



## HOW JUST DOES THE BELIEF IN JUST WORLD MAKE US FAIR?

Adil Dünya İnancı Bizi Nasıl Adil Kılıyor?

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### Abstract

The Ministry of Family and Social Services tries to apply effective and efficient social service models by trying to reach every member of the society, with the mission of developing and implementing holistic and fair social service models for the protection, strengthening and development of the individual, the family and our social values. The Ministry of Family and Social Services, which adopts supply-oriented working as a principle while reaching individuals, constitutes a large part of the working area of disadvantaged, fragmented families in need of social and economic support, and women, children and disabled individuals. Establishing the necessary communication with the families in question, carrying out the professional work, determining and implementing the appropriate social work model are among the job descriptions of the professional staff working as psychological counselors, psychologists, social workers, sociologists and teachers working under the ministry. Considering the family structures and case details of the mentioned professionals, they have witnessed many traumatic experiences directly or indirectly. The main purpose of this study is to examine how they look at events, how they keep their psychological well-being in balance or for what reasons, and how the just world belief systems affect all these experiences.

**Keywords:** Social work, Belief in a just world, Trauma

### Öz

Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, bireyin, ailenin ve toplumsal değerlerimizin korunması, güçlendirilmesi ve geliştirilmesi için bütüncül ve adil sosyal hizmet modellerinin geliştirilmesi ve uygulanması misyonu ile toplumun her ferdine ulaşmaya çalışarak etkin ve verimli sosyal hizmet modellerini uygulamaya çalışmaktadır. Bireylere ulaşırken arz odaklı çalışmayı ilke edinen Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı'nın çalışma alanının büyük bir bölümünü dezavantajlı, parçalanmış, sosyal ve ekonomik desteğe ihtiyaç duyan aileler ile kadın, çocuk ve engelli bireyler oluşturmaktadır. Söz konusu ailelerle gerekli iletişimin kurulması, mesleki çalışmaların yürütülmesi, uygun sosyal hizmet modelinin belirlenmesi ve uygulanması bakanlığa bağlı olarak çalışan psikolojik danışman, psikolog, sosyal çalışmacı, sosyolog ve öğretmen olarak görev yapan meslek elemanlarının görev tanımları arasında yer alıyor. Söz konusu meslek elemanlarının aile yapıları ve vaka detayları göz önünde bulundurulduğunda doğrudan ya da dolaylı olarak birçok travmatik yaşantıya tanıklık etmişlerdir. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, olaylara nasıl baktıklarını, psikolojik iyi oluşlarını nasıl ya da hangi nedenlerle dengede tuttuklarını ve adil dünya inanç sistemlerinin tüm bu deneyimleri nasıl etkilediğini incelemektir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Sosyal hizmet, Adil dünya inancı, Travma

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## INTRODUCTION

Social services are defined as the whole of systematic and programmed services that aim to eliminate the material, moral and social deprivations of individuals and families arising from their own structure and environmental conditions and beyond their control, to help them meet their needs, to prevent and solve their social problems, and to improve and raise their living standards (Social Services Law/Article 3). In order to provide this whole and to intervene as necessary, the professional staff meet many families with different dynamics and learn the majority of the lives of these families as a result of the social examination that needs to be done. As a result of the detailed social examination, the family structure and the negative events experienced in general are discussed in all aspects and the most appropriate social service model for the family or the individual is decided. Just like deciding on the social work model, implementing the model, following up and monitoring the process together with the family are among the duties of the professional staff. During this process, it is necessary to be beneficial to the family, to intervene in the existing crisis situation, or to try to prevent the negative situation arising from the traumatic experience, if the case is child-oriented, it is necessary to base the best interests of the child and act in this way. In this study, it is desired to examine the relationship between the psychological well-being of the just world beliefs of the professionals involved in this whole process. It is aimed that the universe of this study consists of professional staff working in the provincial organization of the Ministry of Family and Social Services and working in the field.

### General Information on Social Service Models and Professional Staff

The Ministry of Family and Social Services, which continues its activities with the vision of being a pioneer in the social development and social state understanding of our country by reaching every member of the society and providing effective social services, tries to continue its activities systematically in order to reach families living in our country and who are in a disadvantageous position due to various situations in its central and provincial organization.

In the provincial organization, the directorates consisting of different organizations within the provincial directorates seek solutions to different problems of different segments. Social Service Centers, Disabled Life and Rehabilitation Centers, Elderly Care and Rehabilitation Centers, Children's Homes/Communities, Women's and Men's Guest Houses, Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers constitute the main ones of these institutions. Professional staff, who will form the universe of our work, are assigned in these centers. Professional staff members are members of various occupational groups. While choosing these occupational groups, occupational groups that can evaluate the needs of the family, their socioeconomic status, culture, social norms, individual needs and psychological health are preferred.

Sociologists, who make up the majority of the professionals working in the provincial directorates and affiliated institutions of the Ministry, help individuals to see the general patterns of the society in their private lives with the perspective that the society in which they live in is shaped. In short, sociological perspective is about how it approaches social events, how it is analyzed, how sociology examines events and how it differs from other social sciences. Psychologists and psychological counselors, who are also from these occupational groups, make individual-specific observations in the social examination, and make observations specific to the individual's communication styles, attachment styles, traumatic experiences and how these experiences affect the individual, whether their cognitive developments and physical appearances are compatible with their biological ages, and whether they are compatible with their biological ages. Evaluation of reactions tries to understand the place of individuals in cognitive, psychological and social structure dynamics.

Social workers, another professional group, try to make case studies based on concepts such as social change and development, social cohesion and people's approach and liberation, social justice principles, human rights, common responsibility and respect for roads. Apart from these occupational groups, we work in cooperation with occupational groups such as child development and pre-school teaching.

Professional staff working in the Ministry of Family and Social Services work in certain units of the organizations they work for. Social Service Centers are the institutions in which the professional staff affiliated to the Ministry are employed the most. These Social Service Centers are the institutions that receive the most case studies. In these institutions where personnel diversity is high, Home Care Services are provided for the relatives who provide care for the disabled people who have a disability rate of 50% or more and who are in the category of fully dependent disabled people, and the disabled individuals are supervised at certain periods.

Again, children who will be in need of protection if they are not supported due to economic deprivation are benefited from Social and Economic Support Services without taking a care measure decision. This service is a support for children under the age of 18 whose parents are divorced, one or both parents are in prison or have passed away, the parents refuse to care for the child and are cared for by a relative. It is the social unit that works in cooperation with the counseling unit, where counseling, health and education measures are also applied in families (especially for children who have been

exposed to neglect or abuse). The counseling unit is the unit responsible for implementing the injunctions, together with the children and their families, against whom an injunction decision has been taken.

Again, in the Child in Need of Protection Unit at the Social Service Center, we work with children who are driven to crime or witness an event that constitutes a crime, and who are exposed to neglect and abuse (emotional, physical, sexual) and their families. The education unit, which is another unit of the Social Service Centers, provides more preventive and informative trainings on the topics such as family education program, pre-marriage education program, etc., which are thought to be needed by the social segments in need. Social Service Center Directorates work in this and many similar areas, and the professional staff who are exposed to many traumatic, negative and unjust experiences, including the subject of the work, keep these processes under control, help the family effectively, and decide on the right social work model and put it into practice, especially considering the best interests of the child and while doing all these, it is necessary to protect their own mental health.

Considering the family dynamics by determining the structure of the family, considering the cultural norms, customs and traditions of the region where each member of the profession has their own working principle and method, has their own value judgments, lives or works, and evaluates the social economic situation of the family. Interviews should be carried out based on the developmental stages of the child studied, adhering to the characteristics of the developmental period. It is inevitable that the social examination, which will be carried out taking into account the criteria mentioned above and similar, is independent of the belief in a just world, value judgments, psychological and subjective well-being of the professional in charge of the case, while starting and ending the case. In this study, it is desired to examine how the just world beliefs of the professionals from the field of study they are in and how the just world beliefs guide them while performing their profession and how they affect their psychological well-being.

## **FAIR WORLD BELIEF**

In this section, the definition and development of the just world belief theory, the general and individual just world belief concepts of the just world belief theory and the connection between psychological well-being and just world belief will be discussed.

### **A. Just World Belief Definition and Development**

The concept of justice, which has kept its place as a dynamic part of our lives from the past to the present, especially in the regulation of social life and the preservation of this order, ensuring that the rights acquired by the individual by the law are used by everyone or giving everyone what is his/her own right, truthfulness (TDK, <http://www.tdk.gov.tr/>). Individuals do not refrain from expressing that they care about the justice aspect of the words and actions they realize or plan to perform and that they directly or indirectly show the necessary effort to ensure justice, and even emphasize that this is a very essential situation for their own lives. The individual who makes this effort thinks that justice will be applied to him in the most appropriate way when appropriate, which is a comforting and social adaptation factor for the individual.

Belief in a just world refers to the more or less articulated assumptions that underlie the way people orient themselves in relation to their environment. These assumptions have a functional component linked to a manageable and predictable world image. These are central to the ability to engage in long-term purposeful activities. In order to plan for, work for, and achieve what they want, and avoiding frightening or painful ones, people must assume that there are manageable procedures that are effective in producing desired end states (Lerner, 1980).

According to Gençöz (1998), there are many theories that base or center the need for consistency. Festinger's Cognitive Contradiction Theory and Heider's Equilibrium Theory are the main ones of these theories. On the basis of the aforementioned theories, it is stated that when the individual encounters a contradictory, inconsistent situation or experiences an event that will cause discomfort in his inner balance, the individual tries to get rid of this contradictory situation and to achieve psychological harmony, and at least he needs the effort to achieve this harmony (Kaya, 2020).

While the factor that ensures the survival of a species mentioned in the theory of evolution is possible with its adaptation to the environment, individuals need to adapt to the social environment as well as the physical environment. How the individual who tries to achieve social cohesion evaluates the positive and negative experiences that he has gone through, how he behaves in the face of these positive and negative experiences, or with which norms he integrates these situations into his life, and the experiences he has indirectly witnessed or had to experience. How he evaluates it and what role he attributes to whom or what is important. It is challenging to achieve social adaptation for the individual who encounters situations that he cannot overcome in the ongoing life cycle. So much so that living or having to live in a chaotic

environment causes physical and emotional problems (Lerner, 1980). In other words, it is important to avoid chaos and ensure orderliness in terms of social cohesion.

The belief that the world is a fair place and that people will eventually experience or face the things they deserve, good or bad, was first investigated by Lerner (1965) and took its place as the theory of just world belief in psychology (Kaya, 2020). According to Lerner's Just World Belief Hypothesis, people are motivated to believe that the world is a just place, where the good are rewarded and the bad are punished. It is emphasized that it is normal for people to want to live in a just world and they have to believe that the world they live in is fair. Because this obligation helps people to spend their daily lives with the belief that their future will be hopeful and secure (Topuz et al., 2017). Within this developed belief system, the idea that the world is a place where the bad are punished and the good ones are rewarded, and the belief system it brings is of functional importance in terms of making sense of life for individuals (Topuz et al., 2017). In our daily life, people develop certain beliefs or norms in order to continue their lives in a healthy way and to maintain homeostasis. For example, people tend to believe that those who work hard or have good behavior that are accepted by society are rewarded as a result of their behavior, while those who are lazy and sinful will be punished on the contrary. Similarly, they believe that positive outcomes such as money, success, and happiness are only achieved by good people, while negative outcomes happen to bad people. Belief in a just world serves as an adaptation tool that protects people from the uncertainty of the future and makes them think that reward or punishment will happen one day as a result of events that have occurred in the past. So much so that belief in a just world plays an active role in protecting the mental health of individuals.

### **General and Individually Just World Belief**

It is thought that the belief of the individual in a just world also reflects the principles adopted as a rule of culture. Hierarchical statuses existing in society, statuses arising from mutual relations such as employers and workers, relations with similar and different characteristics, religion, cultural and social norms shape this belief (Lerner, 1980).

Belief in a just world is a belief system that makes one's life more predictable and livable, and that enables one to shape and direct oneself according to the society in which they live. A person's ability to plan, achieve their wishes and be motivated for this is a way of thinking that enables the individual to overcome the events that make his life difficult (Tansel, 2019). The belief in a just world, which allows life to continue in its normal course, provides the main motivation in people's lives, and can be described as facilitating adaptation, is discussed with two different concepts in the literature. The first of these aspects is the belief in an individual just world based on the idea of how fair the world treats the individual to himself, while the idea of how fair the world treats other individuals is the basis of the general belief in a just world. Although personal and general world beliefs are related to each other, it is thought that they actually represent different situations and both beliefs have independent and different effects (Tansel, 2019).

While the general belief in a just world makes individuals think about whether the world is a fair place or not, the personal just world is more about the fairness or unjustness of the events that the individual encounters in his own world and that affect his life positively or negatively. The person's personal perception of the situation that he or she faces and describes as injustice causes him to see the situation as more threatening and to oppose the situation. It is thought that personal belief in a just world is related to the individual's mental health, while general belief in a just world is associated with harsh social attitudes (Kılınç & Torun, 2011). For this reason, while individuals' commitment to their personal just world beliefs is higher, their beliefs about the justice of the world and the general just world may be lower (Dalbert, 2001).

### **Belief in a Just World and Psychological Well-Being**

Psychological well-being is related to the person's life goals, whether he is aware of his own potential, and the quality of the social relationship he has established with his environment. The emphasis here is on the concept of personal responsibility. This shows that the individual's psychological well-being and subjective well-being are entirely the responsibility of the individual. Thus, keeping and maintaining the subjective and psychological well-being of the individual in good condition is again the responsibility of the individual. This obligation is one of the most basic responsibilities of the individual in life (Özen, 2010). While fulfilling this responsibility, the individual strives to realize his personal potential and to reveal this potential in the most functional way. One of the biggest supporters of this effort is the concept of psychological well-being. One of the main reasons for considering the concept of psychological well-being in this study is that it is a concept that affects the performance of the professionals working in the Ministry of Family and Social Services and is thought to be directly proportional to the just world beliefs of the professionals. Psychological well-being is a concept that started with experimental studies in the 1980s, emphasizing the potential of the employee for self-realization and a meaningful life when faced with difficulties (Telef, 2013). Psychological well-being, which examines the cognitive and emotional well-being of the individual, is also expressed as the individual's feeling of well-being.

Psychological well-being is defined as an individual's positive emotions being more dominant than negative emotions. The continuity of psychological well-being is not always the result of the individual feeling happy and peaceful emotionally. Psychological well-being is people's struggle against life in order to ensure their personal development while continuing their lives (Kaplan, 2022).

Since the belief in a just world that individuals have affects people's feelings, thoughts and therefore behaviors, some changes in their psychological well-being; It can cause positive and negative ups and downs. Early studies from the perspective of belief in a just world are more related to the tendency to justify injustice or to blame the person identified as the victim. The basic needs and desires of individuals and the needs that will enable them to survive shape human behavior. Cognitive consistency, competence, social cohesion, control, need for meaning, self-esteem are some of these needs (Kaya, 2020). Individuals want to have a consistent, harmonious and meaningful profile in interpersonal relations, and this desire can be considered as an impulse that forces individuals to cognitive consistency. When beliefs and attitudes show inconsistency, this situation negatively affects the emotions of the individual, as it brings inconsistency of behavior, and in this case, it causes a change in psychological well-being (Kaya, 2020).

According to Lerner and Miller (1978), belief in a just world has positive effects on the mental health of the individual, as it can be defined as a belief system that protects people from uncertainty by acting as a decision mechanism in the face of events or negative situations they witness. Belief in a just world enables individuals to think that the world is an orderly and non-contradictory place. When faced with events or situations that contradict individuals' belief in a just world, the individual gets the opportunity to re-evaluate the events or situation that he or she faces with some psychological breakthroughs in order to harmonize the contradiction (Kaya, 2020). Professional staff of the Ministry of Family and Social Services, who frequently encounter events or situations that contradict individuals' beliefs and who have to work holistically with such individuals, families or cases, must be able to protect their psychological health. We can say that they use certain defense mechanisms to always be stable and to evaluate events objectively and to make their lives more livable both at work and outside of work. It is thought that they create a cognitive infrastructure and this infrastructure takes shape in order to harmonize their contradictions in the face of direct or indirect events they encounter in their lives.

## **B. The Role of Belief in a Just World in Coping Skills**

In order for an individual to provide psychological well-being or to keep it in balance, coping skills must also be functional. While developing coping skills, it is necessary to know how the individual's belief in a just world is effective at this stage. The ability to cope with the problems faced by the individual is a skill that should be supported in childhood and adolescence, starting from infancy, and whose effects continue throughout life (Eroğlu, 2001). Considering our living conditions, working environment and social life, it is understood that it is not possible to completely remove stress factors from our lives. For this reason, it is understood that the best way to follow is to try to minimize or even eliminate the negative consequences of stress.

Belief in a just world has adaptive effects for individuals' cognitive health. Studies show that belief in a just world has a predictive effect on life satisfaction and a healthy life. It is possible for individuals to try to cope with the negative situations that occur in their lives with a just world belief system. Considering the relationship between coping skills and belief in a just world, it has a functional effect such as the psychological well-being of the individual. Dalbert (1998) emphasizes that belief in a just world is highly functional for 4 reasons that will be explained. These reasons are as follows:

- 1- Belief in a just world guides the social relations of the individual.
- 2- Belief in a just world affects an individual's perception of the course of his life and his ability to reorganize his life.
- 3- Belief in a just world is a balancing system that enables the individual to cope with daily life events. It reduces the possibility of depression, psychological well-being or other stress-triggered diseases.
- 4- Belief in a just world helps the individual, who is described as a victim, to cope with an unjust destiny. It has been observed that victims with a belief in a just world show a better state of well-being after traumatic events than those who do not have this belief (Yeşil, 2019).

According to Dalbert (1998), belief in a just world reveals a positive relationship with life satisfaction in victims and non-victims. In this case, it shows that the individual has a personal coping potential. Belief in a just world can prevent individuals in the position of victims from constantly repeating the question "why me", which can cause difficult life experiences and negatively affect their psychological well-being, and prevent the negative psychological state that may come with it. In other words, belief in a just world is considered as a personal resource that provides individuals with different coping mechanisms (Yeşil, 2019).

It is thought that it is important for the professionals working under the Ministry of Family and Social Services to use this personal resource effectively and efficiently. So much so that after the difficult experiences that they face and have to work with, it is essential that the belief in a just world plays a role as a factor that strengthens the psychological well-being of the employee and facilitates social adaptation in different situations in their business life.

### C. Studies on the Just World Belief

Justice is a concept that has existed in the lives of all individuals since birth, and it is an important power for people to regulate and maintain their social relations and to ensure their social harmony. Without the belief in a just world, it will be very difficult for people to overcome the experiences they have experienced or witnessed. It is known that the just world belief theory emerged as a result of the realization of the tendency of people to legitimize injustice in the events they observed, and therefore, the studies on the just world belief covering the first two decades are mostly focused on the tendency to justify injustice and humiliate and blame the individual, who is described as a victim. Belief in a just world creates a positive illusion, helps the world to be seen more meaningfully and has positive effects on mental health. It is also obvious that it has a negative effect on one's coping skills (Kılınc, 2011).

According to Lerner's (1965) theory of belief in a just world, people have certain assumptions and set of rules that help them perceive their physical and social-emotional environment as stable and regular, which they take as their guides. According to the theory, which is expressed as an attribution bias in terms of the observer, people believe that the world is a fair place, that everyone gets what they deserve and deserves what they get. For example, Lerner (1965) found in his study that winners of a lottery consider themselves more deserving than losers. He states that belief in a just world is basically an illusion, that is, perception as wrong, different or different. This perception is very important in terms of adapting to the environment. Otherwise, it is thought that it will be difficult for individuals to continue their daily lives and they may become unable to adapt to the environment (Çakır, 2012). It is thought that the just world belief system is of great importance in order for life to continue in its usual flow.

In a study conducted by Dalbert (1998), the just world beliefs, life satisfactions, moods and depression levels of four different groups were examined. Two of these four groups, mothers with disabled children and the unemployed, were included in the victim's category, and the other two, students from East and West Germany, were included in the category of non-victims. In these four groups, only life satisfaction has a significant positive correlation with belief in a just world. However, this correlation is much higher in the victim group. There was no significant relationship between depression and belief in a just world in mothers with disabled children and in the unemployed. However, when the mood variable was controlled, a positive relationship was found between depression and belief in a just world in the unemployed adults group. Contrary to expectations, it was revealed that as the belief in a just world increased, unemployed adults showed more signs of stress.

The belief in a just world developed by Rubin and Peplau in 1973 brought a new stage to this theory. This study was followed by the just world belief scales developed by Dalbert (1999). These scales were used by arranging them in two dimensions as general fair world and individual fair world (Çakır, 2012). Janoff-Bulman (1989), in his study comparing individuals who have been exposed to a traumatic experience and individuals who have not been exposed to a traumatic experience, in terms of their basic assumptions, found that individuals who have been exposed to trauma have more negative implications for the world (Kaya, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Belief in a just world is considered as a functional system that makes people feel safe. Inquiries about whether there is a fair place where the good are rewarded and the bad are punished in direct or indirect events that happen to individuals in the world they live in are among the dynamic topics in different disciplines. It is seen that individuals tend to believe in a just world and as a result of these belief systems, they try to make their personal worlds more livable. In situations where this belief loses its functionality, adaptation mechanisms come into play and psychological well-being is tried to be ensured by ensuring the effective use of individuals' coping skills. In this respect, belief in a just world is very important for the continuity of cognitive and mental health. The belief in a just world seems to be related to many vital variables that are at the center of our lives and affect our psychological well-being directly or indirectly, such as how individuals perceive or make sense of the life they live, methods of coping with events/situations, and perspectives towards people. Therefore, it is important to investigate the theory of belief in a just world in terms of various variables.

In this study, which will be shaped on the basis of Lerner's theory of belief in a just world, it is desired to look at the phenomenon of justice from the perspective of professional staff working in the Ministry of Family and Social Services. It is desired to investigate how the professionals who are included in various occupational groups (psychological counselors, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, teachers) create a just world belief system and how they ensure the continuity

of this issue, which is essential for the continuation of mental health. The psychological counselor and pedagogue team, which works with many people exposed to trauma in all layers of society in 81 provinces of Turkey, consists of especially disadvantaged groups, broken families, children exposed to neglect and abuse, socially and economically deprived individuals who have many negative experiences in their lives. groups are assisted. Fair world belief systems come into play to ensure the psychological well-being of employees while participating in these processes. It is also considered that employees who are faced with many negative situations and situations that can be interpreted as injustice while performing their duties must comply with certain laws and regulations in this process. Considering that they have a duty to do, but the work also has a conscientious and spiritual aspect, is it worth investigating how they developed the belief system in question?

### KATKI BELİRTME

Yazar/yazarlardan başka makalenin her hangi bir safhasında katkı sağlayan kişiler varsa yazının sonunda bu kişilerin isimleri ayrıca belirtilmelidir.

Makale kurum ya da kuruluş tarafından desteklenen bir araştırma/proje bulgularından oluşuyorsa desteği sağlayan kurum/kuruluşun adı, projenin ismi, (varsa) tarih, sayı ve numarası verilmelidir.

### ÇIKAR ÇATIŞMASI BEYANI

Yazarlar aralarında çıkar çatışması olmadığını "The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest" beyan ederler.

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