

# Comparing the Belief in a Just World for Self and Others and Moral Development in the Optimistic and Pessimistic Individuals

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to compare the belief in a just world for self and others and the moral development in the optimistic and pessimistic students of Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch. Statistical population of the study consists of all postgraduate students of Science and Research University in academic year 2014-2015 that 202 individuals were selected as the sample group by using random cluster sampling method. For collecting the necessary data, Dr. Lotfabadi's Moral Development Questionnaire (2011), Seligman Attributional Style Questionnaire, which was validated by Eslami Shahrabaki (1990), and Golparvar and Arizi's (2006) questionnaire of Belief in Just World for Self and Others were used. To analyze the data, the statistical method of independent t-test was employed to compare two independent groups. Results of the research indicated that the optimistic students are different from the pessimistic students in terms of environmental ethics, personal morality, familial ethics, human ethics and the belief in a just world for self and others and also it was revealed that they had no difference in terms of spiritual and social ethics.

**Keywords:** belief in a just world for self, belief in a just world for others, moral development, optimistic, pessimistic

## Introduction:

One of the most important challenges and problems of human society is the abnormal behaviors in the society and although the ethical issues are one of the most essential concerns in human life and modern human has recognized and perceived it, but due to various reasons, every passing day, human beings move away from the ethical values and norms and they have become confused; however, by having the Holy Qur'an and the traditions, we possess the best protectors in moral education that , so far, we have not dealt seriously with them, while addressing these sources, can lead us towards solution of many problems (Zakeri, 2012, with tabloid). One of the major aspects of social development of human is the moral development. (Jahangirzadeh, 2011) In general, positive thinking and trying not to think negative thoughts are good strategies for coping effectively with the psychological pressure and stress; because the good temperament makes the information processing more efficient and makes us more altruist creatures and increases our self-esteem (Hassan Shah, 2002). Among the effects and results of optimism and positive thinking in the individual and the society we can refer to the achievement of peace and success and reduction of fear, anxiety, sadness and grief (Nayeri and Allahyarinejad, 2013). When facing some failures and difficulties, the optimists believe that these failures are transitory obstacles and they would not last for a long time; and consider that its causes are limited only to that specific case. They do not blame themselves for the failures, but rather they believe that circumstances, misfortune or other people are responsible for it. Such people are unfazed by defeat.

Confronted by a bad situation, they perceive it as a challenge and try harder (Seligman, translated by Davarpanah and Mohammadi, 2012). The defining characteristic of pessimists is that they tend to believe bad events will last a long time, will undermine everything they do, and are their own fault (Seligman, translated by Davarpanah and Mohammadi, 2012). These two kinds of habit of thinking about the causes of events have some consequences. The fact is that the most researches indicate that pessimists give up more easily and become depressed more frequently. In addition, according to the findings of this research, optimistic people have much better performance at school, university, work, and sports. Their physical condition is extremely good; they pass the aging process safely and in comparison to most middle-aged people they experience less middle-age related physical diseases. Evidences suggest that even optimists live longer (Seligman, translated by Davarpanah and Mohammadi, 2012). Components of optimism include selective attention (includes positive attention to different aspects of human life such as positive attention to God, world, individuals and...) and positive expectation (believing in trusting in God, expecting desirable incidences, and expecting proper performance from self and a bright future). Given the profound impact of optimism on physical, mental and social dimensions of human health, identifying the differences between optimists and pessimists is of great importance for detecting the components that are influential on optimism. Also the role of ethics, as one of the essential components of a healthy society, and consideration of the human dimensions, which has recently been considered by spiritual psychologists, are among the topics that have not been dealt accurately in the conducted researches. Belief in a just world is a variable that although it is not a new subject, but it has not been used in relation with optimism and pessimism. In this regard, the researcher, during the present study, tries to find an answer to the question that: Is there any difference in terms of the belief in a just world for self and for others and moral development in optimistic and pessimistic students?

### **Research methodology**

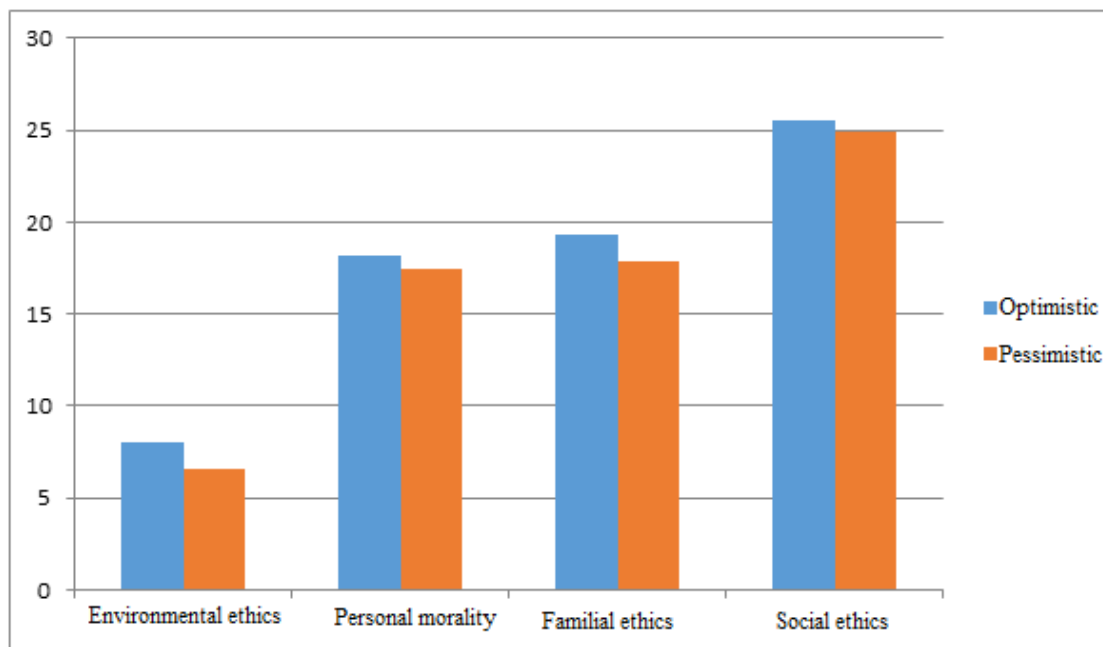
The present study was conducted with the aim of comparing the belief in a just world for self and others and the moral development in the optimistic and pessimistic individuals. The method applied in this study is of applied and causal-comparative type. This method is often ex post facto or after the fact research because it refers to the cases in which the cause has occurred previously. In this method, the researcher does not have a direct control over the independent variables (Delavar, 2013). Two groups are studied in this research, in this way that optimistic and pessimistic students are compared in the research variables. Statistical population of the study consists of all postgraduate students of Science and Research University in academic year 2014-2015 that are 5878 individuals. To select the sample size, after referring to the Morgan's table, 361 subjects were determined as the sample size that they were selected randomly from the study population. Statistical population of the study consists of 202 postgraduate students of Science and Research University in academic year 2014-2015 who answered the provided questionnaires. The sample of the present study was selected by using random cluster sampling method. Measuring tools of the study include Dr. Lotfabadi's questionnaire of moral development of children, adolescents and young adults. The questions of this test have been designed in six ethical categories, and three fictional questions have been considered for each category. These six ethical categories include: environmental ethics, self-care or personal morality, ethics in familial relationships, social ethics, human ethics and spiritual (or transcendental) ethics. Each of the eighteen questions of the test has been assessed by one or more of the six-point scale of moral judgment. Attributional Style Questionnaire evaluates the content of causal attributions for positive and negative consequences in the dimensions of causality, stability and generality and it has been developed by Seligman (1998; quoted by Taghipour, 1999) following the revised model of learned helplessness for measuring the students' attributions (Mehdi Zadeh and Abolghasemi and Rostam Oghli, 2014); it is a self-report questionnaire that is used for determining attributional style of individuals in three internal - external, stable - unstable and general - specific dimensions (after the circumstances of success and failure). Questionnaire of belief in a just world for self and others, questionnaire of belief in a just world has been developed by Sutton and Douglas (2005), Dalbert (1999) and Dalbert et al(2001), on the basis of public opinion (fairness of the world) and personal beliefs (fairness of events that happen in the personal life). This questionnaire was initially translated into Persian by Golparvar and Arizi's (2006) and then translated Persian version was translated into English. Then, understandability and expressiveness of the text was investigated by the psychology professors and the questionnaire was distributed among a number of students in order to determine the possible drawbacks and consequently the Persian version of 27 item questionnaire of the belief in a just world was prepared and

implemented on 1500 residents of Isfahan who were over 17 years old. Two kind of statistical methods were used in analysis of the data: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. In the section of descriptive statistics, statistical methods (mean and standard deviation) and tables and graphs were employed and in the section of inferential statistics, T-test was used to compare two independent groups by using the spss20 software.

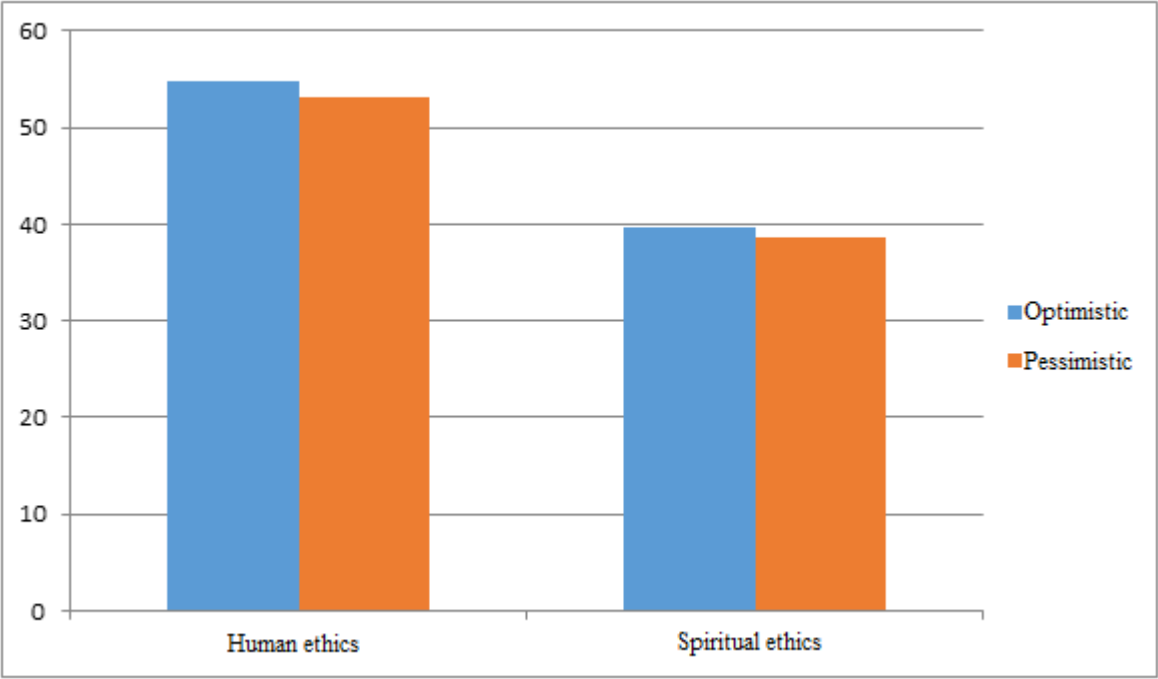
## Findings

Demographic characteristics of respondents include: gender. According to the results of the study, among the participants, 117 (57.9%) were female and 85 (42.1%) were male students. As the results have shown, the scores related to the moral development and its related variables including environmental ethics, personal morality, familial ethics, and social ethics, human ethics and spiritual morality, are higher in optimist students than the pessimist students. Also the scores of variables of the belief in just world for self and others are higher in optimist students than the pessimist students.

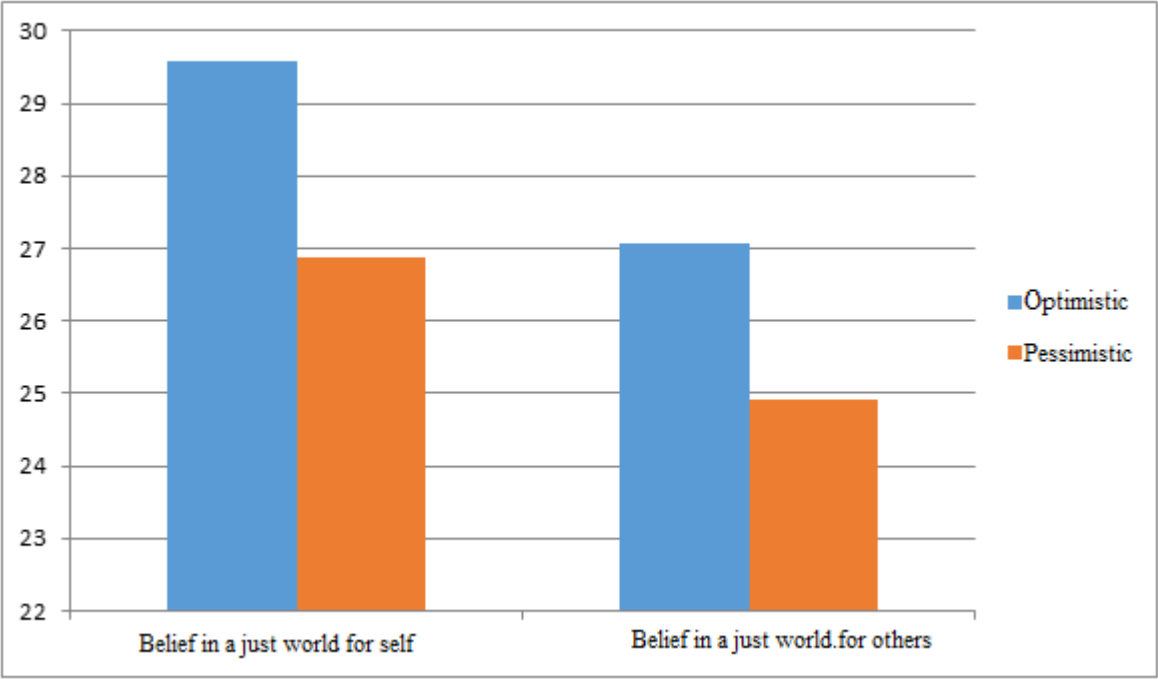
Graph 1: Comparison of the scores of environmental ethics, personal morality, familial ethics, and social ethics in the optimist and pessimist individuals



Graph 2: Comparison of the human ethics and spiritual morality in the optimist and pessimist individuals



Graph 3: Comparison of the scores of the belief in a just world for self and belief in a just world for others in the optimist and pessimist individuals



### Inferential findings

First hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of environmental ethics in optimist and pessimist students.

Table 1: Comparison of the scores of environmental ethics in optimist and pessimist students

Variable	Groups	Mean	T-test			
			Mean differences	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Environmental ethics	Optimists	7.98	1.43	3.20	200	0.002
	Pessimistic	6.54				

According to the results, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed. Thus, with 99% confidence we can state that the optimist students enjoy higher levels of environmental ethics as compared to the pessimist students.

Second hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of personal morality in optimist and pessimist students.

Table 2: Comparison of the scores of personal morality in optimist and pessimist students

Variable	Groups	Mean	T-test			
			Mean differences	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Personal ethics	Optimist	18.22	0.809	1.65	200	0.041
	Pessimistic	17.41				

According to the results, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed. Thus, with 95% confidence we can state that the optimist students enjoy higher levels of personal morality as compared to the pessimist students.

Third hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of familial ethics in optimist and pessimist students.

Table 3: Comparison of the scores of familial ethics in optimist and pessimist students

Variable	Groups	Mean	T-test			
			Mean differences	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Familial ethics	Optimist	19.33	1.49	2.39	200	0.007
	Pessimistic	17.83				

According to the results, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed. Thus, with 99% confidence we can state that the optimist students enjoy higher levels of familial ethics as compared to the pessimist students.

Fourth hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of social ethics in optimist and pessimist students.

Table 4: Comparison of the scores of social ethics in optimist and pessimist students

Variable	Groups	Mean	T-test			
			Mean differences	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Social ethics	Optimist	25.49	0.59	0.82	200	0.411
	Pessimistic	24.89				

According to the results, the research hypothesis is rejected and the null hypothesis is confirmed. Thus, with 95% confidence we can state that there is no significant difference between the scores of social ethics in optimist and pessimist students.

Fifth hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of human ethics in optimist and pessimist students.

Table 5: Comparison of the scores of human ethics in optimist and pessimist students

Variable	Groups	Mean	T-test			
			Mean differences	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance level

Human ethics	Optimist	54.70	1.56	1.52	200	0.028
	Pessimistic	53.14				

According to the results, the research hypothesis is rejected and the null hypothesis is confirmed. Thus, with 95% confidence we can state that the optimist students enjoy higher levels of human ethics than the pessimist students.

Sixth hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of spiritual ethics in optimist and pessimist students.

Table 6: Comparison of the scores of spiritual ethics in optimist and pessimist students

Variable	Groups	Mean	T-test			
			Mean differences	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Spiritual ethics	Optimist	39.57	0.87	1.34	200	0.18
	Pessimistic	38.69				

According to the results, the research hypothesis is rejected and the null hypothesis is confirmed. Thus, with 95% confidence we can state that there is no significant difference between the scores of spiritual ethics in optimist and pessimist students.

Seventh hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of belief in a just world for self in optimist and pessimist students.

Table 7: Comparison of the scores of belief in a just world for self in optimist and pessimist students

Variable	Groups	Mean	T-test			
			Mean differences	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Belief in a just world for self	Optimist	29.59	2.72	3.80	200	0.00
	Pessimistic	26.86				

According to the results, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed. Thus, with 99% confidence we can state that the optimist students have higher scores of belief in a just world for self as compared to the pessimist students.

Eighth hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of belief in a just world for others in optimist and pessimist students.

Table 8: Comparison of the scores of belief in a just world for others in optimist and pessimist students

Variable	Groups	Mean	T-test			
			Mean differences	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Belief in a just world for others	Optimist	27.08	2.16	2.81	223	0.005
	Pessimistic	24.91				

According to the results, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed. Thus, with 99% confidence we can state that the optimist students have higher scores of belief in a just world for others as compared to the pessimist students.

## Discussion and conclusion

In examining the first hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of environmental ethics in optimist and pessimist students, the results of Table 4 show that the score of environmental ethics in optimist students is significantly higher than the pessimist students. By environmental ethics, Lotfabadi (2011) refers to inner nature of human that the findings of psychology shows that when the living environment of human lacks the necessary qualities and hence the enthusiasm of the proper life is suppressed and it is replaced by depression, chaos, aggression and moral darkness and this kind of behavior leads man towards the degradation and deterioration. The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of (Seligman, 2004; quoted by Jelvani, 2011), (Macotavio Angers, Hiroshi Yokoyama, Hidetoshi Cena, 2004; quoted by Jelvani, 2011), Naderi and Nasir, (2014), Ali Lavassani and colleagues, (2013) and Poorsardar et al., (2013).

In examining the second hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of personal morality in optimist and pessimist students; the results show that the scores of personal morality in optimist students are significantly higher than the pessimist students. The results of this hypothesis are consistent with the findings of Kord Noghabi et al (2014), Kord Noghabi et al (2013) and Jelvani et al., (2011). The findings of Ezhei et al (2013) also showed that psychological well-being is influenced by personality factors such as the resilience and optimism of person, regardless of his resiliency, can provide some grounds for well-being.

In examining the third hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of familial ethics in optimist and pessimist students; the results show that the scores of familial ethics in optimist students are significantly higher than the pessimist students that the results of this hypothesis are consistent with the findings of Patterson, (2000) and Pentti et al., (2005). Research findings of Tabaeh Emami and Ibn Ibrahim Khajooei (2014) indicate that the conversation orientation has a positive and significant relationship with optimistic style of happiness and attitude and conformity orientation has a negative and significant relationship with optimistic style of happiness and attitude.

In examining the fourth hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of social ethics in optimist and pessimist students and the results show that there is no significant difference between the scores of social ethics in optimist and pessimist students. The findings of Jafari Bagh Kheyrati, Ghahremani,



Keshavarzi and Kaveh (2014), Hashemite Sheikh Shabani (2013) and Khosroshahi et al., (1391) are consistent with the results of this study.

In examining the fifth hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of human ethics in optimist and pessimist students; the results show that the scores of human ethics in optimist students are significantly higher than the pessimist students. Optimism has shown a positive correlation with the perseverance, general reputation, academic, athletic, military, occupational, political, and familial success, health and even longevity and lack of emotional trauma. The results are consistent with the findings of (Peterson, 200; quoted by Jelvani et al., 2011), Jelvani et al., (2011), Hashemi et al., (2014), Kord Noghabi et al. (2014) and Rezai et al., (2013).

In examining the sixth hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the scores of spiritual ethics in optimist and pessimist students and the results show that there is no significant difference between the scores of spiritual ethics in optimist and pessimist students. Findings of the present study are consistent with the findings of Naderi and Nasir (2014). Also, the results of multiple regression analysis showed that religious beliefs and interactional flexibility are predictors of optimism and also the findings of the present studies of Golestani Pour et al., (2013), Movahed and Shekarkan (2004) are inconsistent with the results of other researchers in the similar fields of spiritual ethics (such as religious views and religious identity and religious belief). Thus, according to the findings of the research hypothesis and their inconsistency with other results, it can be concluded that inconsistency of researches with the findings of the present study may be due to differences in social, cultural, physical, cognitive, worldview and attitudinal dimensions.

In examining the seventh and eighth hypothesis of the research: There is a significant difference between the scores of belief in a just world for self in optimist and pessimist students; the results show that the scores of belief in a just world for self in optimist students are significantly higher than the pessimist students. And also, there is a significant difference between the scores of belief in a just world for others in optimist and pessimist students; the results show that the scores of belief in a just world for others in optimist students are significantly higher than the pessimist students. Since the variable of the belief in a just world is a new variable and also despite the extensive studies of the researcher, no research was conducted so far about the role of this variable in optimist and pessimist individuals; therefore, through the study of these two variables, it can be concluded that:

People need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve.

Since the belief in a just world is associated with several indicators such as life satisfaction, positive emotion and mental health (Golparvar and Javadi, 2007; Golparvar and Kamkar and Javadi, 2007) and the weakening of this belief creates depression, anxiety and psychological problems (Golparvar and Sajadian, 2008) and on the other hand, also, the optimism is associated with indicators such as mental health, life satisfaction (Poorsardar et al., 2013, Golestani Pour et al., 2013) and the meaning of life and well-being (Gholam Ali Lavassani, 2013) and as predictors of depression and life satisfaction (Rezaei et al., 2013) and quality of life (Farahbakhsh, et al., 2012) and self-efficacy (Khosroshahi, 2012) and subjective well-being (Jelvani, 2011) and spiritual health (Asgari et al., 2010). So if we consider any of the common variables as an intermediary role; we can say that the belief in a just world (for self and others) will vary in the optimist and pessimist individuals. In general, the results showed that there are many observable and considerable differences among optimist and pessimist people. Optimism is a general expectation of the matter that the good things will happen in the future. Optimism is concerned with positive results and leads the individual towards the goodness and positive thinking and positivity. In fact, optimism and pessimism can be considered as essential qualities of personality and the matter that how people adapt themselves with the life events, surrounding environment and ultimately with themselves and how, in the face of difficulties, they think and ultimately behave. As the best impact of optimistic viewpoint, we can refer to the ability of coping with highly stressful and threatening life events and also overcoming that situation with the best possible result and with the least damage and injuries. As a result of optimism, individuals believe that the failures are transitory obstacles and they would not last for a long time; and consider that its causes are limited only to that specific case and they would not occur in other situations. Such people are unfazed by defeat. Confronted by a bad situation, they perceive it as a challenge and try harder. Optimists, through the use of effective coping strategies,

change their personal states so that they can achieve their goals. In comparison to pessimists, optimists often have better performance at school, work, sports arenas, family relationships and talent and progress tests and they are in a healthy physical condition and live longer.

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