

Workplace Bullying and Turnover Intention: The Moderating Role of Belief in a Just World

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Abstract

The present study examined the role of belief in a just world in moderating the relationship between bullying and turnover intention in a Turkish sample. Self-report questionnaires measuring belief in a just world, workplace bullying and turnover intention were administered to the sample in their workplaces. The results of moderated regression analyses based on data collected from 300 employees showed that both personal and general belief in a just world moderate the relationship between bullying and intention to leave. In Hypothesis 1, it was predicted that personal belief in a just world moderates the relationship between bullying and turnover intention such that the relationship is stronger when personal BJW is low and weaker when personal BWJ is high. Conversely, Hypothesis 2 was not supported since negative regression coefficients for the interaction indicates that the relationship between bullying and turnover is weaker under conditions of high general BJW.

Keywords: Workplace bullying; general BJW; personal BJW; turnover intention.

1. Introduction

Employee turnover has adverse consequences for effective organizational functioning. The time and energy devoted to find suitable new employees and the time required for new employees to reach maximum level of productivity may sometimes result in difficulties in achieving organizational objectives (Waldman, Kelly, Arora & Smith, 2004). Because of the important practical implications of turnover, much research attention has been devoted to identifying the correlates of employees' intention to leave the organization. The results of these studies have shown that intention to leave is positively correlated with many job stressors (Ngo, Foley & Loi, 2005; Podsakof, LePine, LePine, 2007). Workplace bullying is one job stressor that has been studied in relation to intention to leave. Some investigators have examined the main effects of bullying whereas others have examined the interactive effects of individual differences variables and being bullied on intention to leave (Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2008; Nishii & Mayer, 2009). The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether belief in a just world moderates the effects of being bullied on turnover intention. Although previous research conducted in Europe and North America has shown that belief in a just world moderates the effects of workplace stressors, there is a paucity of research concerning the mediating or moderating role of BJW in countries with different cultural and religious background such as Turkey. This paper, therefore contributes to the literature by examining the extent to which the concept of BJW can be applicable to organizational behavior in a non-western country.

1.1. Workplace Bullying

Although many different definitions of workplace bullying have been proposed (e.g. Di Martino, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003) and different acts have been considered as bullying some consensus on what constitute bullying have been emerged in recent years (Notelaers, Einarsen, De Witte & Vermunt, 2006).

Workplace bullying comprise hostile verbal and nonverbal acts such as harassing, offending, socially excluding or intimidating an organizational member (Di Martino, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003). For a hostile act to qualify as bullying (1) it must be displayed in a systematic manner for a period of time; (2) the target must experience difficulty in defending himself or herself against this act and (3) it must be perceived by the target as oppressive, unfair, humiliating, undermining. “A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal “strength” are in conflict” (Einarsen et al., 2003, p. 15).

Bullying encompasses a wide range of hostile behaviours. These behaviours may be overtly or covertly expressed and may be targeted at the work or at the personal characteristic of the victim (Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2008). Withholding information, setting impossible deadlines for the victim, removing key areas of responsibility from the victim, permanent criticism of the victim’s work, socially isolating the victim, spreading rumours about the victim, detrimental comments, attacks on the victims personal characteristics and threats of physical violence are examples of bullying behaviours (Einarsen, 2000).

Bullying has adverse consequences for the target. Many investigators have reported that to be a target of bullying lowers self-esteem (Mathiesen and Einarsen, 2007; Vartia, 2003) and produce psychological problems such as fear, anxiety, helplessness, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Mathiesen and Einarsen, 2004; Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2002). Workplace bullying has also widespread negative effects on the organization as a whole. It has been reported that victims of bullying display less organizational citizenship (Constantino, Domingez & Galan, 2006) and more counterproductive work behavior (Einarsen et al., 2003). Being victim of bullying at work also reduces the organizational satisfaction and commitment (Hoel & Cooper, 2000), decreases productivity (Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper, 2003; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003), increases absenteeism (Vartia, 2001), sickness absence (Kivimaki, Elovainio, and Vahtera, 2000), also propensity to leave and turnover (McCormack, Casimir, Djurkovic & Yang, 2009; Quine, 1999).

1.2. Belief in a Just World

The belief in a just world refers to a human need to view the world as a just place in which individuals get what they deserve and de deserve what they get (Lerner, 1980). According to the just world hypothesis, in order to feel confidence in future and to invest in long term goals individuals need to believe that the world is a just place where hard work and a clean life always pay off. To believe otherwise, individuals would have to accept that their fate is at the mercy of others. BWJ makes the world more predictable and enables individual to maintain their “daily lives with a sense of trust, hope, and confidence in their future” (Lerner, 1980, p. 14) Consistent with this view, research has found that individuals high in BWJ tend to believe that they will be treated fairly by others (Tomaka & Blascovich, 1994), and that they are more likely to invest in long term goals (Hafer, Bègue, Choma, & Dempsey, 2005; Otto & Dalbert, 2005). Thus BWJ serves important adaptive functions (Dalbert, 2001; Furnham, 2003; Furnham & Procter, 1989).

Because BJW serves important adaptive functions individuals want to protect their belief when they are confronted an event which threatens their notion that the world is a just place (Dalbert, 2001; Rubin & Peplau, 1975). Therefore, when they experience or witness unfairness that threatens this notion they try to compensate it. If the experienced or observed unfairness cannot be compensated, they reinterpret it so as to fit to their belief that justice prevails in the world (Dalbert, 2001). In such cases BJW serves as a conceptual framework that helps individual to reinterpret unjust events in a meaningful way (Dalbert, 2001). In order to adjust an experienced injustice to the notion that justice prevails in the world individuals can make use of their BJW in several different ways. For example, they may blame the victim for an observed unfairness (Correia, Vala & Aguiar, 2005), try to justify an experienced unfairness as partly self-inflicted (Bulman & Wortman, 1977; Lupfer, Doan, & Houston, 1998), interpret the perpetrator’s actions as being unintentional (Dalbert, 1999), play down the injustice itself (Lipkus & Siegler, 1993).

Although the concept “belief in a just world” was originally developed to explain a human motive to create a predictable environment (Lerner, 1980), later some investigator began to use it to refer an individual differences variable. This use of the term is based on the assumption that as a result of the differences in the strength of their need to believe in a just world, individuals differ in the extent to which they believe the world is a just place (Hafer & Beauge, 2005).

Studies dealing with belief in a just world as a individual difference variable generally focused on its relationship with psychological well-being and the ability to cope with stressful life events (Furnham, 2003). The results of these studies showed that individuals with high BJW scores are more satisfied with their lives (Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996), have a higher level of psychological well-being (Ritter, Benson, & Snyder, 1990), exhibit more positive emotions (Bulman & Wortman, 1977), believe that they will be treated fairly by others (Tomaka & Blascovich, 1994), are more likely to evaluate events in their lives as just (Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006) and are less likely to see themselves as victims (Lipkus & Siegler, 1993).

Dalbert (1999) argued that a distinction should be made between the belief in a personal just world and the belief in a general just world. The personal BJW is related with whether an individual believes that on average events his/her own life are just; while general BJW reflects the belief that, basically, the world is a just place. It has been argued that individuals tend to endorse personal BJW more strongly than general BJW and therefore personal BJW is a better predictor of their reactions to justice related issues (Dalbert, 1999; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2002; Otto, Boos, Dalbert, Schöps, & Hoyer, 2006; Sutton & Douglas, 2005).

1.3. Belief in a Just World as a Moderator of the Relationships between Workplace Bullying and Intention to Leave

Many researchers have provided evidence suggesting a significant relationship between being subject to bullying and intention to leave (Quine, 1999, 2001; Simons, 2008). It has been reported that as compared with employees who have not been subjected to bullying, the targets of bullying have higher intentions to leave (Quine, 1999, 2001) and make threat to quit (Liefoghe, 2003) or actually quit their jobs more often (Rayner, 1999). Therefore literally leaving or thinking of leaving the organization may be seen as a coping strategy used by targets of bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Zapf & Gross, 2001).

Being subject to bullying obviously play an important role in determining an employees intention or decision to leave. However, it has also been shown that some victims of bullying may be more vulnerable than others (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001, 2004). This indicate that responses to workplace bullying are mediated or moderated by employees' personal characteristics. Some authors called attention to a need to examine the potential mediators or moderators impact on the relationship between bullying and intention to leave (e.g. Hoel, Einarsen, Keashly, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). Research has shown that factors such as affective commitment and perceived organizational support mediates or moderates the relationship between bullying and intention to leave (McCormack et al., 2009; Djurkovic et al. 2008).

From the just world hypothesis perspective experiences of unfairness in the workplace is crucial for the employees because such experiences threaten their belief in a just world for immediate and long-term work life at workplace (Cubela Adoric & Kvartuc, 2007; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007). Therefore when they experience injustice they try to assimilate it to their BJW. The stronger employees' beliefs in a just world, the more likely they will be to try to reinterpret unpleasant events in their workplace so as to protect their belief in a just world. Therefore they will be more confident in being treated justly by coworkers, instructors, superiors, and the organization as a whole (Otto, Glaser & Dalbert, 2009). In line with this view, just-world research has evidenced that employees with strong BJW are more satisfied with their jobs and more committed to the organization (Otto, Glaser and Dalbert, 2009), and experience less negative emotions under stressful work conditions such as low job control, job insecurity, work overload (Cubela Adoric and Kvartuc, 2007; Dzuka and Dalbert, 2007; Otto and Schmidt, 2007). Since turnover intention is positively correlated with job stressors (Carlson & Thompson, 1995) and negatively correlated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Glazer & Beehr 2005), it is reasonable to assume that the relationship between workplace bullying and intention to leave the organization is moderated by BJW. Hence the present study was carried out to investigate whether personal and general belief in a just world moderates the effects of being bullied on turnover intentions. Based on the above mentioned characteristic of individual with strong BJW and the results of previous studies the following hypotheses were proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Personal belief in a just world moderates the relationship between bullying and turnover intention such that the relationship is stronger when personal BJW is low and weaker when personal BWJ is high.

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between bullying and turnover will not be moderated by the general BJW.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 300 employees (113 female and 187 male) of a private sector organization in Turkey. The mean age of participants was 39.55 ($S = 4.94$). Of the participants, 198 were blue collar worker and 102 were white collar workers. Participants' work period were ranging from 1 to 33 years.

2.2. Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to the participants in their workplaces. They were informed that participation was voluntary and that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Workplace Bullying. Workplace bullying was measured using a Turkish adaptation of the Negative Act Questionnaire- Revised Einarsen and Hoel, 2001; Einarsen and Raknes, 1997). The NAQ-R consists of 22 items. Each item describes a typical bullying behavior that prevails in workplaces with no reference to the term bullying. Respondents are asked to indicate on 5-points Likert type scales the frequency with which they have been the target of behaviors described in the items during the past six months. Response choices are "never", "now and then", "monthly", "weekly" and "daily. The scale has two factor identified as personal derogation and work-related harassment. (Einarsen and Hoel, 2001) Insulting someone or gossiping about someone are examples of personal derogation while assigning someone too much work load and criticizing her/his work performance may be examples of work related harassment. This version of the NAQ has been used in other studies (Glaso et al., 2009; Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2004; Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001), and its reliability and validity have been demonstrated (e.g., Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers 2009).

Turkish adaptation of the NAQ-R was carried out by Aydın and Öcel (2009). The results of exploratory factor analysis showed that Turkish version of The NAQ-R has a single factor structure. This result is in line with the statement that the NAQ-R may also be used as a one-factor measurement (Einarsen et al., 2009). In addition convergent and criterion validities of the scale were found to be satisfactory. Cronbach's alpha and three weeks interval test-retest coefficients of the scale were .88 and .80 respectively. Split-half correlations obtained between two different halves of the scale were .83 and .82.

2.3.2. Turnover Intention. Turnover intention was measured using four items adapted from Hunt, Osborn, and Martin, (1981) by Shore and Martin (1989). The items aim to assess intent to leave the organization without making reference to intent to change profession or the type of work performed (e.g. *Which of the following statements most clearly reflects your feelings about your future with this organization in the next year?*). Respondents are asked to give their answers on 5-points Likert type and higher scores indicate higher intention to leave. Cronbach's alfas obtained from two different sample were reported as .78 and .74 (Shore and Martin, 1989). The items were adapted to Turkish by the author and Cronbach's alfa was found to be .76.

2.3.3. Belief In a Just World. Personal and general BJW were measured using Personal Belief in a JustWorld Scale (Dalbert, 1999) and General Belief in a Just World Scale (Dalbert, Montada and Schmitt, 1987). These scales contain 7 (e.g. *I believe that I usually get what I deserve*) and 6 items (e.g. *I think basically the world is a just place*) respectively. In both scales respondents indicate the degree to which they agree with the item contents on 6-point Likert type scales ranging from "totally agree" to "totally disagree". Cronbach's alfas of the Personal Belief in a Just World Scale and General Belief in a Just World Scale were reported as .88 (Dalbert, 1999) and .68 (Dalbert, Montada and Schmitt, 1987) respectively.

The items of personal and general belief in a just world scales together with the items of Justice Centrality Scale (Dalbert et. al., 1987) were first translated into Turkish and brought together to constitute a Belief in a Just World Scale by Şahin (2005). Cronbach's alphas of this scale reported by Şahin (2005) are .81 for college students and .83 for adults. Öcel (2009) using the translated items of general and personal belief in a just world scales separately obtained Cronbach's alfas of .81 and .78 for personal and general belief in a just world scales respectively.

3. Results

The descriptive statistics for workplace bullying, each of the just world belief, and turnover intention and the correlations between these variables are presented in Table 1. As may be seen from Table 1. turnover intention is positively correlated with workplace bullying and negatively correlated with both personal and general BJW. Personal and general BJW are positively correlated with each other while both of them show negative correlations with being subject to bullying. The mean of participants personal BJW scores is significantly higher than the mean of their general BJW scores ($t=34.24; p<.001$).

Table1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between Turnover Intention, Just World Beliefs, and Workplace Bullying

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1)Age	--						
2)Gender	.31**	--					
3)Tenure	.74**	.26**	--				
4)Bullying	.07	-.12*	-.04	--			
5)Personal BJW	-.03	.03	-.08	-.56**	--		
6) General BJW	-.03	-.04	-.01	-.41**	.64**	--	
7)Turnover intention	.01	-.01	-.03	.32**	-.33**	-.24**	--
Means	39.5		14.3	30.1	42.9	16.6	12.1
SD	4.9		4.8	8.3	12.2	5.3	2.6

**p < .01; *p < .05

3.1. Regression Analyses

Two moderated regression analyses were conducted to test hypothesis 1 and 2. Following Aiken and West (1991), the independent variable (*i.e.* bullying) and the moderator variable (*i.e.* belief in a just world) were centered, and the product term was calculated using the standardized scores. In the first step age, gender and tenure were included as control variables. In the second step, bullying and belief in a just world were included as predictors. In the third step, interaction between bullying and belief in a just world was included in the regression equation. The results of regression analyses involving personal belief in a just world are presented in Table 2.

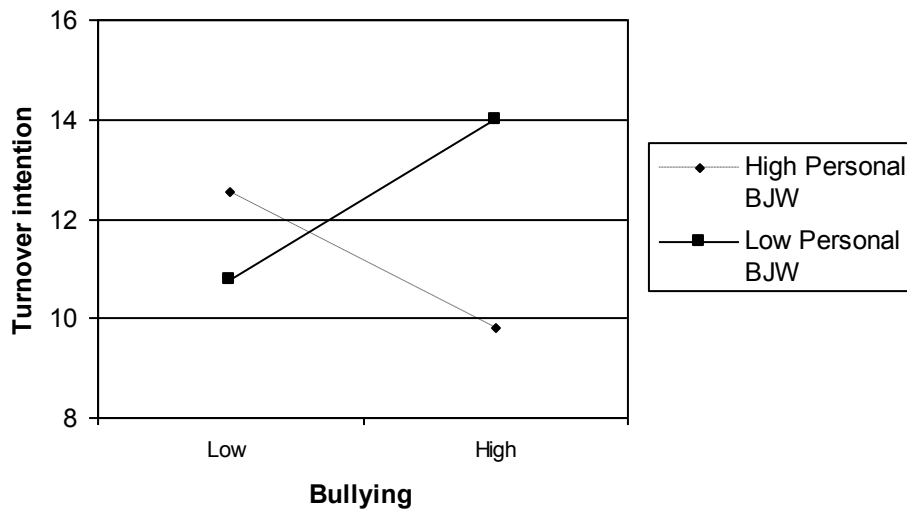
Table2. Moderated regression analyses for turnover intentions (Personal BJW)

Variables	B	β	t	p	R ²	R ² _{chan.}	F _{chan.}
1.Step					.005	-.005	.53
Age	.04	.09	1.02	.30			
Gender	.06	.00	.11	.90			
Tenure	-.05	-.10	-1.24	.21			
2.Step					.13	.12	9.39
Bullying	.06	.20	3.05	.00			
Personal BJW	-.04	-.21	-3.27	.00			
3.Step					.19	.06	11.78
Bullying x Personal BJW	-.02	-.29	-4.53	.00			

In Hypothesis 1, it was predicted that personal belief in a just world moderates the relationship between bullying and turnover intention such that the relationship is stronger when personal BJW is low and weaker when personal BWJ is high. As may be seen from Table 2 Hypothesis 1 was supported ($\beta=-.29 t=-4.53 \Delta R^2= .19 F_{change}=6.289 p<.0.00$), as the negative regression coefficients for the interaction, suggesting that the relationship between bullying and turnover is weaker under conditions of high personal BJW. This interaction is displayed in Figure 1.

In order to examine the nature of the interaction effect displayed in Figure 1, following Aiken and West (1991), participants were divided into two groups according to personal BJW scores, participants who scored 1 SD or more below the mean personal BJW scores and participants who scored 1 SD or more above the mean personal BJW scores. An analysis of simple slopes revealed a positive relationship between bullying and intention to leave when personal BJW is low ($b=0.09, p < 0.00$) and a negative relationship when personal BJW is high ($b=0.08, p < 0.05$).

Figure 1. Interaction of personal BJW and bullying on turnover

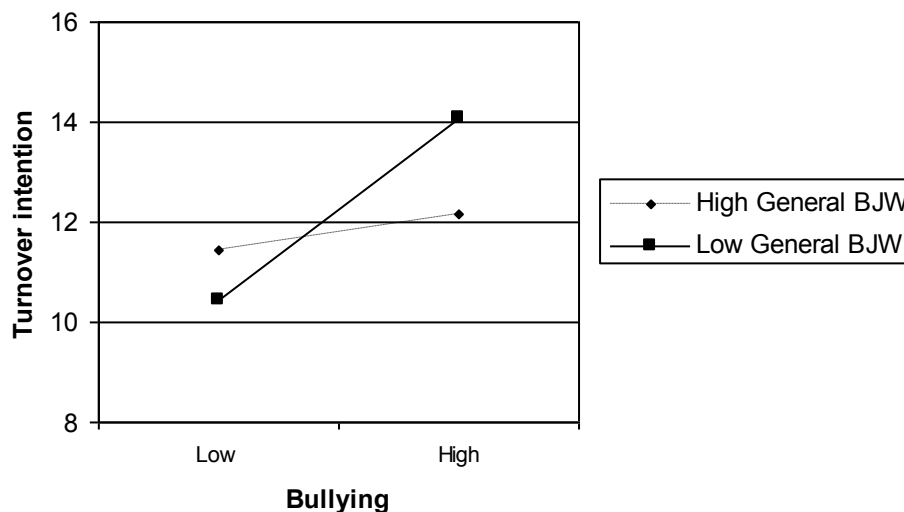


The results of regression analyses involving general belief in a just world are presented in Table 3. In Hypothesis 2, it was predicted that general belief in a just world will not moderate the relationship between bullying and turnover intention. As may be seen from Table 3 Hypothesis 2 was not supported ($\beta=.20$ $t=-3.19$ $R^2_{chan.}=.15$ $F_{change} =6.289$ $p<.0.02$) since negative regression coefficients for the interaction indicates that the relationship between bullying and turnover is weaker under conditions of high general BJW. The significant interaction involving general BJW means as a moderator of the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention is shown in Figure 2.

Table 4. Moderated regression analyses for turnover intentions (General BJW)

Variables	B	β	t	p	R ²	R ² _{chan.}	F _{chan.}
1.Step					.00	-.00	.53
Age	.04	.09	1.02	.30			
Gender	.06	.00	.11	.90			
Tenure	-.05	-.10	-1.24	.21			
2.Step					.13	.13	8.63
Bullying	.07	.24	3.87	.00			
General BJW	-.08	-.17	-2.70	.00			
3.Step					.15	.02	9.12
Bullying x General BJW	-.01	-.20	-3.19	.00			

The nature of the interaction effect displayed in Figure 1, was examined using the procedure described above (Aiken and West, 1991). An analysis of simple slopes revealed a significant positive relationship between bullying and intention to leave when general BJW is low ($b=0.10$, $p <0.00$) and a positive but non-significant relationship when personal BJW is high ($b=0.02$, $p <0.05$).

Figure 2. Interaction of General BJW and bullying on turnover

4. Discussion

The main purpose of the present study was to examine whether BJW functions as a individual difference variable in determining employees reaction to workplace stressors in a non-western country. For this purpose the role of personal and general BJW in moderating the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention was investigated in a Turkish sample. The results of correlational analyses showed that intention to leave and perception of being subject to bullying are negatively correlated with both personal and general BJW. It has been argued and evidenced that the stronger employees' beliefs in a just world, the more likely they will be to try to reinterpret unpleasant events in their workplace so as to protect their believe in a just world. Therefore employees with strong BJW are more satisfied with their jobs (Otto, Glaser and Dalbert, 2009), and perceive less intent of mobbing (Otto & Schmidt, 2007) and less injustice in the behavior of others (Cubela Adoric and Kwartuc, 2007; Dzuka and Dalbert, 2007; Tomaka & Blascovich, 1994). Since the results of our correlational analyses are in line with these argument and finding, the concept of belief in a just world may be said to be applicable to a non-western culture.

Another finding that support applicability of the concept of belief in a just world to Turkish culture was relative strength of participants' personal and general BJW. Mean personal BJW score of the participants was significantly higher than the mean of their general BJW score. This finding is in line with Dalbert's (1999) assertion that individuals tend to endorse the beliefs that events in their life are just more strongly than the belief that the world is a just place and similar to the results of previous research conducted in Europe (e.g., Correia & Dalbert, 2007; Sutton & Winnard, 2007).

The results of regression analysis supported the first hypotheses that personal BWJ moderates the relationship between bullying and turnover intention such that the relationship is positive when personal BJW is low and negative when personal BWJ is high. There are two different view of personal BJW, namely personal BJW as a personal resource and personal BJW as a personal buffer (Dalbert, 2007). Some investigator conceive of personal BJW as a relatively stable personal resource stemming from a personal disposition. This resource enables the individual to cope better with the demands of his/her life. On the other hand some investigators conceptualize personal BJW as a personal buffer that takes effect under the adverse conditions and protects the individual from negative consequences of strain. The first view implies a main effect hypothesis while the second implies a moderator hypothesis (Dalbert, 2007). Based on some studies Dalbert (2007) argued that personal BJW should be seen as a personal resource rather than a personal buffer.

The result of the present study may be interpreted as giving support to both hypotheses. Personal BJW was negatively correlated with perception of being subject to bullying. This negative relationship may result from high just world believers' personal disposition to assimilate bullying acts of others into their BJW and thus experiencing less bullying.

On the other hand the results also showed that personal BJW moderates the relationship between being subject to bullying and intention to leave. The participants high in personal BJW displayed less intention to leave under high bullying condition. Based on this result one may argue that BJW is a personal buffer that takes effect under adverse conditions and protect individuals from negative consequences of strain. It seems reasonable to assume that BJW as a personal resource and BJW as a personal buffer are not mutually exclusive construct. A personal disposition may also function as a buffer that helps individuals to lessen the impact of stressful life events.

Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Contrary to this hypothesis general BJW was found to be moderating the relationship between bullying and intention to leave. However, the moderating effect of general BJW was less pronounced than the effect of personal BJW. This result supports the view that personal BJW is a stronger predictor of individuals reactions to justice related issues (Dalbert, 1999). On the other hand, this result contradicts with the studies finding no relationship between general BJW and individuals reactions to justice related issues (e.g.,Cubela Adoric & Kvartuc, 2007). Since Dalbert's (1999) distinction between personal and general BJW, research carried out in organizational context generally utilized personal BJW. The number of studies using either general BJW alone or both general and personal BJW measures together is rather limited. The results of these studies is somewhat unequivocal. For example, Strelan (2007) reported that forgiveness of others was positively related with personal BJW but not with general BJW while self-forgiveness was related to both types of BJW. These mixed results, together with the result of the present study suggests a necessity to examine the role of general BJW in determining these reactions more closely.

4.1. Implications and Limitations

The present study tested applicability of the concept of BJW to organizational behavior in a non-western country by examining the role of BJW in moderating the relationship between bullying and intention to leave. The results showed that bullying is positively related with turnover intention and that both personal and general BJW moderate this relationship. Finding a positive relationship between a workplace stressor (bullying) and a negative outcome (turnover intention) is not a surprising results in itself as numerous studies showed that the effects of stressors are not expected to differ from one culture to another. It would be redundant to discussed the implication of the relationship between bullying and turnover intention for the organization as it has been discussed by numerous investigators. In the same vein this results showing that BJW moderates the relationship between bullying and a turnover intention are not original as the role of BJW either as a main effect or as a moderator in determining individuals' reactions to stressors has been fairly well documented. The unique contribution of this study is to show that belief in a just world is held by individuals and plays an important role in determining their reaction to stressful work conditions independent of culture and religious beliefs.

Although the present findings contribute to the literature, some limitations of this study are evident. These limitations must be kept in mind when interpreting the results. First, all of the data were collected from the employees of the same organization. There is the possibility that participants' reactions may be affected by unique features of the organization. This possibility must be kept in mind when generalizing the results. Second, this study relied on self-report data. Although confidentiality of their responses were assured, participants might not want to declare their true intention to leave the organization for various reason. In addition, it is known that self-report measure are susceptible various biases. Future research that tests validity of present results should overcome these limitations.

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