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Can Beliefs in Justice Predict Corrupt Behavior?

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Abstract

The belief in a just world has been found to be related to rule breaking behavior. However, research has yet to determine whether the same relation holds for corrupt behavior. The current study focused on identifying whether the belief in a just world is a factor that predicts bribery behavior. We hypothesized that people with a weaker belief in a just world would be more likely to report that they had given a bribe compared with people with a strong belief in a just world. A retrospective design was used to conduct a study in Lithuania. Belief in a just world was measured with two scales for assessing personal and general beliefs in a just world. We measured bribery behavior by asking participants (N = 316) to report how many times they had given a bribe during the past 5 years. The results showed that a personal belief in a just world predicted bribery behavior, whereas a general belief in a just world did not. We discuss implications for further studies.

Keywords: belief in a just world, corruption, bribery, Lithuania, Baltic States, Post-soviet countries

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Corruption is a great threat to many societies and economies. It affects the growth of economy (Mauro, 1995), touches upon moral and business issues. The phenomenon exists in public and private sectors, and it prevails at micro as well as macro levels (Langseth, 2006). Corruption occurs in all countries with no exceptions. According to the 2016 Transparency International survey, even well-developed countries are affected by it (Transparency International, 2016). Therefore, studies on corruption are of critical importance.

Corruption is a phenomenon that is difficult to define (Wedel, 2012). There is no single and universal definition (Langseth, 2006); different fields of study define it in their own ways (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2003), and the perception of corruption may differ across different cultures. For example, a bribe in India is viewed as corruption only if it exceeds the market level of bribes, whereas in the US, any kind of bribe is viewed as corruption (Wade, 1982).

Nevertheless, it is possible to define acts that are considered corrupt. In the literature, a distinction is made between grand and petty corruption. Grand corruption involves acts that include the national government and huge amounts of money, whereas petty corruption involves small amounts that are used for minor benefits (Langseth, 2006). In addition, active (giving a bribe) and passive (receiving a bribe) corruption can also be distinguished (Langseth, 2006). This study focuses on active petty corruption, that is, bribe giving behavior and its correlates.

Corruption in Lithuania

According to Transparency International Lithuania's corruption perception index is 59 (on a scale from 0 [highly corrupt] to 100 [very clean]). The country does not stand out in the Baltic region. Latvia, the neighbor country, reaches the level of corruption index 58, and Estonia 71. The Corruption Barometer shows that corruption is quite a serious and important problem in Lithuania. Transparency International's survey has shown that 68% of Lithuanian citizens believe that corruption is a very serious problem. It is rated as the 5th largest problem in Lithuania, after low salaries, high prices, emigration and alcoholism. Its relevance might be increased because of the ongoing political corruption scandals in Lithuania (Transparency International, 2016).

In the survey conducted by Transparency International 33% of the participants indicated that during the past 5 years they had given a bribe and almost half of those indicating that they had not given a bribe did not experience a situation where they could have given a bribe. The two most common reasons for giving bribes were bribing as a measure to fix problems (34%) and bribing out of conformity— because everybody gives bribes (21%) (Transparency International, 2016). These results demonstrate the prevalence of a corruption culture in Lithuania.

The culture of corruption in Lithuania seems related to the occupation of the Baltic States by the Soviet Union during the period from 1944 to 1990. The economic conditions during this period were bad. Society suffered from a huge deficit of various goods such as food, clothes, household materials etc. How many resources a family had at its disposal depended on the government and people in power. Under these conditions it was important to maintain good relations with people in power to gain better goods. This was ensured by having family members in positions of power and by providing people in powerful positions with gifts (Sampson, 1987; Šliavaitė, 2017). Even 30 years after the collapse of communism these traditions have survived. For example, people still give envelopes with money to the doctors (Praspaliauskiene, 2016), parents still give presents to teachers on various occasions (Christmas or teacher's birthday) in order to ensure good relationships with them so that their children get good grades and admission to good schools (Šliavaitė, 2017). Praspaliauskiene (2016) and Šliavaitė (2017) point out that young generations who grew up in free Lithuania fight against these traditions but eventually end up following them (for a more extensive review on the shadow economy in Soviet Union see Feldbrugge, 1984 and Sampson, 1987). Corruptive traditions are still embedded in everyday lives of Lithuanians. Thus, scientists should focus on studying psychological correlates of such behavior.

Even though the prevalence of corruption is quite high, psychological research on individual differences in corrupt behavior in Lithuania is surprisingly scarce. Diržytė and Patapas (2015) were among the first to attempt to analyze relationships between life satisfaction and encounters with corruption. The authors attempted to collect a representative sample and found that people who encountered corruption in various institutions reported higher levels of satisfaction in different aspects of their lives compared with people who did not encounter corruption at all. The authors encouraged researchers to continue studying the psychological determinants of corrupt behavior and to examine how seeing or experiencing corruption in a country can affect the well-being of its citizens.

Correlates of Corruption

Researchers from different domains such as sociology, criminology, economy, legal science, and psychology have tried to explain the phenomenon of corruption on different levels. Studies on micro-level correlates of corruption have found that various characteristics are related to corrupt behavior. For example, research in Jakarta found that people who were more likely to act in a corrupt manner were individualistic as opposed to collectivist (Abraham & Pane, 2014). Studies in Canada and West Africa showed that they also tended to be younger, less religious, and paid less (Armantier & Boly, 2008). Studies in the US showed that individuals who tended to be corrupt also had weaker moral identities (DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis, & Ceranic, 2012) and belonged to the upper class (Piff, Stancato, Cote, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012). Furthermore, researchers have emphasized the importance of cultural correlates. Culture was found to affect people's behavior and informal norms as well as policies on corruption, legal regulation, and punishment for corrupt behavior (Benuri & Eckel, 2012). Cross-cultural studies found that wealthier countries that have larger governments (a measure of a government's general final consumption expenditure as a percent of the country's GDP) and that value individual autonomy and social diversity tend to be less corrupt (O'Connor & Fischer, 2012). In addition, gender equality and women in politics were also found to be important aspects that are related to corruption in the country. In the developing countries where women are restrained from participating in political life, corruption levels tend to be high (Branisa & Ziegler, 2010). Other studies also showed gender differences in corrupt behavior. For example, a study conducted by Agerberg (2014) showed that women tend to be less tolerant of corruption and report giving fewer bribes. Additionally, studies conducted in European countries showed that males, more often than females, tend to act in a corrupt manner (Agerberg, 2014; Branisa & Ziegler, 2010; Dollar, Fisman, & Gatti, 2001). However, conclusions about the gender as a correlate of corruption should be drawn carefully because there might be third variables that are confounded with gender and are causally responsible for the relationship.

Belief in a Just World

Belief in a just world (BJW) has recently been proposed as another determinant of corrupt behavior (Bai, Liu, & Kou, 2014). The concept of BJW was proposed by Lerner in 1980 and refers to a person's belief that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Lerner, 1980). Since then, BJW has been studied in various fields, and some striking results have been found. To outline just a few, BJW was found to play a role in unjust situations by helping people reconcile conflicting information between their beliefs and their experiences with or observations of injustice, thus helping people to adapt and maintain their mental health (Dalbert, 1999, 2009; Otto, Boos, Dalbert, Schöps, & Hoyer, 2006; Swickert, DeRoma, & Saylor, 2004). It was also found to motivate people to set goals for the future and maintain them (Hafer, Bègue, Choma, & Dempsey, 2005; Hafer & Rubel, 2015). Finally, BJW was found to be negatively related to socially deviant behavior (Sutton & Winnard, 2007).

Some authors have distinguished between two spheres of BJW: personal and general. A general belief in a just world (GBJW) reflects the belief that people generally get what they deserve, whereas a personal belief in a just world (PBJW) reflects the belief that events in one's own life are fair. These two constructs have different functions: GBJW was found to be important for dealing with observed injustice and was found to help people incorporate observed injustice into their general views about the world and to maintain a balance between what people observe and what they believe (Sutton & Winnard, 2007). On the other hand, PBJW was found to help people deal with injustices that are experienced on a personal level, and to help people cope with injustice and maintain mental health (Dalbert, 1999; Sutton & Winnard, 2007). In short, both GBJW and PBJW are crucial for dealing with injustice; however, the former deals with observed and the latter with personally experienced injustice.

Overall, BJW studies have suggested that people with a strong BJW should want to act fairly in order to receive positive deserved outcomes, and they should want to avoid engaging in unjust behavior in order to avoid a punishment—a negative outcome. People with a weak BJW, on the contrary, should not be concerned about the repercussions of their behavior because they should not believe they will receive any; such beliefs can lead people to be less fair to others or to inflict illegal or harmful behavior on others.

This latter reasoning has been demonstrated in studies that have identified a relationship between PBJW and rule-breaking behavior (Correia & Dalbert, 2008; Donat, Dalbert, & Kamble, 2014; Otto & Dalbert, 2005; Sutton & Winnard, 2007). For example, Otto and Dalbert (2005) identified this relationship in a sample of young prisoners. During incarceration, delinquent youngsters with a strong PBJW had fewer disciplinary problems compared with those holding a weak PBJW. The authors stated that the young adults who endorsed a strong PBJW tended to judge legal procedures as more just, which led them to believe that the state was willing to be fair, thus motivating them to obey the law. Therefore, PBJW may be related to further criminal behavior (Otto & Dalbert, 2005).

GBJW has also been found to affect rule-breaking behavior (Cohn & Modecki, 2007), however, in the opposite direction (Sutton & Winnard, 2007). Sutton and Winnard (2007) analyzed antisocial intentions of young people in a community sample. Major life goals and confidence in realizing them were measured as well. The authors found that a strong GBJW was related to higher intentions to act criminally, whereas a strong PBJW was related to lower intentions to behave criminally. The authors relate these results to positive correlations between GBJW and victim blame and derogation. They argue that for people who intend to commit illegal acts, a strong GBJW may allow them to blame and derogate victims, which, in turn, might attenuate the feelings of guilt, shame and regret. Thus participants could have minimized their feelings of guilt by derogating and blaming the victims of their misconduct and this may have resulted in greater intentions to break rules in the future (Sutton & Winnard, 2007).

The relationship between PBJW and deviant behavior has been replicated in different domains, such as prison (Otto & Dalbert, 2005) or school (Donat et al., 2014; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007) and across cultures. It has been tested in Portugal (Correia & Dalbert, 2008), Slovakia (Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007), Germany, and India (Donat et al., 2014). Donat, Dalbert, and Kamble (2014) tested the relationship between PBJW and students' cheating and delinquent behavior in school. This relationship was mediated by students' perceptions of teachers' justice (Donat et al., 2014), which suggests that PBJW has a negative relationship with unjust behavior through the perceived justice of authorities. The results proved to be the same even when gender, country, and neuroticism were controlled for (Donat et al., 2014). This study provides support for Otto and Dalbert's (2005) previous reasoning that strong PBJW leads people to evaluate authorities and the procedures they apply as more just, and this, in turn, leads to obedience.

Overall, research on BJW and deviant behavior is quite vast. However, conclusions about the relationship between BJW and corrupt behavior should be drawn with caution because corrupt behavior is distinct from the deviant behavior that was examined in previous studies. Most of these studies that examined the relationship between BJW and deviant behavior studied delinquent adolescents or the unjust behavior of young individuals. For example, Otto and Dalbert's (2005) sample consisted of young male prisoners from a German detention center, and the study by Correia and Dalbert (2008) was conducted in a school setting. Delinquent behavior differs from corrupt behavior because delinquent behavior primarily includes adolescents' criminal behavior as well as other kinds of rule violations (Shoemaker, 2018). Typically, criminal behavior involves a victim who is directly affected by the behavior, whereas corrupt behavior does not. In a situation involving corrupt behavior, both parties benefit from

the arrangement, and in some cases it might be perceived as a gift rather than something illegal (Šliavaite, 2017), therefore, there is no indication that a specific person is suffering from the unjust behavior. Thus, the relationship between corrupt behavior and BJW might be different from the relationship that delinquent behavior has with BJW.

One of the first studies relating the BJW to corrupt behavior was conducted by Bai, Liu, and Kou (2014). These authors ran three studies. In one study the authors manipulated the GBJW, the other two studies employed scenarios. It was found that GBJW, but not PBJW, was negatively correlated with perceived others' intentions of corruption. The perceived likelihood of punishment mediated this relationship. Similar results were found in different corruption scenarios (bribery and nepotism). When manipulating GBJW, perceived intention of corruption varied between the experimental and the control groups. The group that was primed with an unjust situation expressed significantly higher perceived intentions of corruption as compared to a control group and the group that was primed with a just situation. According to the authors, if Person A's stronger GBJW is related to his or her perception that Person B will not act corruptly, Person A might not be willing to act this way either (Bai et al., 2014).

The authors later tested this hypothesis in an additional study in which they focused on personal intentions, rather than perceived others' intentions as in their previous study (Bai et al., 2014), to act corruptly (Bai, Liu, & Kou, 2016). They proposed that corrupt behavior (i.e., both the giving and receiving of a bribe) would be related to the strength of PBJW and that this relationship would be mediated by perceived punishment. Two surveys concerning bribery from the positions of a bribe giver and a bribe receiver demonstrated that PBJW was negatively related to corrupt behavior and that this relationship was mediated by perceived punishment for the bribery behavior. To test for a causal relationship, the authors conducted an experiment that demonstrated that a weak PBJW indirectly caused bribery behavior through the mediating variable of perceived punishment (Bai et al., 2016). However, the results should be interpreted with caution. The experiment aimed to manipulate beliefs in justice by asking participants to recall a personal event in which they were treated fairly versus unfairly. Participants who recalled an unfair event expressed a stronger intention to give or take a bribe (Bai et al., 2016). However, it is still unclear whether these results reflected the effect of BJW on bribery behavior or the effect of the recalled event and the emotions and cognitions it triggered. Recalling an unfair personal event might have strengthened the feeling that one is entitled to or deserves a benefit (to get what one deserves). According to the literature (e.g., Otto et al., 2006), BJW is a relatively stable construct. It is unlikely to change when an unjust event is recalled. Thus, we assume that the recalled event made the existing BJW salient but did not have any influence on the strength of BJW. Nevertheless, these results demonstrate the importance of maintaining and nourishing social justice in organizations and society (Bai et al., 2016).

In conclusion, previous research has found that BJW is negatively related to deviant and rule-breaking behavior. This was demonstrated in a number of studies conducted in different domains (prison and nonprison samples), age groups (adolescents and young adults in particular), and cultures. However, most of these studies concentrated on young participants, ranging from teenagers to young adults attending a university. The relationship between BJW and corrupt behavior was tested only in China, which raises the importance of conducting studies in Western cultures and Europe. In addition, the methods that were used to identify the relationship between BJW and corrupt behavior (Bai et al., 2016) were scenario-based ones, that is, participants were asked to read a scenario and give a response to a given situation. Therefore, to fill these gaps, we conducted a retrospective study of actual corrupt behavior, including a wider age group of participants from the European country of Lithuania.

Aim of the Study

In the present study, we further addressed the question of whether individuals with a strong BJW tend to act more fairly and less corruptly. Taking into account previous studies on the relationship between BJW and deviant, corrupt behavior (Bai et al., 2016; Otto & Dalbert, 2005; Sutton & Winnard, 2007), we hypothesized that people with a weaker PBJW would be more likely to give petty bribes as opposed to people with a strong PBJW. We did not focus on bribe receiving because in general people who receive bribes are government officials. The consequences for a government official for taking a bribe are more serious – in addition to a fine they might lose their job. Therefore, these participants would be less motivated to participate in a study or more inclined to lie about their experience.

A previous study found differences between PBJW and GBJW in relation to deviant behavior (Sutton & Winnard, 2007). However, concerning evaluations of others' intentions to act corruptly in Bai et al.'s (2014) study, GBJW showed a negative relationship. Additionally, as mentioned before, corrupt behavior differs from other kinds of criminal behavior because it does not involve a direct victim, and sometimes it can be perceived as a gift rather than a bribe (Šliavaitė, 2017). Thus, there might be two competing hypotheses. First, if Sutton and Winnard's (2007) study results could be generalized to all rule-breaking behavior, we would expect to observe a positive correlation between GBJW and bribery. And second, if corrupt behavior, in fact, is not perceived as inflicting harm to some victim, which inhibits the experience of injustice, we would expect to find no relationship between these two constructs.

Method

Participants

The study was conducted from April to June and from September to October 2016. A convenience sample was obtained with the help of Vilnius university psychology students. Distribution of the questionnaire was one of activities to receive an additional credit point. In order to increase representativeness of the sample we collected data from different groups of age. Participation in the study was voluntary, and we provided no material compensation for the participation. Overall, the questionnaire was administered to 330 participants, but 14 questionnaires were filled out only partially and were therefore eliminated from the study, leaving a total of 316 participants with usable data (47.5% men; 52.5% women). Age ranged from 18 to 77 years ($M = 40.59$, $SD = 14.81$). In order to compare bribery behavior between different generations we divided participants into three groups according to age: young adults (18 to 29 years, $n = 100$), adults (30 to 49 years, $n = 116$), and older adults (50 years or more, $n = 100$). This division was used for descriptive purposes. In all correlational and regression analyses age was treated as a continuous variable.

The demographic characteristics of the sample were as follows: 54% had a higher educational degree from a university, 11.1% had a high school leaving certificate, 11.7% were students at the university, 13% had some kind of special professional education, 7% had graduated from college, and 2.8% had finished what is considered "basic school" (10 grades) in Lithuania. A total of 49.7% of the sample lived in a big city, 34.8% in a city, and 7.9% and 7.6% in a little town or village, respectively.

We also asked about participants' income, but instead of asking for an amount, we asked whether their monthly earnings allowed them to save money. Answers were given as either yes or no: 72.8% answered yes, 36.3% answered no, and 0.9% did not answer this question.

The largest part of the sample worked in either governmental institutions (32.3%) or the business sector (36.1%).

Measures

The study was conducted as part of the research project "The Social Context of Corruption" (2016 – 2017) funded by the Research Council of Lithuania. The methods presented here were part of a larger survey (for more information about scales used in a survey see [Supplementary materials](#)).

To measure BJW, we used the General Belief in a Just World Scale (Dalbert, Montada, & Schmitt, 1987) and the Personal Belief in a Just World Scale (Dalbert, 1999). Internal consistencies in our study were $\alpha = .82$ and $\alpha = .88$, respectively. The General Belief in a Just World Scale is measured with six items (e.g., "I think basically the world is a just place"). The Personal Belief in a Just World Scale includes seven items (e.g., "I believe that, by and large, I deserve what happens to me"). Participants evaluated every item on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*). Both scales were translated from English to Lithuanian and back translated from Lithuanian to English by K. Stupnianek and V. Navickas. Factor analysis has revealed a presence of two components with items about the general belief in a just world loaded strongly on one component and items about the personal belief in a just world – on the other (for more information see [Supplementary Materials](#)).

To assess the experience with bribery we asked participants 3 dichotomous questions: "During the past 5 years, has someone expected a bribe from you?"; "During the past 5 years, has someone demanded a bribe from you?"; "During the past 5 years, have you ever given a bribe?", followed by a question asking participants to specify the number of times each had happened. However, for the purpose of our study we used only one of these questions: "During the past 5 years, have you ever given a bribe?", as it refers to the actual behavior of the participant.

Results

Data analysis was performed with IBM SPSS 25.

Descriptive Statistics

One hundred forty-six participants (46.2%) indicated that they had given a bribe at least once during the past 5 years (53.8% answered no). We asked participants to specify how many times they had given a bribe. The mean of reported number of bribes was 1.22 ($SD = 2.49$); 7.91% (25 participants) did not answer this question. We grouped the participants according to the number of times they had given a bribe. The percentage of participants in every group is provided in [Table 1](#). Overall, participants who indicated that they had given a bribe reported that they had done this one to three times in 5 years; 9.2% of the participants reported more than four bribes.

Table 1

Frequency of Bribe Giving

| Frequency of bribe giving | Percentage of participants who gave a bribe |
|---------------------------|---|
| None | 53.8 |
| 1 time | 15.8 |
| 2 to 3 times | 13.3 |
| 4 or more times | 9.2 |
| No answer | 7.9 |

We calculated whether giving bribes differed by gender or age. Although we found no significant difference between male and female participants, we found differences between age groups, $\chi^2(2) = 13.915$, $p = .001$, $n = 316$. Specifically, a larger proportion of older participants (58% for the group with over 50 years old and 48.3% for the group with 30 – 49 years of old) compared with younger ones (32%) indicated that they had given a bribe in the past 5 years at least once.

Bivariate Statistics

We calculated correlations between all variables (Table 2) in our model and demographic characteristics. Two variables, PBJW and age, were correlated with bribe giving. Thus we excluded other demographic variables from our analysis.

Table 2

Correlations Between Variables

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|------|------|---|
| Bribe | – | | | | | |
| GBJW | -.092 | – | | | | |
| PBJW | -.245*** | .555*** | – | | | |
| Age | .207*** | .083 | -.102 | – | | |
| Gender | -.034 | .032 | -.030 | .021 | – | |
| Income | .052 | -.186*** | -.275*** | .030 | .065 | – |

Note. GBJW = General belief in a just world; PBJW = Personal belief in a just world.

*** $p \leq .001$.

Logistic Regression

A logistic regression was computed to determine whether age, PBJW, and GBJW predicted the likelihood that participants had given a bribe. The logistic regression model with the variables age, PBJW, and GBJW was statistically significant (Table 3), $\chi^2(3) = 37.506$, $p < .001$; Hosmer and Lemeshow $\chi^2(8) = 9.414$, $p = .309$, which shows that the model fits the data. Nagelkerke $R^2 = .156$. Table 4 shows that the model correctly classified 64.6% of the cases.

Table 3

Logistic Analysis Results Predicting Bribe-Giving Behavior (n = 310)

| Predictor | B | SE | Wald χ^2 | df | p | e ^{β} |
|-----------|--------|-------|---------------|----|------|---------------------------------|
| Constant | 0.634 | 0.683 | 0.863 | 1 | .353 | 1.886 |
| Age | 0.032 | 0.009 | 14.417 | 1 | .000 | 1.033 |
| PBJW | -0.610 | 0.166 | 13.484 | 1 | .000 | 0.543 |
| GBJW | 0.078 | 0.161 | 0.237 | 1 | .627 | 1.082 |

Note. GBJW = General belief in a just world; PBJW = Personal belief in a just world.

Table 4

The Observed and Predicted Frequencies of Bribery Behavior

| Observed | Predicted | | % correct |
|-------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| | No bribe | Gave a bribe | |
| No bribe | 123 | 42 | 74.5 |
| Gave a bribe | 65 | 72 | 52.6 |
| Overall % correct | | | 64.6 |

An increase in age was associated with an increase in the likelihood of giving a bribe, but a stronger PBJW was associated with a reduction in the likelihood of giving a bribe. Odds ratios for age were 1.03 (95% CI [1.02, 1.05]) and 0.54 (95% CI [0.39, 0.75]) for PBJW.

Discussion

With this study, we aimed to analyze whether BJW would predict bribery behavior, specifically, giving a bribe. Unlike previous studies, our study was conducted in a nonlaboratory setting, where participants were asked to report their actual bribery behavior. As expected, and in line with previous studies (Bai et al., 2016), PBJW predicted bribery behavior. Thus, our findings might suggest that people who believe that they get what they deserve are less inclined to act unjustly because they fear punishment. By contrast, if people believe that they do not get what they deserve, then they will be more likely to act unjustly because they do not fear punishment.

Our results regarding GBJW were different from previous studies. Given the fact that personal and general BJW have been described as having different functions (Dalbert, 1999; Sutton & Winnard, 2007), our results should have uncovered trends that are similar to those documented in Sutton and Winnard's (2007) study. However, in our study, a stronger GBJW was not related to reported bribery behavior, different from its relation to criminal behavior in Sutton and Winnard's (2007) study (i.e., the stronger GBJW, the more likely the participants were to express the intention to behave in a criminal manner in the future). Sutton and Winnard (2007) argued that people with a strong GBJW tend to justify their unjust behavior and blame the victim (direct and indirect) for her or his misfortune and that this may thus lead to continued unjust behavior through reduced feelings of guilt, shame and regret. If this reasoning is correct, we should have found similar results for corrupt behavior. One way to account for this difference is through the characteristics of bribery. In a corrupt arrangement, an individual who gives a

bribe does not observe a direct victim of this behavior; instead, he or she observes that the other individual benefits from this arrangement. Thus an individual might not perceive his or her behavior as unjust or harmful and would not need to look for justifications of his or her behavior. The argument could be made that in a bribery situation, different from other types of misconduct, GBJW is not salient. Furthermore, although corrupt behavior is illegal, in some situations it might be perceived as a gift and not at all as a harm (Praspaliauskiene, 2016; Šliavaitė, 2017).

Praspaliauskiene's (2016) research about the phenomena of envelopes given to doctors has shown that even when people express negative opinions towards such practices, in situations where their life is at stake, they do give envelopes filled with money to the doctor (Praspaliauskiene, 2016). In our study we did not ask our participants in what situations they had given the bribe. We do not know whether they gave it to the police man in order to evade a fine or to a doctor in order to get priority treatment. Future studies could investigate whether the context of bribery affects the relationship between bribery and BJW.

Another possible explanation for our results might be obtained through the lens of Bai and colleagues' (2014) results, which showed a negative relationship between perceived intentions of corruption in others and GBJW, but not PBJW. This finding might suggest that when perceiving others' behavior, GBJW becomes more salient than PBJW. In a later study, conducted by the same authors (Bai et al., 2016), a relationship between personal intentions to act corruptly and PBJW was found. This finding is in line with our findings. In this later study Bai and colleagues (2016) did not test, however, whether GBJW was related to personal intentions to act corruptly. Taken together, the findings of Bai et al. (2014), Bai et al. (2016) and our findings suggest that GBJW is more relevant for dealing with the bribery behavior of others, whereas PBJW is more relevant for dealing with own bribery behavior.

Another interesting result was the relationship with age. Age was a significant predictor of bribery behavior. This finding contradicts previous studies that have shown that younger age is related to giving bribes (e.g., Armantier & Boly, 2008). Age differences might be explained by cultural determinants specific to Lithuania or other post-Soviet countries. People from older generations were raised or lived parts of their lives while Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union. During this period, corruption was socially acceptable. Gifts to government officials, police officers, judges, and doctors for favorable treatment and outcomes were considered normal practice. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is still manifest in this society even though Lithuania has been independent for almost 30 years now. However, this corrupt tradition is gradually changing, and the younger generations that were born after Lithuania regained its independence are less affected by these traditions (Praspaliauskiene, 2016; Šliavaitė, 2017). Another possible explanation might be that older people may have had to face more situations where they felt they had to give a bribe than younger people. Even though the question we asked about bribery asked participants to report their behavior during the last 5 years, older participants may have considered their experiences over a longer period of time. Furthermore, 5 years ago, the young adults in the study may have been underage and possibly had not encountered corrupt situations at all.

Limitations and Implications for Future Studies

This study provides insight into the issue of corruption and extends the understanding of the mechanisms that underlie bribery behavior. Nevertheless, these results should be interpreted with caution. As in many psychological studies, the convenient recruitment of the sample may have led to biased results that reflect the tendencies in the specific group that was studied. It should also be noted that our sample was highly educated. More than half of the participants had graduated from a university. Therefore, we should be cautious in generalizing our results to other populations.

In addition, the retrospective study design may have led to inaccurate reports about bribery. Because of memory limits, participants may have reported bribes they had given throughout their lives or at least for a longer period of time than they were asked about. This issue could be addressed by conducting an experiment in which participants would be administered questions about BJW and would subsequently be put in a situation in which they would have to decide whether to give a bribe or not.

Problems involved in asking participants to report an illegal behavior might have affected their reports of this corrupt behavior. First, participants might have been afraid of the possible consequences of engaging in bribery and were therefore reluctant to indicate that they had given a bribe. However, participants were ensured that the information they gave would be kept confidential. Second, social desirability might have also been a concern in this study. Corrupt behavior is socially unacceptable and there is also a correlation between social desirability and BJW (Dalbert et al., 1987). That is, people with a stronger BJW tend to give more socially desirable answers. However, underreporting of bribery behavior did not seem to be a problem in our study. Almost half of our sample (46.2%) reported that they gave a bribe. The results of the Transparency International Barometer documented 33%. It seems that the participants of our study were more open about their behavior. This might have happened because of two reasons. First of all, at the beginning of the study we ensured participants that their answers are kept confidential and we asked to answer honestly. Secondly, most of our participants filled out questionnaires outside of their work environment, where they might have felt reluctant to report such information about themselves. This is not the case in Transparency International's surveys, where participants are being surveyed in their work environment.

Other similar studies have found variables that mediated the relationship between BJW and unjust behavior, for example the justice of the teacher (Donat et al., 2014) and perceived punishment (Bai et al., 2016). In future studies, researchers might want to examine perceived justice of authorities or perceived punishment as mediators or moderators of the relationship between BJW and corrupt behavior.

Donat, Dalbert, and Kamble (2014) additionally examined whether neuroticism is related to rule-breaking behavior. Future studies could explore whether other variables affect corrupt behavior. Other variables, such as corruption level in the country, justice sensitivity, personal experience with corruption, psychological well-being, or life satisfaction could moderate or mediate the relationship between BJW and involvement in corruption.

Conclusion

The results of our study in Lithuania indicate that justice beliefs, particularly PBJW, can help understand bribery behavior. The belief that the world is personally just and that things that happen are deserved can decrease the likelihood that a person will give a bribe. Thus, psychological studies of corrupt behavior should put more emphasis on justice beliefs. Our data might provide some implications for practitioners. Perhaps justice beliefs, together with other variables related to corrupt behavior, might be considered during the recruitment of employees. Sustaining justice feelings by increasing justice in business organizations, governmental institutions, police, court etc. might work as a prevention of rule breaking behavior.

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Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Data Availability

For this study a dataset is freely available (see the [Supplementary Materials](#) section).

Supplementary Materials

The following Supplementary Materials are available via the PsychArchives repository (for access see Index of [Supplementary Materials](#) below):

1. Additional information on the scales

- a. Project information
- b. List of measured variables and scales used, with Cronbach alpha values
- c. Results of factor analysis conducted for Belief in a just world scale
- d. Logistic regression model for the prediction of bribery with age, personal and general belief in a just world, gender and income as predictors

2. Data set

Index of Supplementary Materials

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