M2: Research Methods

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The study wanted to prove if having cynical beliefs about human nature was detrimental to income. Previous research and literature associated cynicism with detrimental outcomes across major aspects of life such as physical and mental health, relationships, and income (e.g., Smith et al., 2004, Heponiemi etal., 2006, and Baron et al., 2007). What the study found is that individuals with cynical views were more likely to have adverse health effects and make less income, it could not explain why. Instead, the researchers proposed the mechanism: cynical individuals make less money due to missed opportunities from a collaborative effort. For example, a business leader is successful because they know how to leverage other people's skill sets. The cynical person would not have the ability to trust anyone to leverage their talents. They would try to do everything themselves (Heine and Norenzayan, 2006). The findings of the study showed that in countries with high cynicism, expressing those same views is not associated with lower income, but might even provide an advantage. Whereas countries with low levels of reported cynicism showed that having cynical views does lower income.

The abstract notes that there were five studies done. The first two studies, done using a longitudinal survey in America, showed a decrease in income about cynical beliefs about human nature 9 and 2 years later. The third study applied a panel study in Germany, showing that cynical beliefs undermined an income increase over 9 years. The fourth study showed that the negative effect of cynical beliefs about income proved to be independent of individual differences in the Big Five personality dimensions, specifically focusing on neuroticism and extraversion. The 5th and final study showed the first evidence of the hypothesized mechanism underlying this effect, meaning it only mattered if the cynical beliefs were true and were carried out by the population.

Study 1 and Study 2 deployed a longitudinal survey over the course of roughly a decade between both studies. These two studies were descriptive because they were monitoring a group of people and not influencing their lives in any way. These two studies indicate there is a correlation between cynicism and lower income rates. Study 3 was done similarly to 1 and 2.

This study was done in Germany using the German Socie-Economic Panel. The panel represents ~22,000 thousand individuals. The cynicism levels were recorded in 2003, and individual income was recorded every year up until 2012. The study found that at an individual level, differences in cynicism showed a negative correlation with income and education. It is important to note that the study also showed income-developed trajectories over a period of 9 years. This study, like 1 and 2, would be a longitudinal survey, and this study was descriptive for the same reasons as 1 and 2.

Study 4 had the goal of examining individual differences in the Big Five personality could account for the effect of cynical beliefs on income. Study 4 was done using the GSEOP like study 3, however, did not include GSOEP panel members. This study was done using a sample of 1,000 Germans aged 16 or older. The results of this study also showed a correlation between cynicism and negative effects on income.

Study 5 was meant to see if the negative income was due to the cynicism of the individual, or if the individual lived in an area where people displayed cynical behaviors. Simplifying even further, did the individual live in an area with a low or high crime rate? The sample for this survey was gathered using the European Value Study (EVS, 2010). The study was done by measuring answers to questions about cynicism. The results of the study showed that if the individual lived in a country where the population was cynical, their personal views did not matter. However, if the individual lived in a country where the population displayed less cynical views, their personal belief of cynicism would decrease their income. All the studies done in this experiment were an experimental survey and represented a correlation between cynicism and lower income.

https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/psp-pspp0000050.pdf