Belief in a Just World and Well-Being of Bullies, Victims and Defenders: A Study with Portuguese and Indian Students

Isabel Correia¹, Shanmukh V. Kamble², and Claudia Dalbert³

¹ CIS - Centro de Investigação e Intervenção Social / ISCTE - Lisbon University Institute, Portugal
² Karnataka University Dharwad, India
³ Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg, Germany

* Corresponding author: Isabel Correia, ISCTE, Av das Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal, tel.: +351-217903001; fax: +351-217903002; e-mail: Isabel.Correia@iscte.pt

Shanmukh.V.Kamble, Department of Psychology, Karnataka University, Dharwad 580003 Karnataka State, Índia, tel: +91-836-2747121, fax: 91-836-2747884, e-mail: anilhubs@rediffmail.com

Claudia Dalbert, Department of Educational Psychology, Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg, D-06099 Halle/Saale; tel +49-3455523811; fax: +49-3455527135 e-mail: claudia.dalbert@paedagogik.uni-halle.de


Journal Homepage: http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/10615806.asp
Abstract
This paper presents a cross-sectional study that applies just world research to the analysis of bullying at school. Based on previous findings that characterize the belief in a just world (BJW) as a valuable resource for maintaining positive well-being and assimilating injustice, the present study is based on the hypotheses that the personal BJW is positively correlated with subjective well-being, here in specifically school distress. In this paper the generalizability of this association is tested in victims, bullies, and defenders, and across gender and also two countries with different cultures, Portugal and India. We will test if BJW can best be interpreted as a personal resource (main effect) or a buffer (moderator) for the distress of victims, bullies and defenders of the victims. The participants were 465 school students (Portuguese sample: 187 students aged between 12 and 18 years; Indian sample: 278 Indian students aged between 14 and 17 years. Overall, the results of the study supported the personal resource hypothesis. The stronger the adolescents’ endorsements of the BJW the less they felt distressed at school, and this was true independent of their bullying behaviour and within both sexes and across both samples, although boys, bullies, and Portuguese adolescents experienced more distress and defenders experienced less distress at school.

Key words: bullying; just world beliefs; adolescence; well-being; victimization; school
Belief in a Just World and Well-Being of Bullies, Victims and Defenders: A Study with Portuguese and Indian Students

The study of well-being is recognized as paramount in psychology as well as factors that can promote it (for a review, see Ryan & Deci, 2000). The belief that events in one’s life are just, as reflected in the personal belief in a just world (BJW), has been acknowledged as a resource that bolsters subjective well-being in general (Dalbert, 2001), for both victims (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2002; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007a) and non-victims (Correia & Dalbert, 2007; Dalbert & Stoeber, 2005). Recently a study revealed that BJW was positively associated with well-being for victims of aggression and aggressors alike (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007a). This new pattern of results needs further investigation as the possibility that BJW is not only a resource for the victims to maintain their well-being but also for the actors involved in bullying situations would have both theoretical and practical implications. Therefore, in this paper we examine whether the association between personal BJW and well-being holds for victims, bullies, and defenders of the victim alike, and we did this with improved methods, across two different cultures, and we also explored the meaning of gender for this association.

Bullying

Bullying is acknowledged to be a common and widespread form of violence in the school context in many countries (Smith et al., 1999). In his pioneering work, Olweus (1978) defined bullying as a subtype of aggressive behaviour in which an aggressor intentionally and repeatedly harms a weaker victim either physically and/or psychologically. Bullying has been shown to have marked detrimental consequences for both victims (Hawker & Boulton, 2000) and aggressors (e.g., Rigby & Slee, 1993). Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen (1996) identified six roles school students can take in bullying situations: bullies; victims; the assistants of the bully, who do not start the bullying episode but participate in it; the reinforcers of the bully, who do not actively attack the victim but positively reinforce the bully, for example, by laughing; the outsiders, who do not get involved and pretend not to
notice the bullying episodes; the defenders, who support the victim and try to stop the bullies. We will focus here on studies of well-being of the three central roles bully, victim, and defender.

Bullies have been regarded as skilled individuals who try to reach personal benefits through bullying (Gini, 2006; Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999). Bullies are socially rejected by their peers, but this pattern seems to be different according to the sex of the bully: boys are not chosen in a sociometric measure but contrarily girls are chosen (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Rigby and Slee (1993) showed that the tendency to bully others was negatively correlated with happiness and liking school, but no relationship was found between the tendency to bully and self-esteem. In addition, peer bullying was found to be associated with delinquent behaviour (Rigby & Cox, 1996).

Victims are the children more socially rejected and less socially accepted by their peers (e.g., Salmivalli et al., 1996). Social rejection of the victim can be considered both as a cause and a consequence of bullying: the victim is chosen among the most rejected and the fact that s/he is bullied reinforces the low status (Olweus, 1991). Rigby and Slee (1993) obtained a negatively correlation between the tendency to be more victimized than others with happiness and self-esteem, although no correlation was found with liking for school. Furthermore, being frequently victimized was associated with poor mental and physical health (Rigby, 2000), and several forms of social and psychological maladjustment (Hawker & Boulton, 2000).

Defenders are socially accepted and less socially rejected (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Furthermore, research has shown that these children are competent at understanding cognitions and emotions of other people (Gini, 2006). The tendency to defend others seems to be positively correlated with happiness, liking school, and self-esteem (Rigby & Slee, 1993).

Belief in a just world and well-being
According to the just world hypotheses "People want to and have to believe they live in a just world so that they can go about their daily lives with a sense of trust, hope, and confidence in their future" (Lerner, 1980, p. 14). Just-world research has evidenced three functions of the belief in a just world (for a review, see Dalbert, 2001): (1) it obliges people to act fairly themselves (Hafer, 2000); (2) it enables people to trust in being treated fairly by others (Zuckerman & Gerbasi, 1977), and to invest in long-term goals (Dette, Stöber, & Dalbert, 2004, Otto & Dalbert, 2005); and (3) it promotes the assimilation of injustices (Hafer & Olson, 1989). Thus, BJW serves important adaptive functions, such as enabling people to invest in long-term goals and assuaging people’s concerns about the unfairness of others. In consequence, BJW supports mental health and well-being.

One issue that has received recent discussion (Dalbert, 2007) is the conceptualization of BJW as a personal resource or a buffer. A personal resource can be defined as a personal disposition that helps people to cope with the events of their life, including working life. The stronger the resource, the better they can be expected to cope (main effect hypothesis). A personal buffer, in contrast, is usually seen as a resource that takes effect under specific adverse conditions (moderator hypothesis). In this paper we examine if BJW can best be interpreted as a personal resource or a buffer (moderator) for the distress of victims, bullies and defenders of the victims and thus tested the interaction between BJW and bullying behaviour.

Victims with a strong BJW may be more likely to assimilate their unjust fate towards their BJW and consequently may feel better. In line with these considerations, a relationship between BJW and psychological adjustment has been found in various samples of victims as for example in accident victims with spinal cord injuries (Bulman & Wortman, 1977), and more recently in flood victims (Otto, Boos, Dalbert, Schöps, & Hoyer, 2006). Lately, Dzuka and Dalbert (2007b) found that the BJW was adaptively associated with well-being for teachers who were victims of student violence. In the same vein, in a group of self-labelled
victims of mobbing, BJW was positively associated with five dimensions of psychological
adjustment (Cubela Adoric, & Kvartuc, 2007). Therefore, the more the bullying victims
believe in a just world, the better their well-being should be. However, the more victim
experiences they made, the worse their well-being should be.

As bullying can be seen as a specific type of aggressive and rule-breaking behaviour
that constitutes a breach of the personal contract it should be avoided by students with a
strong BJW. Therefore students with a strong BJW should be less likely to bully other
students as in fact shown by Correia and Dalbert (2008). Although just behaviour is
mandatory for individuals with a strong BJW it may nevertheless occur that students with a
strong BJW bully other students and this bullying behaviour is in contrast to their BJW. This
threat of the BJW can be diminished by finding justifications for one’s unjust behaviour (for a
review, see Dalbert, 2001); this can be interpreted as expression of the assimilative function
of BJW. Therefore, the stronger the BJW the better the well-being of bullies should be. In
addition, we expect that the bullying behaviour itself should be positively associated with
distress experienced at school, and this should be particularly be true for male bullies which
are rejected by their peers (Salmivalli et al., 1996).

Own just behaviour strengthens one’s self-esteem and well-being (e.g., Dalbert, 1999). The
defenders presumably defend bullying victims in an attempt to restore justice. Therefore,
the stronger the students’ BJW the better the well-being of defenders should be. In addition,
we expect that the defending behaviour itself as a type of own fairness behaviour has the
potential to strengthen one’s subjective well-being.

Recent investigations have shown that it is necessary to distinguish the belief in a
personal just world from the belief in a general just world (Dalbert, 1999; Lipkus, Dalbert, &
Siegler, 1996). The personal BJW reflects the belief that, overall, events in one’s life are just,
whereas the general BJW reflects the belief that, basically, the world is a just place. Empirical
studies have shown that the personal BJW is a better predictor of well-being than the general
BJW (e.g., Dzuka & Dalbert, 2002). Therefore, we focus on personal BJW in the present
studies.

In a recent study with Slovakian school students Dzuka and Dalbert (2007a)
investigated BJW and well-being of victims and aggressors at school. Their results showed
that personal BJW was associated with higher life satisfaction, more positive affect, and less
negative affect and these relationships persisted when controlled for global personality
dimensions and, particularly, victim or aggressor status. Only the association between
personal BJW and life satisfaction differed in the two groups, with BJW proving to be a better
buffer for victims than for aggressors. This study however had three major limitations. Firstly,
although the victimization and aggression occurred in the school context, the well-being of
victims and aggressors was described by dimensions that were not specific to the school
context. To overcome this limitation, in the present study, we described well-being specific to
the school context, namely school distress. The second limitation was that it addressed
aggression more than bullying as the identification of victims and aggressors was based on a
single-item indicator that did not take into account the repetitive character of bullying. To
overcome this limitation in the present study victim and bully self-reported behaviours were
measured by asking for the repetitive character of the behaviour and the experiences,
respectively. As we assessed the bullying behaviours with scales instead of single items, we
also increased the reliability of the assessments and we defined bullies and victims not as two
mutually exclusive categories; indeed, these roles are not always at opposite poles (Olweus,
1993). A third limitation is that Dzuka and Dalbert (2007a) did not account for other groups
involved as the defenders of the victims (Salmivalli et al, 1996). To overcome this limitation
in the present study we also included a measure of self-reported behaviour of defending
victims.

The aim of our study was to test for the generalizability of the association between
BJW and distress, particularly across three self-reported behaviours regarding bullying at
school. Furthermore, we extended the test of generalizability in two regards. We explored whether this association may be gender-specific. BJW usually don’t differ between male and female participants (O’Connor, Morrison, McLeod, & Anderson, 1996), but the distress as other well-being dimensions may differ between boys and girls (e.g., Correia & Dalbert; 2007). Furthermore, the vast majority of studies on BJW and well-being were done in Western cultures as USA, Germany or Great Britain. Only very few were done in other cultures as, for example, in India (e.g., Dalal & Pande, 1988). We assume that the three functions just-world research revealed thus far are very basic functions which should hold under different conditions and namely, in different cultures, even if the content of the justice reasoning would be different. Dalal and Pande (1988) reported for example that accident victims with a strong BJW justified their fate by karma which can be interpreted as a culture specific version of self-blame. Therefore, the observed adaptive association between BJW and this psychological adaptation was observed in other cultures. However, as far as we know no study so far was done on BJW and bullying in non-Western cultures. Thus, we included an Indian sample to test whether the expected results would hold across different cultures.

In sum, we conducted a study aiming to extend Dzuka and Dalbert (2007a) findings to bullying situations while addressing its shortcomings. Our general hypothesis was that the personal BJW should be negatively correlated with distress at school. Although presumably based on different mediating mechanisms, we expected this association to hold across different behaviours in bullying as bully, victim, and defender. We will test if BJW can best be interpreted as a personal resource (main effect) or a buffer (moderator) for the distress of victims, bullies and defenders of the victims; in particular, we will test the interaction of BJW with the three bullying dimensions. Furthermore, the tendency for being a victim and a bully should be positively associated with school distress, whereas the tendency to defend victims should be negatively associated with school distress. Moreover, with one exception, this pattern of results should hold across boys and girls and also across two cultures, namely
Portuguese and Indian adolescents; however, the association between bullying behaviour and distress should be particularly strong for male bullies.

Method

Procedure and Sample

The participants in this study were 465 school students. The Portuguese sample consisted of 187 school students aged between 12 and 18 years ($M = 14.5; SD = 1.4$); 90 (48.1%) were female and 97 (51.9%) male. Students were attending the 7th to 9th grades of two different schools; 41 (21.9%) in the 7th grade, 78 (41.7%) in the 8th grade, and 67 (35.8%) in the 9th grade. One participant did not report the grade level. The Indian sample consisted of 278 Indian school students aged between 14 and 17 years ($M = 15.3; SD = 0.5$) with the majority being 15 or 16 years of age (95.7%); 122 (43.9%) were female and 156 (56.1%) male. Students attended the 10th grade of two different private English medium schools; ten different classes were recruited, 5 classes with boys and five with girls only.

In both samples, participants were invited to fill in a questionnaire regarding school life. It was stressed that their participation was anonymous and voluntary. The assessment was conducted in the classroom during lesson time, in Portugal with Portuguese and in Indian with English versions of the instruments both of which were successfully used in other studies already (e.g. Correia & Dalbert, 2007; Loo, 2002).

Measures

BJW was measured using the Personal Belief in a Just World Scale (Dalbert, 1999). The scale comprises 7 items designed to capture the belief that, overall, events in one’s life are just (Portugal: $\alpha = .77$; India: $\alpha = .68$; sample items: “I am usually treated fairly,” “Overall, events in my life are just”) with a 6-point answer scale ranging from 1 (“totally disagree”) to 6 (“totally agree”). Self-reported behaviour in bullying was assessed using the Rigby and Slee (1993) 12-item measure of dimensions of interpersonal relations. Responses were given on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (“never”) to 6 (“very often”). Each kind of self-
reported behaviour was assessed with 4 items. Victim experience was assessed with 4 items (Portugal: $\alpha = .85$; India: $\alpha = .62$; sample item: “How often do you get picked on by other kids?”); bully behaviour was measured with 4 items (Portugal $\alpha = .77$; India: $\alpha = .55$; sample item: “How often do you enjoy upsetting wimps?”); and defender behaviour was assessed with 4 items (Portugal: $\alpha = .78$; India: $\alpha = .52$; sample item: “How often do you help harassed children?”). Both bully behaviour and victim behaviour refer to several types of bullying as physical bullying and verbal bullying. Distress was measured using the 6-item short form school distress scale of the Anxiety Questionnaire for School Students (Wieczerkowski, Nickel, Janowski, Fittkau, & Rauer, 1974) with a 6-point answer scale ranging from 1 (“totally disagree”) to 6 (“totally agree”), as administered by Baumert, Gruehn, Heyn, Köller, and Schnabel (1997; Portugal: $\alpha = .70$; India: $\alpha = .56$; sample item: “Just thinking of school in the morning makes me feel distressed”). Scale scores were computed by averaging across items, with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of the construct. Sex was coded as a dummy variable, with 0 indicating “female” and 1 indicating “male.” Country was coded as a dummy variable, with 0 indicating “Portugal” and 1 indicating “India.

Independent t-tests showed that both samples did not differ significantly regarding victim experience, $t(464) = 0.70$, however Indian students believed stronger in a just world, $t(464) = -10.38$, than Portuguese students, whereas Portuguese students reported more bully behaviour, $t(464) = 3.08$, defender behaviour $t(464) = 12.48$, and experienced more distress, $t(464) = 6.13$, than their Indians counterparts. A chi-square test indicated that both samples did not differ significantly in sex, $\chi^2(1) = 1.13$, but our samples differed in age with the Indian sample being significantly older than the Portuguese sample ($t = -7.45, p < .001$). However, as age did not correlate with any study variable we did not control for age in the regression analyses.

Results

-- insert Table 1 about here --
First, bivariate correlations between distress and all the variables were inspected (see Table 1). Significantly different correlations between both samples were only observed regarding the three bullying dimensions. In the Portuguese sample, defender behaviour was negatively correlated with bully and victim experiences; in contrast in the Indian sample were all three behavioural dimensions positively associated. For both samples, personal BJW was associated with less distress; boys reported more distress at school compared to girls; and the students felt more distress at school the more they reported bullying behaviour and the less they reported defender behaviour. Victim experiences was however unrelated to distress at school.

To elucidate the relationship between well-being and BJW for the three behaviours, multiple regression analyses were performed for school distress on BJW, the three behaviours and their interaction with BJW, sex and country. Following Aiken and West (1991) we centered BJW and the three self-reported behaviours before analyzing the data. Country, sex and the three behaviour variables and personal BJW were entered in the first block; in the second block the four two-way interactions of BJW with the three behaviours and with sex, and the two-way interaction of bullying with sex were entered. In the third block the three three-way interactions of BJW and behaviour interacting with sex were entered; in order to test for the three-way interactions the two-way interactions must be included, thus the two two-way interactions of sex with victim and defender were also included in this block. In a second regression testing for country, the third block consisted of the three three-way interactions of BJW and behaviour with country and also the four two-way interactions with country. Results are shown in Table 2.

Twenty percent of the variance in school distress was explained by the main effects of personal BJW, bullying behaviour, defender behaviour, country and sex. None of the interactions with sex or country became significant, and this was also true for the interaction of BJW with country when entered as single predictor in the third block of Model 3b (p =
.51). Boys and Portuguese adolescents experienced more distress at school compared to girls and Indian adolescents. Moreover, the more strongly the adolescents endorsed the personal BJW, the less bullying behaviour they revealed, and the more defending behaviour they reported, the less distressed the adolescents experienced at school.

Discussion

The study presented in this paper examined if BJW can best be interpreted as a personal resource or a buffer (moderator) for the distress of victims, bullies and defenders of the victims. Findings provided unambiguous support for the adaptive relationship between personal BJW and distress at school. The more strongly the students believed in a personal just world, the less distress they experienced in school. This result is in line with the personal resource hypothesis. The effect size with $\beta = -.22$ is small (Cohen, 1988), but together with country the largest effect, and thus larger than the effects of bullying and defending behaviour (see Table 2). Furthermore, this pattern of results persisted when controlled for self-reported behaviour (victim, bully, or defender) and was observed for bullies, victims and defenders alike. Overall, the majority of cross-sectional questionnaire studies gave support to the resource compared to the buffer hypothesis (e.g., Dalbert, 2007). To give the buffer hypothesis a more rigorous test, future studies should investigate the buffer hypothesis experimentally by testing the association between BJW and well-being after confronting the participants with a personal unjust situation (or not in the control condition) like for example being treated unjustly by a more powerful confederate in an experimental scenario.

We also found an association of the behaviour itself with distress. In line with Rigby and Slee (1993), the tendency to bully others was associated with more distress at school and in line with Dalbert (1999) the tendency to defend others was positively associated with less distress at school. Unexpectedly, the self-reported victim experience was not associated with distress at school. No interactions with sex or country were found. The positive association between the tendency to bully and distress at school, which is in line with previous results,
supports the notion of bullying as a maladaptive behaviour.

We can only speculate why we did not observe the expected association between being victimized and distress at school. It may be that the students did not report their true victimization experiences because they were ashamed and therefore our assessment did underestimate the victim experiences and consequently could not explain well-being. To rule out this problem in future studies, observational data or at least a measure of social desirable responding should be included.

Taken collectively, our data support the notion that the personal BJW acts as a resource protecting well-being in various situations. In all of our students--whether they were bullies, victims, or defenders, whether they were living in India or Portugal--a strong just world belief was associated with less distress. This pattern of results is in line with the reasoning that BJW can trigger different coping patterns in different situations, but that all of these BJW-specific coping reactions have the potential to mediate the adaptive relationship between BJW and well-being: Defenders may be proud of their behaviour; victims may blame themselves; bullies may justify their behaviour. The results seem to be the same across all groups: the stronger their BJW, the better their well-being.

Future studies should examine the coping patterns mediating this relationship in more detail and to seek to elucidate the cognitions that are evoked in students with a strong personal BJW when bullying others, defending the victims of bullying, or experiencing bullying themselves. We assume that the mechanisms through which BJW can act on the well-being can be different for people under different circumstances. When non-victims are concerned, it is more probable that the motivation to act fairly and the trust in justice are important mediator mechanisms between BJW and well-being. People with a strong BJW may be more likely to act fairly and to trust in the justice of others and both – own fairness and the trust in justice – may strengthen their well-being. However, when victims are concerned, it is more likely that the assimilation of injustice is the important mediator mechanism between BJW
and well-being. Victims with a strong BJW may be more likely to assimilate their unjust fate towards their BJW and consequently may feel better. The assimilation function may also be responsible for the adaptive association between BJW and well-being observed for the bullies. The stronger their BJW the more likely the bullies may justify their own behavior for example by blaming the victim. Therefore, the mechanisms through which BJW can act on the well-being of bullies, victims and defenders could be different for each of them, but all mediator mechanism would result in a positive association between BJW and well-being.

The strength of our studies is that they were conducted in two culturally different countries: in Portugal and in India. In both countries we revealed the same pattern of results, namely that the school students experienced less distress the more they endorsed the belief in a personal just world, in which one is usually treated justly, thus supporting the general validity of the association between personal BJW and well-being. This is in line with other observations that just world theory is equally valid in very diverse cultures, within Europe (Dalbert & Sallay, 2004), but also around the globe (Furnham, 1993). Furthermore, we also did not find effects of sex. Although gender is an important factor in bullying behaviour it seems not be the case for the relation between BJW, behaviour in bullying and well-being.

Nevertheless, some shortcomings should be noted. Our data are cross-sectional, meaning that no causal conclusions can be drawn. We cannot rule out the possibility that positive mood or more specific less distress is associated with seeing life as more just (e.g., Isen, 1970) instead of BJW functioning as a resource to sustain subjective well-being. Also, it is possible that the relation between being a defender and distress is inversed: it is not defending others that lessens school distress but instead the less distressed students are those who offer more help to victims. Longitudinal studies would allow the causal direction to be better defined. Furthermore, all of our variables were assessed by self-report measures, leading to an overestimation of common variance and to possible distortion due to social desirability. Studies including observational data on social behaviour are needed to rule out
this alternative explanation. Moreover, the alphas of the English scales applied in India were lower than the alphas for the Portuguese version of the scales and lower than observed with the English scales in other studies (e.g., Rigby & Slee, 1993). However, given the shortness of the scales, the observed alphas can be seen as sufficient reliable and the correlations between study variables (see Table 1) were as expected and thus underline the validity of the scales. Finally, the observed associations could be caused by third variables that are associated with both the belief in a just world and distress. However, we expect the correlation between the BJW and school distress to persist because this is what was usually found in previous research (e.g., Correia & Dalbert, 2007, controlling for self-esteem, self-efficacy and general trust).

In sum, our results support the notion that personal BJW is a valuable resource for school students as it seems to maintain their subjective well-being. Future studies aimed at understanding the dynamic of cognitions appraising and justifying one’s own behaviour in the context of bullying at school should take the need to believe in a personally just world in which one gets what one deserves into account.
References


Table 1

Correlations between study variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>BJW</th>
<th>Bully</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Defender</th>
<th>Distress</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>14.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.26***</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>BJW</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.23***</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.22***</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>-.29***</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>1.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defender</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>-.23***</td>
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<td>0.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distress</td>
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<td>-.25***</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>0.53</td>
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<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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</table>

*Note.* In all scales higher values indicate stronger endorsement of the construct. For sex, 0 = female, 1 = male; BJW = belief in a just world.

Correlations above the diagonal refer to the Portuguese sample. Correlations below the diagonal refer to the Indian sample. Italicized coefficients mean that correlations significantly differ across samples.

* *p < .05; ** *p < .01; *** *p < .001.*
Table 2

Regression of school distress on country, sex, belief in a just world, behaviour in bullying and their interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3a</th>
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<th>Model 3b</th>
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<td>SEb</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SEb</td>
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<td>SEb</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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**R²** change | .20 | .01 | .01 | .01

**F** change | 19.56*** | 0.55 | 0.93 | 0.57

**df** | 6,459 | 11,454 | 16,449 | 16,449

Note. In all scales higher values indicate stronger endorsement of the construct. For sex, 0 = female, 1 = male; BJW = belief in a just world; for country, 0 = Portugal, 1 = India.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. 