

# *The Influence of College Students Belief in a Just World on Litigation Willingness: Mediation Model*

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**Abstract:** In order to explore the mediating role of sense of security in the relationship between college students' belief in a just world and their willingness to sue, we conducted a questionnaire survey among 878 college students. The results show that college students' belief in a just world can positively predict their litigation will. In addition, the order mediation effect (belief in a just world will enhance the sense of security, and security has a positive predictive effect on litigation will) is also supported. Therefore, college students' belief in a just world can not only positively affect their litigation will, but also indirectly affect them through their sense of security.

## 1. Introduction

Litigation willingness refers to the degree of individual's willingness to choose litigation channels for relief when their legitimate rights and interests are infringed (Zhu Xianrui, 2013)<sup>[14]</sup>. The strength of litigation will largely reflects the individual's awareness of safeguarding rights and the rule of law and the current situation of the country's rule of law construction, while the strength of college students' litigation will can better reflect the development of the country's rule of law and the degree of social civilization (Zhu Yiwen, 2014)<sup>[15]</sup>. At present, a large number of college students either fail to protect their legitimate rights and interests or take some drastic actions to fight against infringement (Yang Guoan, 2010)<sup>[13]</sup>. The reason for this situation is that apart from the fact that college students' awareness of group rights protection and rule of law is still relatively weak, an important factor that cannot be ignored is the influence of college students' own psychological state. For example, because college students with low emotional intelligence can't control and regulate their emotions well (Meng Lin et al., 2023)<sup>[8]</sup>, they will have a higher willingness to defend their rights in a non-institutionalized way when they are confronted with illegal infringement, and they will easily make some excessive behaviors. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the psychological factors that affect college students' litigation will and its influencing mechanism, so as to effectively enhance their awareness of rights protection and rule of law and promote their psychological healthy development.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Proposition

### 2.1. Belief in a just world and willingness to sue

After summarizing and sorting out the relevant literature at home and abroad, it is found that the belief in a just world may be one of the important psychological factors affecting litigation will. Zhang Mengrou (2017)<sup>[16]</sup> believes that individuals with a high level of belief in a just world are more willing to use the law to safeguard their legitimate rights and interests because they firmly believe that they can be treated fairly. Zina Trost et al. (2016)<sup>[12]</sup> found from the perspective of anger response that the perceived injustice of individuals can predict their litigation intention. Belief in a just world means that individuals believe that they live in a just world, in which people get what they deserve and what they get is what they deserve (Lerner et al., 1978)<sup>[6]</sup>. As an important value and concept, the belief in a just world emphasizes the importance of social justice, fairness and equal treatment, which can inspire individuals and society to work together to correct injustice. Therefore, we put forward the following assumptions:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a positive correlation between college students' belief in a just world and their willingness to sue. The higher their belief in a just world, the stronger their willingness to sue.

### 2.2. The intermediary role of security

According to the theory of self-determination, this study believes that the sense of security may be an important intermediary factor in the relationship between college students' belief in a just world and their willingness to sue, that is, the belief in a just world may indirectly affect their willingness to sue through their sense of security. In the 1980s, American positive psychologists Deci Edward L and Ryan Richard M put forward the theory of self-determination, arguing that there are three basic psychological needs (autonomy needs, relationship needs and competence needs) inherent in each individual, and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs plays an important role in people's self-development and positive behaviour<sup>[4]</sup>. In social life, individuals will naturally have needs for the future, security, and protection of their own status, and a sense of security is an emotional experience and a form of feedback when this need is met (Shi Ronghua, 1988)<sup>[11]</sup>. The emergence of a sense of security will have a great impact on individual psychology and behavior. Specifically, when the individual's sense of security is improved, he will have a sense of certainty and control over the risks that will appear or the problems that will be dealt with (An Lijuan & Feng Jiangping, 2015)<sup>[1]</sup>, which will prompt him to take more active actions to solve the problems. College students' worries about social influence, economic factors, threats and retaliation are important reasons that hinder them from choosing litigation channels to remedy their legitimate rights and interests, but in essence, it is still caused by the unsatisfied needs of college students' sense of security. In addition, studies have confirmed that the improvement of the belief in a just world can meet the needs of individual security to a certain extent (Meng Suqing et al., 2019)<sup>[9]</sup>. Individuals with a high level of belief in a just world have a higher sense of security, because they firmly believe that everyone lives and develops in a just and equal world, everyone can enjoy equal rights and opportunities, and their efforts and efforts will eventually be fairly rewarded (Liu Changjiang et al., 2008)<sup>[7]</sup>. This will help individuals to avoid security concerns, enhance their self-confidence and enthusiasm, and then take litigation to remedy the infringed rights and interests in the face of infringement. Therefore, we speculate that college students' sense of security may be an important psychological mechanism between their belief in a just world and their willingness to sue, and put forward the following assumptions:

**Hypothesis 2:** Sense of security plays an intermediary role in college students' belief in a just world and their willingness to sue.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Object of investigation

The subjects of investigation are college students in Wuhan. During March-June, 2023, we distributed questionnaires through online sending and on-site filling. The inclusion criterion is that potential participants must be college students in Wuhan. Respondents were told that their participation was voluntary. We got 878 valid responses from 396 women (45.10%) and 482 men (54.90%). After completing the survey, participants will receive a small gift.

#### 3.2. Measure

##### 3.2.1. Just world belief scale

Because Dalbert(1999)<sup>[2]</sup> pointed out that the version of the scale has good reliability, validity and high predictive ability, we used the Chinese version of the just world belief scale to measure the belief in the just world. The scale includes two dimensions: general belief in a just world and individual belief in a just world. Subjects rated thirteen items on a six-point Likert scale with a score of 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree). The sample items is "To a large extent, I believe that people get what they deserve." The Cronbach's alpha value of this study is 0.948.

##### 3.2.2. Security scale

We use the security scale compiled by Cong Zhonghe and An Lijuan (2004)<sup>[3]</sup> to measure the sense of security, which includes two dimensions: interpersonal security and certain sense of control. Subjects rated sixteen items on a five-point Likert scale with a score of 1 (very consistent) to 5 (very inconsistent). The sample items is "I'm always worried that my life will be a mess." The Cronbach's alpha value of this study is 0.932.

##### 3.2.3. Litigation willingness questionnaire

Because there is no mature scale for litigation willingness at home and abroad, this study designs a questionnaire for litigation willingness based on the five-level scale of willingness on the basis of learning from the practices of relevant scholars at home and abroad. Subjects were asked to answer the following question: "When their legitimate rights and interests are infringed, they will choose to protect their legitimate rights and interests through litigation", and they were rated on a five-point Likert scale with a score of 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The Cronbach's alpha value of this study is 0.952.

##### 3.2.4. Data analysis

We used SPSS23.0 to test the relationship between variables by Harman common method deviation test, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression analysis. Then we use the PROCESS plug-in (model 4) to test the mediating effect of the sense of security between the belief in a just world and the willingness to sue, and analyze the mediating effect by nonparametric Bootstrap method with deviation correction (repeated extraction of 5000 times).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Common method deviation test

The data source of this study is the self-report of college students, which may have the problem of common method deviation. Therefore, Harman single factor test method is used to control the possible common method deviation. The results show that there are six factors with characteristic roots greater than 1, and the variance variance of the first common factor is 36.392%, which is less than the critical value of 40%, that is, there is no significant common method deviation in this study.

### 4.2. Descriptive statistical analysis and correlation analysis

The average, standard deviation, maximum and minimum values of the variables in this study are shown in Table 1, and the correlation is shown in Table 2. We studied the correlation between variables, and found that there was a significant positive correlation between belief in the just world and willingness to sue ( $r=0.446$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), which indicated that there was a certain relationship between belief in the just world and willingness to sue, and individuals with higher belief in the just world were more likely to have higher willingness to sue in the face of unfair treatment or infringement (Hou Yubo & Wang Ting, 2019)<sup>[5]</sup>. The belief in a just world is positively correlated with the sense of security ( $r=0.688$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), and the sense of security is positively correlated with the willingness to sue ( $r=0.426$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), which supports our hypothesis.

Table 1: Mean value, standard deviation, maximum value and minimum value of variables (n = 878).

project	M	SD	maximum	minimum value
Grade	2.370	1.101	4.000	1.000
Political status	1.930	0.784	3.000	1.000
Belief in a just world	4.781	0.873	6.000	1.000
Willingness to sue	3.900	0.846	5.000	1.000
Sense of security	3.886	0.658	5.000	1.250
Mean thinking	5.268	0.699	6.800	1.400

Note: N=878, grade and political outlook are covariables, among which: freshman =1, sophomore =2, junior =3, senior and above = 4; Masses =1, Communist Youth League members =2, party member of the Communist Party of China =3, the same below.

Table 2: Correlation matrix of each variable (n = 878)

project	grade	Political status	Belief in a just world	Willingness to sue	Sense of security	Mean thinking
grade	1					
Political status	0.302***	1				
Belief in a just world	-0.231***	0.466***	1			
Willingness to sue	-0.104**	0.209***	0.446***	1		
Sense of security	-0.227***	0.425***	0.688***	0.426***	1	
Mean thinking	0.115**	0.085*	0.504***	0.355***	0.352***	1

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; The same below.

## 5. Hypothesis test

We tested the proposed model. Results As shown in Table 3 and Table 4, the belief in a just world is positively correlated with litigation intention ( $\beta=0.426$ ,  $t=11.771$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), so hypothesis 1 is supported. As shown in Table 3, the belief in the just world has a positive impact on the sense of security ( $\beta= 0.589$ ,  $t=20.509$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), and the sense of security has a positive impact on the willingness to sue ( $\beta= 0.226$ ,  $t=5.394$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), which shows that the sense of security plays an intermediary role between the belief in the just world and the willingness to sue.

Table 3: The test of intermediary model of security

regression equation		Fitting index			Coefficient significance	
Outcome variable	Predictor variable	R	R2	F	$\beta$	t
Willingness to sue		0.449	0.202	55.123		
	Grade				0.005	0.143
	Political status				-0.019	-0.509
	Belief in a just world				0.426	11.771***
Sense of security		0.705	0.497	215.421		
	Grade				-0.037	-1.469*
	Political status				0.087	2.955*
	Belief in a just world				0.589	20.509***
Willingness to sue		0.477	0.227	51.337		
	Grade				0.013	0.413
	Political status				-0.039	-1.051
	Belief in a just world				0.293	6.748***
	Sense of security				0.226	5.394***

Note: All variables in the model are substituted into the regression equation by standardized variables, the same below.

Table 4: Decomposition table of total effect, direct effect and intermediary effect

	Effect value	Boot Standard error	Boot CI lower limit	Boot CI upper limit	Relative effect value
Sense of security Mediating effect of	0.13	0.04	0.06	0.22	31.71%
Direct effect	0.28	0.04	0.20	0.37	68.29%
Total effect	0.41	0.04	0.34	0.48	

As shown in Table 4, the upper and lower bounds of the Bootstrap 95% confidence interval of the direct effect of the belief in a just world on the willingness to sue and the intermediary effect of the sense of security do not include 0, which shows that the belief in a just world can not only directly predict the willingness to sue, but also indirectly predict the willingness to sue through the intermediary effect of the sense of security. The direct effect (0.28) and the intermediary effect (0.13) account for 68.29% and 31% of the total effect (0.41) respectively. Therefore, assumption 2 is supported.

## 6. Discuss

### 6.1. The Influence of Belief in a Just World on Litigation Willingness

The survey results of this study show that the belief in a just world can positively affect college students' willingness to sue. The process of college students' choosing whether to apply litigation to relieve their rights and interests is a psychological game, and its purpose is to choose a specific solution that is in line with their actual situation from many solutions. In this process, the individual's own beliefs and attitudes will have a certain degree of influence on it. Herbert Simon's decision-making theory holds that individuals will make a comparison between pay and return in the process of making decisions. If the return is greater than the effort, it will make a decisive decision. However, the comparison between pay and return is more general, and the decision-making process often involves many factors, such as the rationality, value and utility of the scheme, opportunity and probability, attitude and norms, and the response of interpersonal interaction (Qin Yuqin, 1999)<sup>[10]</sup>. The belief in a just world is actually one of the many factors involved in the process of college students' decision whether to apply litigation to relieve their rights and interests. The belief in a just world can stimulate individuals' pursuit of justice and make them more inclined to seek legal ways to solve disputes and pursue fairness. Therefore, in the process of cultivating college students' awareness of rule of law and safeguarding their rights in the future. We should pay attention to the psychological factors of college students, strengthen the rule of law education and psychological counseling, provide legal aid and resource support, and enhance the willingness and ability of college students to choose appropriate litigation channels to solve problems.

### 6.2. The Mediating Role of Sense of Security between Belief in a Just World and Litigation Willingness

The results of this study also emphasize the importance of security, and further clarify the important role of security between college students' belief in a just world and their willingness to sue. Security is an important intermediary factor in the relationship between college students' belief in a just world and their willingness to sue. Belief in a just world can indirectly affect college students' willingness to sue through their sense of security. The higher their level of belief in a just world, the stronger their sense of security and their willingness to sue. On the one hand, the improvement of sense of security is beneficial to enhance college students' willingness to sue. When individuals feel safe, they will be more confident in the fairness and effectiveness of the judicial system, believe that just legal relief can be obtained through litigation, and have more confidence and courage to take actions to defend their rights and dignity, including defending their own interests through litigation. On the other hand, the individual's belief in a just world also affects the promotion and maintenance of his sense of security. An individual's belief in a just world can give him a sense of comfort and security. Because they think that if they do the right thing, it will bring about a positive outcome. For unjust events or misfortunes, they may interpret them as temporary, special, or personal in order to maintain their sense of justice and security in the world. Individuals with a high level of belief in a just world will have a positive attitude and sense of security when their rights and interests are violated or treated unfairly, so they think that law and morality can safeguard justice and protect their own interests, and hope to seek justice and compensation through legal procedures. Therefore, in the future judicial protection of the rights and interests of college students, one is to strengthen the publicity of judicial procedures and judicial rules, so that the advantages of judicial protection are known to college students. Second, it is necessary to further improve the professional quality of judicial staff, strengthen the construction of the rule of law team



with both virtue and ability, achieve good law and good governance, enhance the belief and sense of security of college students in a just world, and enhance their willingness to choose litigation channels to safeguard their legitimate rights and interests.

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