

An Investigation of Relationship between Wisdom and Subjective Wellbeing for a Sample of Pakistani Adolescents

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The present research aimed to examine the relationship between wisdom and subjective well-being among adolescents and adults. Sample of 212 participants were selected from Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Findings indicate that scales were internally consistent and reliable. Moreover, results show a significant positive relationship between wisdom, positive affect and life satisfaction, while negative relationship between wisdom and negative affect. Overall age related differences indicate that adolescents were wise and having positive affect and satisfied with their life as compared to young adults and middle aged adults, while middle aged adults have high score on emotional regulation and young adults have high negative affect.

Keywords: wisdom, adolescents, adults, subjective well-being, positive affect, negative affect, satisfaction with life, age.

Wisdom is one's capacity to make sound judgment to deal effectively with difficult life circumstances (Assmann, 1994; Bianchi, 1994; Clayton, 1982; Kramer, 2000; Vaillant, 1993) by recognizing and utilizing feelings; both pleasant & unpleasant, to solve problems and adapt to their environment (Taylor, Bates, & Webster, 2011; Webster, 2010). Wise individuals can use factual and procedural based knowledge to deal with uncertainty, and know how to manage and work for the welfare of self and for others as well; ultimately, such individuals live a happier and satisfied life (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003; Staudinger, 1999). In other words, wisdom plays an important role in maintenance of happiness which in turn associated with individual's overall life satisfaction (Bianchi, 1994; Clayton, 1982; Ardel, 2000; Bergsma, 2000; Vaillant, 2002; Ehrenreich, 2009). Although, the debate "whether the growing wiser is related with the attainment of happiness or whether the attainment of happiness might be accompanied by wisdom" has been highlighted very much. In recent times this concept (wisdom) got attention as a result of empirical studies in the various field of psychology i.e., life span psychology, the study of aging, cognitive psychology, and positive psychology. As a result, various perspectives coming out of different orientation of wisdom and the researchers have defined the construct wisdom according to their own philosophical orientation and particular work focus. For instance, Sternberg (1986) defined wisdom as "a deep understanding and realization of people, things, events or situations, resulting in the ability to apply perceptions, judgments and actions in keeping with this understanding". Similarly, Webster (2007) defined the term wisdom in this way "the competence in intention to, and application of, critical life experiences to facilitate the optimal development of self and others".

The concept of wisdom had received the attention of the large number of scholars and philosophers from various

disciplines. According to Robinson (1990), in Greek philosophy the word '*sophia*' was used for wisdom. However, in Plato's dialogues the construct of wisdom is highlighted in three different senses. Firstly, wisdom as *sophia* found in those people who lead a thoughtful life in searching truth. Secondly, wisdom as *phronesis* the kind of practical wisdom used by statesmen and legislators. And thirdly, wisdom as *episteme* was found in those people who had scientific knowledge of things. Later on, Aristotle (as cited in Honderich, 1995) in his *metaphysics* explains wisdom as the understanding of causes, i.e. knowing '*why*' things are happened in a certain way, which is deeper than merely knowing '*that*' things are a certain way.

Psychological theories regarding wisdom focus on two main questions (i) what people actually believe wisdom to be (ii) how wisdom develops over time. To answer the first question Holliday and Chandler (1986) by using the implicit approaches of wisdom had identified the five factors: exceptional understanding, judgment and communication skills, general competence, interpersonal skills, and social unobtrusiveness. Whereas, to answer the second question Baltes and his colleagues (1990) presented the explicit approach that viewed wisdom as a form of advanced cognitive functioning and intellectual growth (p.55). Furthermore, Baltes and Staudinger (2000) explain the term fundamental pragmatic of life 'as an expertise in the conduct and meaning of life' (p.124).

In literature, Subjective well-being (SWB) was used as a similar term for happiness in the fields of economics, and philosophy; but in the field of psychology happiness is a narrower concept than subjective well-being. According to Diener (2009) subjective well-being is defined as "a combination of positive effect (in the absence of negative effect) and general life satisfaction i.e., subjective appreciation of life rewards".

Despite of such conceptual complications, a number of theoretical traditions have been presented that contributed to our understanding of Subjective well-being (SWB). Other

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models of SWB which are commonly used that are; Liking, wanting, and needing model, Multiple discrepancy theory, Top-down and bottom-up factors, Orientation to happiness model, and The 3P model. In the present study Diener's model of SWB is used so this model is briefly discussed here.

Diener's model of subjective well-being. Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (1999) viewed SWB as the combination of three independent components that are life satisfaction (cognitive dimension), positive affect and negative affect (emotional dimensions). Furthermore they identified the several distinctive features of Subjective well-being, which are as follows: *Firstly*, the field of subjective well-being covers the complete range of well-being from unpleasant to pleasant. *Secondly*, it is defined in terms of inner experience of the person instead of focusing on external frame of references (e.g., maturity, autonomy, realism). *Finally*, it focuses on longer-term states, not just momentary moods (positive and negative).

Wisdom and Subjective Well Being

Although a number of studies have analyzed the association between wisdom and subjective well-being in western cultures, and different terms such as life satisfaction and happiness were used in many studies for subjective well-being. The empirical evidence is mixed; some studies findings indicate a positive association between measures of wisdom and subjective well-being and others failing to do so. For instance, Takahashi and Overton (2002) conducted a study with the sample of middle-aged, older American and Japanese adults, and found that wisdom and life satisfaction were positively related. Empirical studies also suggested the association between wisdom and positive and negative affects e.g. Neff, Rude, and Kirkpatrick (2007) and Beaumont (2009) found the positive relationship between wisdom and subjective happiness and inverse relationship with negative affect.

According to Kekes (1983), "one can be old and foolish, but a wise man is likely to be old simply because such growth takes time" (p. 286). So this statement explains that wisdom and age might be positively connected with each other; especially for those people who have the opportunity and motivation to pursue its development and who are willing to accept and able to learn from their life experiences. Easterlin (2006), Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Gowdy (2007) found a U shaped relationship between age and SWB, they also found that those people who were young and middle aged adults have low level of life satisfaction as compared to those people who were adolescents or older.

Although, wisdom is a complex and elusive construct but recently this concept has received considerable attention in the areas of human development, successful aging, and personal growth. The role of wisdom and subjective well-being (SWB) in the enhancement of happiness in one's life urged us to study these variables in detail. However, to the best of our knowledge no previous study has examined the relationship between wisdom and subjective well-being by using the Diener's model. The prior research work has

focused on these components separately and very few studies have addressed these relationships.

There are also mixed findings regarding these constructs (wisdom & SWB) with different age groups. Age plays an important role in the development of wisdom and SWB. Wisdom as virtue emerges during the period of adolescents and it persists throughout old age, some people postulate that wisdom is lost over time not gained (Meacham, 1990), but empirical work supports that there are essential "building blocks" emerged during the period of adolescence and young adulthood (Pasupathi, Staudinger, & Baltes, 2001; Staudinger & Pasupathi, 2003). The present study will also attempt to address the issue of age regarding these constructs.

Based on the above literature it is suggested that wisdom and SWB components (positive affect & life satisfaction) will be positively correlated, and SWB component (negative affect) negatively correlated with wisdom. And middle aged adults will score high on wisdom, positive affect, and life satisfaction as compared to adolescents and young adults.

Method

Sample

In this phase of the study, the sample consisted of $N=240$ (women $n=120$; men $n=120$) participants. Out of these 240 participants only 212 gave complete responses. So the final analyses were done on the sample of 212 participants with age range 16-60 years. Participants were students, teachers, housewives, government employees from Rawalpindi (Wah Cantt) and Islamabad.

Procedure

On the scheduled days of data collection, the researcher visited the schools, colleges, universities, and easily approached population of Wah Cantt and Islamabad. Initially 220 participants with age range from 16-60 years were selected on voluntarily basis. After introducing the nature of the study, Consent form and demographic information sheet along with three instruments: SAWS, I-PANAS-SF, and SWLS were administered. But after careful examination of the data, 8 cases due to missing information, and incomplete instruments or pattern responses were discarded before the analysis. Therefore sample comprised 212 participants for the final analysis. In the end participant's queries were answered, after that they were thanked for their participation and cooperation in the study.

Measures

For this phase of the study, the following instruments were used:-

Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale was developed by Webster (2003) and comprised of forty items. These items are divided into five dimensions; Experience, Emotional regulation, Reflection, Humor, and Openness. It is a Likert type scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree), to 6 (strongly agree). This scale had good reliability test-retest=.84; and alpha =.90

(Webster, 2003). In the present study, alpha reliability =.85, and fit indexes for the scale was CFI=.98, GFI=.98, RMSEA=.05, and ratio of chi square =1.6. This factor structure showed a good fit to the data on SAWS.

International Positive and Negative Affect Schedule-Short Form was originally developed by Thompson (2007). It consist of 10-item 5 point Likert types scale (1= never) to (5= always), which further comprises of two independent 5-item scales (positive affect and negative affect. Thompson (2007), reported the test retest reliability for Positive and Negative Affect Cronbach’s alphas to be .78 and .76 respectively. In the present study, alpha reliability =.71 and fit indexes for the scale was Comparative Fit Index (CFI) =.97, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) =.97, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) =.03, and ratio of chi square =1.5. This factor structure showed a good fit to the data on the scale.

Satisfaction with Life Scale Originally developed by Diener, Emmons, Sem, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) five item scale with a five point rating scale ranging from (1 to 5) were used. In the present study Urdu version translated by Siddiq (2001) was used. For this scale, alpha reliability =.73 and fit indexes for the scale was Comparative Fit Index (CFI) =1.00, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) =.99, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) =.001, and ratio of chi square =1.01. This factor structure showed a good fit to the data on the scale.

Results

Analysis such as mean, standard deviation, alpha reliability coefficients, Pearson product moment correlation, ANOVA, and Post hoc were computed to test the objectives of the study.

Table 1

Mean, SD and Alpha reliability coefficients of Self Assessed Wisdom Scale (SAWS) Urdu version and its dimensions, International-Positive affect and Negative affect Schedule-Short Form (I-PANAS-SF) Urdu version and its dimensions and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)(N=212)

Scale / Dimensions	No. of Items	M	SD	Alpha coefficient
SAWS	40	173.01	24.61	.85
Experience	8	34.42	6.52	.60
Emotional regulation	8	34.78	6.58	.66
Reflection	8	38.36	8.21	.70
Humor	8	33.22	7.11	.62
Openness	8	32.25	6.49	.61
I-PANAS-SF	9	34.47	4.90	.71
Positive affect	4	16.39	2.04	.68
Negative affect	5	15.08	2.92	.61
SWLS	5	15.84	2.15	.73

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, and alpha values of all scales. Alpha values of SAWS are .85, while for its dimensions it ranges from .60 to .70 that are satisfactory. For the I-PANAS-SF the alpha value for entire scale is .71, while for its dimensions it ranges from .61 to .68. The alpha value is .73 for SWLS; overall findings indicate that all the instruments are internally consistent.

Table 2

Correlations between the Self assessed Wisdom scale (SAWS), and its dimensions with subjective well-being dimensions (Positive affect, Negative affect, & Life satisfaction) (N=212)

Dimensions of SAWS	Dimensions of Subjective Well-being		
	Emotional dimensions	Cognitive dimension	
	Positive Affect (PA)	Negative Affect (NA)	Life Satisfaction (LS)
Experience	.30**	-.12	.23**
Emotional regulation	.32**	-.17**	.25**
Reflectiveness	.17*	-.15*	.18**
Humor	.15*	-.10	.16*
Openness	.25**	-.18*	.28**
SAWS	.34**	-.21**	.29**

*p <.05, **p <.01

Table 2 shows the correlation between all scales SAWS and its dimensions and PA, NA, and LS. Results indicate the significant positive correlation between SAWS (total) and its dimensions with positive affect and life satisfaction, and significant negative correlation between wisdom and its dimensions (emotional regulation, reflection, & openness) with negative affect.

Table 3

Mean Differences on three groups of respondents' age (Adolescents, Young adults, & Middle aged adults) on self assessed wisdom scale, its dimensions and subjective well-being dimensions (N=212)

Scales	Adolescents (16-18) (N=77)		Young Adults (19-40) (N=58)		Middle Aged Adults (40-60) (N=77)		F	i-j	MeanD (i-j)	SE	95%CI	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD					LB	UB
Experience	34.84	6.64	33.34	6.17	34.79	6.62	1.08	No	No	.44	33.53	35.29
ER	34.92	6.08	33.15	6.37	35.87	7.02	2.89*	Adults> young adult	2.72	1.13	-.02	5.45
Reflection	39.06	7.16	37.22	7.89	38.49	9.33	.85	No	No	.56	37.24	39.46
Humor	35.86	6.09	33.16	6.35	33.60	7.03	2.76*	Adolescents >adults	2.69	.48	32.25	34.17
Openness	33.61	6.40	32.24	6.21	30.87	6.59	3.50*	Adolescents >adults	1.37	1.03	.24	5.24
SAWS	175.90	22.79	169.62	25.54	172.66	25.59	1.09	No	No	1.69	169.67	176.34
PA	16.40	2.17	16.25	1.82	16.46	2.06	.18	No	No	.13	16.11	16.66
NA	14.20	2.77	16.03	2.6	15.23	3.04	7.05*	Young adults >Adolescents	1.83	.49	.63	3.02
LS	15.90	2.69	14.10	2.9	15.22	3.00	7.01*	Adolescents >Adults	2.01	.44	15.55	16.13

Note. CI=confidence interval; LL=lower limit; UL=upper limit; ER=emotional regulation; SAWS=self-assessed wisdom scale; LS =life satisfaction

The Table 3 results show significant differences on emotional regulation, humor, openness, life satisfaction and negative affect whereas the non-significant differences on self assessed wisdom scale (total) and experience, reflectiveness, and positive affect.

Discussion

The present study aimed at to examine the relationship between wisdom and subjective well-being among adolescents and adults, and to explore the demographics such as age groups differences on these variables. In this study consent form, demographic information sheet, self assessed wisdom scale (SAWS), I-PANAS-SF, and SWLS were administered on a larger sample of (N=212) participants with age range (16-60) on three age groups (adolescents, young adults, & middle aged adults).

Alpha coefficients were computed and results show that all the scales SAWS, I-PANAS-SF and SWLS were internally consistent and alpha values of their dimensions were quite satisfactory (see Table 1). All the scales and subscales are in line with the reliabilities of existing literature (Webster, 2007; Thompson, 2007; Diener et al., 1985).

Present study findings show that wisdom and its dimensions are positively correlated with positive affect while significant negative correlation between wisdom and its dimensions (emotional regulation, reflection, & openness) with negative affect (see Table 2). These findings are in-line with the previous literature that wise individuals have high level of positive affect such as happiness, self-opinionated and low level of negative affect like angry, anxious (see for instance, Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003; Taylor, Bates, & Webster, 2011; Webster, 2010), and wise persons exercises the positive social exchanges which are favorable for self and for others as well. So as a virtue it relates with the positive aspects and enhances the pleasant feelings and decreases the negative

feelings. Neff, Rude, and Kirkpatrick (2007) and Beaumont (2009) found the positive relationship between wisdom and subjective happiness and inverse relationship with negative affect. Another study by Bergsma and Ardelt (2011), found that wisdom and positive affect such as happiness are associated with each other.

Present study findings revealed that wisdom and its dimensions are positively correlated with life satisfaction (see Table 2). These findings are consistent with the results of many previous researches (see for instance, Ardelt, 1997, 2000; Kramer, 2000; Thomas, 1991) which found wise individuals have high life satisfaction because they have the ability to accept ups and downs and gain meaning for life and struggle to overcome them that increases their life satisfaction. Life satisfaction provides psychosocial strengths which enable them (wise individuals) to experience life challenges in a more effective way, and they do not focus on the ideal life circumstances (see e.g., Ardelt & Oh, 2010; Le, 2011; Linley, 2003; Takahashi & Overton, 2002; Webster, 2010) and they promote, nurture, and exercise positive social exchanges which are favorable for self (see e.g., Taylor, et al., 2011) and for others.

Middle aged adults will have wisdom as compared to adolescents and young adults. Results revealed the statistically significant age differences on emotional regulation, humor and openness dimensions of wisdom (see Table 3) and statistically non-significant age differences on wisdom and its dimensions (experience & reflection). Adolescents scores are higher on openness and humor dimension, while middle aged people score high on emotional regulation. These results are consistent with the findings of the previous research that was conducted by Meacham (1990) which found wisdom is lost with the passage of time not gained and many fundamental "building blocks" for wisdom are emerge during adolescence and young adulthood and these groups are as opening for gaining wisdom (see e.g., Bang, 2009; Pasupathi, Staudinger, & Baltes, 2001; Pelechano & González-Leandro, 2004; Perry et al., 2002; Staudinger & Pasupathi, 2003). These results are also consistent with the findings of the previous research that non-significant association between wisdom and age (Webster, 2003,

2007). In our culture adolescents are in the transition stage, they have lot of friends and make use of humor with them. Middle aged adults have the ability to regulate their emotions in a more effective way as compared to adolescents because adolescents are emotional and passionate and take risks more frequently and ignore the side effects, and lack of experiences, that's why they have low level of emotional regulation.

Middle aged adults have high subjective well-being component (positive affect) as compared to adolescents and young adults. Results revealed the non-significant age differences on positive affect (see Table 3). These findings are consistent with previous studies, which revealed inconsistent findings regarding subjective well-being that shows demographic variables indicated less than 20 percent variance (see for instance., Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976) and variables such as age, gender, and education were correlated at low levels. The construct subjective well-being is very specific and its meaning vary across cultures. Cultural differences can affect those constructs that are related to human behavior (see e.g., Hofstede, 2001).

Middle aged people have low level of negative affect as compared to adolescents and young adults. Results show the significant differences on negative affect and revealed that adolescents have low level of negative affect as compared to adults (young adults and middle aged adults) (see Table 3). There are many reasons behind this finding, in our culture middle aged people are facing a lot of problems that occurs daily like terrorism, murders, economic, social, and moral problems, may be these reason increases their level of negative affect. Young adults have higher level of negative affect than adolescents, and middle aged adults, because they face different type of problems related to their job, marriage, and family; they were failed to handle them because they have not capable to overcome all these crises at a time so they feel depressed, and anxious. Adolescents have low negative feelings because they have energy, opportunities and time to handle their problems, and their problems are not very serious in nature so they overcome these issues with the help of elders.

Seventh assumption of the study regarding middle aged adult they have high life satisfaction as compared to adolescents, and young adults. Findings indicate the significant differences on high life satisfaction that indicate adolescents have high life satisfaction than adults (see Table 3), as consistent with the previous studies results the individuals who are in their 30s and 40s were less satisfied with their life compared to those who were younger or older (see for instance., Easterlin, 2006; Ferrer-i-Carbonell & Gowdy 2007) because young adults and middle aged people face different type of problems related to their job, family, relationships related issues and they are struggling to achieved their target goals; while older people struggling phase has been completed and they achieved their goals; and adolescents have energy and passion to face the challenges and they know they have a lot of time

to achieve their desired goals. Sometimes increasing age low the level of satisfaction if they don't meet the desired goals, so they feel sad and anxious about their future life.

Limitations and Suggestions

As an initial effort to examine the relationship between wisdom and subjective well-being among adolescents and adults within Pakistani cultural context, the present research can be a valuable addition in the existing literature by opening new area of research there are certain caveats that need to be addressed for future research.

First and obvious limitation, the present study was cross-sectional in nature so directions in terms of causality cannot be determined. For future studies longitudinal research should be conducted for capturing individual differences that would yield better understanding of association between these constructs with respect to different age groups. A second limitation of the study concerns by the nature of the inclusion criteria the sample represents a non-random, convenient sample of adolescents, and adults, an urban, and specific area i.e., Rawalpindi and Islamabad. As such, the time was limited and the sample size was small; the findings cannot be generalized to the entire country, which consists of elderly people, uneducated, poor and rural population. For the purpose of generalize the findings, the future research should be conducted with large sample of older adults, uneducated, divorce/widowed, poor, and rural area.

Third limitation of the study was that only one culture is studied, due to time constraints and lack of resources. So for future research it is suggested that cross-cultural research should be carried out to explore the variables of current study and also focused on other demographic differences in a global context. It would be more interesting to add the comparison of the wise and non-wise groups. And finally, this is a survey based research it was administered face-to-face with the participants. So there may be social desirability related issues regarding participants more likely to respond in a more desirable way. So for future research, social desirability related issue will be carefully handled for sound findings.

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