

## Wisdom : The Development Across Life-Span

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**Abstract.** Wisdom is a part from human's personality that develop across their life-span, many factors – be it internal or external– in an individual become important factors to form stabile wisdom. An individual who has wisdom stability tends to use perspective, critical cognitive to face problems so they will get wise problem solving. This research aims to test how big is the difference of construction male employees' wisdom levelin Jember, with comparison age in category 1 (20-35) year old, category 2 (36-50) years old, and category 3 (51-70) years old. Research was done using quantitative approach. Respondents are male private employees of construction field in Jember, (N=30 people). Data is collected by questionnaire. Wisdom is measured with Empirical Assessment of a Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale by Monika Ardel, University of Florida with Likert scale form modification. Data analysis is done using Shapiro Wilk normality test that showed normal distribution, then continued with Independent Sampel t-test. Result shows that there is no significant difference between wisdom level on male employees, with comparison score Sig.(2-tailed). Category A to B (0,202), category A to C (0,222), and category B to C (0,939) which mean the three category shows value that is bigger than 0,05. It means score variants between each category are not proven or the three groups have the same variant so it can be concluded that there is no difference between wisdom level on construction field male employeesin Jember.

**Keywords :** Wisdom, Development across life-span.

### Introduction

Across life-span, human encounters many problems. As time goes by every problem faced will be wider and more difficult. That's why wisdom is needed in one's self as a defense mechanism, so an individual can think through and have positive attitude to face and solve the problems. Wisdom has some perspective and can be studied deeper and continuously across one's life-span; wisdom in one's self can increase or decrease that influenced by many factors and influence their life, either it is related to themselves or their social environment.

Ardelt (1997) said that wisdom is actually a better predictor of life satisfaction than the existence of life goals such as physical health in a research. Individual who is satisfied with his/her life will give an inner happiness effect that influence their well-being and will influence physical healthiness too. Wisdom is a result from learning and cognitively logical thinking process, creative and critical in meaning every problem faced by considering every aspect possible. Wisdom and positive thinking is related, an open minded and positive individual results stabile psychological emotion so they can organize themselves, physically or psychologically.

Wisdom of one's self and environment open up great opportunities to the vast knowledge and acceptance as wisdom on everything happen, either pleasant or unpleasant experiences as stages of inner wisdom and behave maturity process formation. In this study, researcher will answer these questions; what wisdom is, characters of the wise, factors that influence wisdom, and how big the difference between age category is (research about construction field employees in Jember).

This research aims to provide an empirical study about the meaning of wisdom, character of the wise, factors influencing wisdom, and how big the difference of some particular age groups wisdom is (research about construction field employees in Jember).

## **Literature Review**

### **Wisdom Definition**

Wisdom is a reasoning ability as a part of depth understanding and knowledge, learning about ideas and environments, judgment, and using information expeditiously and perspicacity (Stanberg, 1985). In its development, wisdom includes cognitive function to seek truth by doing “reflective thinking” so it produces a behavior that reflects care, for the good that goes beyond personal interests.

In line with the statement above, Ardel (2003) placed wisdom as a combination of cognitive, reflective, and affective aspects in one’s personality. Wisdom cognitive dimension refers to the ability to understand life, how they can understand the deeper meaning from a phenomenon and event, especially those related to intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects (Ardelt 2000b; Blanchard Fields and Norris 1995; Chandler and Holliday 1990; Kekes 1983; Sternberg 1990a). Wisdom reflective dimension is the most important one because it pushes the development, either cognitive or wisdom affective elements (Ardelt 2000a). Through self reflection practice in wisdom, one’s learning to not giving reaction to pleasant sensation, to accept truth, and to acknowledge and understand other people’s and one’s motive and behavior (Hart 1987). Wisdom affective dimension assess the existence of positive emotion and behavior toward things, such as sympathy and compassion, inexistence of emotion and indifferent or negative behavior toward other people.

Standberg, (2002) thought that wisdom is based on reasoning relativistic and dialectic, those relate to development that may affect regulation. The way of thinking will drive awareness of unpredictable nature of life events. Dialectical thinking on the other hand, involves the awareness of integrity of knowledge through conflict resolution. In line with that, Kramer (2000) reviewed numerous study on wisdom. He saw that wisdom two main elements mainly are openness to experience and capacity to reflect and struggle with difficult existential life problems. One of the other qualities found on those study is wise people’s ability to find positive and negative meaning in life experience. Kramer believed that wise people were able to transform negative experience to life-affirming experience. Through this process, they may even show a sense of tension.

A study from RavenaHelsonand Paul Wink (1987) shows that there are two forms of wisdom, (1) practical wisdom consists of special ability such as good interpersonal skill, clear thinking, bigger tolerance, andgenerativity. (2) transcendental wisdom, which has spiritual and philosophical quality. It tells the frontiers of knowledge, rich complexity of human experience, and a sense of personal and individual aspects that goes beyond human experience.

Particularly, wisdom is conceptualized as the knowledge application towards achieving through a balance between several interests, including other people’s and one’s interests. An analytic factor study done by Staudinger (1997) describes implicit wisdom tradition theory which refers to (a) and incredible knowledge about wisdom acquisition; (b) incredible knowledge about the application (c) incredible knowledge about life contextual and temporal variation; and (d) the related competency.

Batles and Staudinger’s (2000) explicit theory saw the three sides of a related study that utilizes an explicit theory of wisdom. (1) involves a perspective that sees personality traits and how they may be associated with wisdom, in this case related to an individual’s psychosocial relationship. (2) cognitive post-formal wisdom and dialectical thinking wisdom method is defined to be a kind of thinking that is more complex than just being able to use abstract ideas or concepts. (3) wisdom as a specific example of excellencein one’s life.

### **Wise Person Characteristics**

Baltes and Kunzmann formulated wise person's characteristics based on the results of their research (Sternberg & Jordan, 2005), namely: (1) Look at the phenomenon from various perspectives (viewpoints) more thoroughly; (2) Display detached attitude (self-limiting) and less emotional. This does not mean that a wise person has a flat and shallow natural emotion. Instead, a wise person can show concern for other people's problems because of their fundamental knowledge about complex life issues, and success and failure dynamics across human's life-span.

In addition, they are also capable to limit the negative effects of problem that could cripple their own empowerment. Baltes called this ability as "constructive Melancholy"; (3) Concern to personal development, insight, and other people's well-being more than life full of pleasure and comfort; (4) Use cooperative approach in resolving interpersonal conflicts more instead of using dominant, submissive, or escaping approach; (5) Display more process and environment oriented affective structures, such as inspiration and interests, rather than evaluative orientation and self-centered.

### **Factors that Influence Wisdom**

These are factors that can affect wisdom development in one's life:

1. *Age*  
Age is seen as one of the factors affecting the wisdom level with the assumption that an individual will have more life experiences that are more likely to be wiser than the younger generation. Age was also nominated as one of the wisdom determinants, considered it only appears after a spiritual awakening in elderly age (Sternberg & Jordan, 2005).
2. *Sex*  
Sex is believed to affect one's wisdom. Denney stated that men are seen as having more intellectual wisdom while women are wiser in social relationships (Sternberg & Jordan, 2005).
3. *Life Experience*  
Life experiences that sharpen one's perspective, such as education and skills as well as working in a specific field can also sharpen one's wisdom (Dacey & Travers, 2002).
4. *Culture*  
Culture is also believed to affect one's wisdom. Western culture sees wisdom more intellectually, that often emphasis on the combination of cognitive ability, insight, reflective attitude, compassionate towards others, and tranquility. Eastern culture is more focused on spiritual wisdom (Schaie & Willis, 2011).
5. *External Condition*  
External conditions also affect one's wisdom, for example individuals who live in a supportive social environment during early adulthood is positively related with wisdom in the next 40 years (Sternberg & Jordan, 2005).
6. *Personality*  
Kramer said that personality influences one's wisdom. Individuals who have cognitive, reflective and emotional quality that contribute to wisdom tend to be educated, physically healthier, have more positive relationship with others, and have higher value in a variety of personality tests for openness to new experiencedimension (Sigelman and Rider, 2003). Baltes added generativity and creativity dimensions as personality factors that are considered able to predict wisdom better than intelligence factor (Santrock, 2011)

## Research Method

The study was conducted to construction field male employees aged 20 to 70. This study aims to examine how big the wisdom level difference construction field male employees in Jember, with few age categories; category (20-35) years, category 2 (36-50) years, and category 3 (51-70) years. The study was conducted in quantitative approach. Respondents were employees of private construction field in Jember, male (N = 30 people). Data is collected with questionnaire method. Wisdom is measured by Empirical Assessment of a Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale by Monika Ardelt, University of Florida. Researcher did a modification by making it in the form of Likert scale. The data were analyzed using Shapiro Wilk normality test which showed normal distribution, followed by independent sample t-test.

## Result and Discussion

The results showed that there was no significant difference between wisdom level on male employees, with a score of Sig. (2-tailed) comparison. Category A to B (0.202), categories A to C (0.222), and category B to C (0,939), which means the three categories showed values greater than 0.05. This means that score variants between each category are not proven or that those three groups had the same variant. Thus it can be concluded that there is no wisdom level difference between construction field male employees of any age category in Jember.

The results obtained in the study showed no significant difference in wisdom level between the age categories. Similarly, individual score results showed that wisdom level is in normal and tend to be high level. This research shows that age is not the main factor affecting the wisdom of the individual, so we need to look from different angles to determine wisdom factors that necessary to observe, such as internal factor, from within the individual's own example with cognitive, reflective, and affective as well as external factors such as one's social environment, work, life experiences, and culture.

In behavior science, there are three models describing relation between age and wisdom that started from adolescence age (Sternberg & Jordan, 2005). Those three models are:

- a. *Positive Model*, which said that age has positive correlation to wisdom. This means the older an individual is, the wiser he/she is. This model is not supported by empirical studies.
- b. *Decline Model*, contrary to positive model, this model says that the older an individual is, the more their wisdom will be decreased. This model is also not supported by empirical studies.
- c. *Crystallized Model*, based on Baltes's theory that wisdom that has been obtained in young adulthood will remain until elderly. This is the reason why the elderly has the same opportunity with young adults to be wise. This model suggests that age does not increase or decrease wisdom. This model has most empirical evidence than the others.

One theory that supports Crystallized Model is that wisdom is seen as crystallized intelligence that will survive until the end of life or until disease deters it (Schaie & Willis, 2011). Crystallized intelligence theory is supported by Baltes assumption that after people age over 75 years old, their wisdom began to decrease along with the decreasing of their cognitive function (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). One of his study also said that individual expertise in one field contributed wisdom in their life more than just one age factor (Sigelman & Rider, 2003).

## Discussion

Wisdom is the result of cognitive, creative and critical thinking and learning process in defining problems occurred while considering all influencing aspects. Wisdom and positive thinking are closely related, individuals who are open-minded and positive generate stable psychological emotion so they can manage themselves both physically and psychologically.

Wisdom is an aspect of one's personality in building strength to face life problems across the life span. Wisdom can be developed through one's internal and external aspects; internal aspects of wisdom are cognitive, reflective and affective. While external factors that can affect the wisdom are age, gender, social environment, life experiences, and culture.

Individuals who have high level of wisdom is an individual who seea phenomenon from various perspectives, able to control him/herself affectively by showing stabile attitude and not easily affected by the circumstances, more concerned to others development, insight and welfare than personal interests.

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