mediating effect on the link between just world belief and SWB. Echoing the Post-traumatic Growth Model (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) and previous research on the link between patience and SWB (Li, Zhang, & Li, 2017), the findings suggest that patience does contribute to individual’s subjective well-being, and may serve as a mediator linking just world belief with SWB. A plausible explanation of these findings could be that highly patient people tend to thoroughly

evaluate and efficiently cope with situations that may normally result in maladaptive coping (Deng & Li, 2017; Selmer, 1999), and therefore they may be more likely to maintain a relatively high level of SWB (Elliot, Thrash, & Murayama, 2011; Pérez-García, Oliván, & Bover, 2014). More specifically, when caught in challenging situations, individuals with a strong just world belief prone to regulating their negative emotions (Correia, Kamble, & Dalbert, 2009; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; Nudelman, 2013), and thus they would be able to more patiently and effectively coping with stressful situations (Dalbert, 1998), which may lead to relatively higher level of SWB (Adebayo, Sunmola, & Udegbe, 2008).

To some degree, the present study expanded the understanding of how just world belief influences SWB, nevertheless, it also had a few noteworthy limitations. First, the participants in the present study were mainly college students in Beijing, which is the capital city of China. Compared with the average population of the whole country, they are relatively more privileged and better educated, which may compromise the generalizability of the findings (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Therefore, future researchers should bring in participants from different social classes to obtain a more diverse research sample if possible. Second, in the present study, all the variables were measured by questionnaires. However, self-report measures may increase social desirability bias, which may contaminate the results of the study. Hence, future studies adopting multiple research methods are needed to test and support the findings in the present study. In addition, since causation cannot be drawn from correlation studies, it is imperative that future studies implement longitudinal and experimental designs to further clarify the potential causal relation between just world belief and patience, as well as the possible causal relation between patience and SWB.

Despite these limitations, we did make an attempt to build a bridge between Buddha's wisdom and Western psychology, make Buddha's wisdom more evidence-based, as well as open up a potential new direction of modern positive psychology.

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