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Modeling Wisdom Based on Hedonic Beliefs and Sensation-Seeking with Self-Compassion Among Students

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to model wisdom based on hedonic beliefs and sensation-seeking, with self-compassion as a mediating variable among university students.

Methods: This applied study adopted a descriptive–correlational design using path analysis. The statistical population consisted of male and female students enrolled in universities in Shahrekord during the 2023–2024 academic year. Based on the recommendations of Klein (2010) and Stevens (2009), which suggest a minimum of 15 participants per indicator, a sample of 510 students was determined and selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using Ardelt's Wisdom Scale (2003), the Hedonic Beliefs Questionnaire (Snaith et al., 1995), Zuckerman's Sensation-Seeking Scale (1980), and Neff et al.'s Self-Compassion Scale (2003). Data analysis was conducted using inferential statistics and structural modeling procedures. Model parameters, including direct, indirect, and total effects, were estimated using the Maximum Likelihood method, and model fit indices were examined.

Results: The correlation matrix indicated significant relationships between hedonic beliefs, sensation-seeking, self-compassion, and wisdom. Path analysis results demonstrated that hedonic beliefs and sensation-seeking exerted both direct and indirect effects on wisdom through self-compassion. The proposed model showed satisfactory fit indices, supporting its adequacy in explaining variations in students' wisdom.

Conclusions: The findings highlight the important role of self-compassion in linking motivational and experiential traits to wisdom. Enhancing self-compassion may help channel sensation-seeking tendencies and hedonic beliefs toward adaptive psychological growth and wisdom development among university students.

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Introduction

Wisdom (*Khrad*) is one of the central topics in the behavioral sciences and has attracted considerable attention from researchers and scholars across multiple disciplines—particularly psychology—in recent years. Over the past decades, scholars in psychology and developmental sciences have attempted to offer comprehensive and unified definitions of wisdom; however, the diversity of theoretical perspectives has hindered the development of a single, all-encompassing, and operational definition.

Despite these differing viewpoints, researchers generally agree that wisdom encompasses knowledge, insight, reflection, and the integration of personal resources with concern for the interests and well-being of others (Christ Johnson, Fowers, Darnell, & Pollard, 2021). Accordingly, over the past two decades, wisdom has been recognized as a crucial cognitive skill within psychological literature, receiving substantial attention and forming the basis of a growing body of research (Yang, 2014). Some scholars conceptualize wisdom as a form of expertise or proficiency in addressing fundamental life issues related to meaning-making, management, planning, and understanding existence. Given its emphasis on excellence, wisdom is often regarded as a specialized form of expertise in conduct and life meaning. In this context, wisdom has been identified as a key factor in the construction of a good life (Kalbāgh & Bodnik, 2023).

Wisdom emerges from experience and knowledge and extends beyond the mere accumulation of information; rather, it involves organizing, integrating, and applying knowledge appropriately to enhance individuals' psychological well-being (Oueungochukuchai, 2020). Wisdom is associated with numerous positive characteristics, including self-integration and maturity, sound judgment, interpersonal competence, and a distinctive understanding of life. Its fundamental capacity lies in the ability to impart meaning to life—both for the wise individual and for others—which underscores its significance (Grossmann, 2016). Consequently, wisdom represents a profound construct closely linked to maturity, timely and sound decision-making, and living a good life. It is also associated with a wide range of psychological variables and constructs. Based on various definitions, some researchers have operationalized wisdom by suggesting that wise individuals are motivated by positive psychological values and maintain a consistently positive and integrated outlook on life (Webster et al., 2018). Empirical findings further indicate that wisdom enhances

emotional self-regulation in challenging situations and contributes to psychological relief and inner tranquility (Walsh & Reims, 2015).

A review of existing research demonstrates that wisdom is significantly related to cognitive ability and memory (Ardelt & Ferrari, 2019), mindfulness and self-awareness (Wilson et al., 2020), intelligence and higher-order mental functions (Sternberg, 2013), philosophical orientation and social functionalism (Yang, 2014), emotion regulation (Arney & Black, 2015), and mental health (Ardelt, 2005), among other factors. In light of these findings, an important question arises: according to existing wisdom models and empirical research, to what extent do intellectual, cognitive, reflective, emotional, and personality factors contribute to the prediction of wisdom?

Another psychological construct related to wisdom is *savoring*. Savoring refers to the ability to attend to positive experiences and regulate one's thoughts and behaviors in ways that intensify and prolong positive emotions (Bryant et al., 2020). Positive emotions may be enhanced through recalling past experiences, appreciating the present moment, or anticipating future pleasures. Individuals can increase enjoyment by engaging in thoughts and behaviors that amplify positive emotions—such as reminiscing and counting blessings—or by reducing thoughts and behaviors that diminish them, such as excessive focus on negative events or unrealistic fantasies. Maladaptive responses, including distraction and persistent problem-focused rumination, have been associated with increased depressive symptoms, reduced positive affect, and lower life satisfaction (Reese et al., 2016). In contrast, higher savoring ability is linked to greater resilience, fewer depressive symptoms, increased happiness, and enhanced well-being (Smith & Honey, 2019). Chang and Angie (2020) demonstrated that mindfulness in adulthood predicts savoring positive experiences through cognitive reappraisal, providing further support for the role of mindfulness in enhancing savoring. Moreover, savoring has been identified as an effective positive psychological intervention that teaches strategies for recognizing and amplifying meaningful moments, particularly within interpersonal and couple relationships. Research suggests that savoring is a significant predictor of mental health, memory recall, and subjective well-being among couples (Singh & Tripathi, 2018).

Another construct associated with wisdom is *sensation-seeking behavior*. According to Zuckerman, sensation-seeking is defined as the need for varied, novel, and complex sensations

and experiences, accompanied by a willingness to take physical or social risks to obtain such experiences (Javahari Mohammadi et al., 2020). Studies conducted in the United States have shown that individuals with high sensation-seeking tendencies are more likely to engage in higher levels of sexual activity. Humans possess a fundamental motivation to process environmental stimuli in order to maintain optimal levels of arousal; when stimulation falls below this optimal level, individuals may experience negative mood states (Zuckerman, 1978, cited in Dehghan Ibn-e Vahid, 2019). Zuckerman's (1987) research on sensory deprivation revealed that volunteers shared common characteristics, including high curiosity, enjoyment of novelty, and a willingness to take risks to experience new situations. Individuals scoring high on sensation-seeking measures are classified as high sensation-seekers, whereas those scoring low are referred to as sensation-avoiders. A central feature of sensation-seeking is the acceptance of risk. Chronic's research on mountain climbers demonstrated that they score significantly higher on sensation-seeking scales than non-athletes (Eskandarnejad & Abdi, 2022). Additionally, research indicates that sensation-seeking is directly and indirectly related—through emotion regulation and social media use—to risky sexual behaviors, accounting for part of the association between personality traits and such behaviors (Ahmadi Chegini et al., 2022).

Given the importance of wisdom and its documented relationships with numerous cognitive and psychological variables, as well as the limited research specifically addressing wisdom, the present study aims to develop a conceptual model of wisdom among university students. Considering the existing literature and the lack of comprehensive domestic and international research examining the direct and indirect relationships among savoring, sensation-seeking, and self-compassion, the objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the causal relationships between these variables and students' wisdom using standardized questionnaires and path analysis;
2. Assess the impact of savoring, sensation-seeking, and self-compassion on wisdom;
3. Evaluate the goodness of fit of the proposed model within the target population.

In the proposed model, the latent endogenous variable (students' wisdom) and the latent exogenous variables (savoring, sensation-seeking, and self-compassion) are measured through their respective observed indicators. Accordingly, the primary research question guiding this study is:

Is the proposed conceptual model of students' wisdom supported with respect to savoring beliefs, sensation-seeking, and self-compassion?

Material and Methods

This study employed a descriptive–correlational design using path analysis to examine the relationships among savoring, sensation seeking, self-compassion, and wisdom. The statistical population consisted of all male and female university students enrolled in universities in Shahrekord during the 2024–2025 academic year. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation across academic fields and gender.

Sample size determination was based on established recommendations for structural modeling. According to Klein (2010) and Stevens (2009), a minimum of 15 participants per observed indicator is required for path analysis. Given that the present study included 34 indicators, the required sample size was estimated at 510 participants. Questionnaires were randomly distributed among the selected students, and completed responses were collected for analysis.

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were calculated to assess means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine associations among variables. Path analysis was conducted to test the hypothesized model, with parameter estimation performed using the Maximum Likelihood method. All analyses were carried out using SPSS version 26 and AMOS version 24 software.

Measurement Instruments

Wisdom was assessed using Ardelt's Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale (3D-WS; 2003), which consists of 39 items measuring cognitive, reflective, and emotional dimensions on a 5-point Likert scale. Previous studies have reported acceptable reliability and validity for the scale, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in the present study to confirm its factor structure.

Savoring was measured using the Savoring Beliefs Inventory developed by Snaith et al. (1995). This 14-item instrument assesses individuals' capacity to derive pleasure across four domains. Items are scored dichotomously, with higher scores indicating greater savoring capacity. CFA was used to confirm construct validity.

Sensation seeking was measured using Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking Scale, Form V (SSS-V; 1980), a 40-item forced-choice questionnaire assessing four dimensions of sensation seeking. The scale has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties in both original and Iranian samples, and CFA was applied in the present study.

Self-compassion was assessed using Neff's Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; 2003), a 26-item measure rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale evaluates six components of self-compassion, with higher scores reflecting greater self-compassion. Reliability and validity were confirmed through CFA in this study.

Table1. Validity and Reliability Indices of Research Instruments

Characteristic	Wisdom Scale	Savoring Beliefs	Sensation Seeking	Self-Compassion
Chi-square (χ^2)	1817.708	854.70	708.1817	280.128
Degrees of Freedom (df)	692	59	692	281
χ^2/df	2.626	1.200	2.626	0.996

Results

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in Table 2. The mean scores indicated moderate to high levels of savoring (M = 40.33, SD = 3.23), sensation seeking (M = 99.83, SD = 5.36), wisdom (M = 43.12, SD = 3.23), and self-compassion (M = 74.44, SD = 3.45). Skewness and kurtosis values for all variables fell within acceptable ranges (±2), suggesting that the assumption of normality was met and supporting the use of Maximum Likelihood estimation.

The correlation matrix (Table 3) revealed significant positive associations among the main variables. Wisdom showed significant correlations with savoring ($r = 0.289$, $p < 0.01$), sensation seeking ($r = 0.287$, $p < 0.01$), and self-compassion ($r = 0.245$, $p < 0.05$). In addition, savoring was significantly related to sensation seeking ($r = 0.362$, $p < 0.01$), indicating meaningful interrelations among predictors and mediators.

Structural path analysis results are reported in Table 4. Savoring exerted significant direct effects on self-compassion ($\beta = 0.12$, $t = 3.42$, $p < 0.01$) and wisdom ($\beta = 0.12$, $t = 3.35$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, sensation seeking showed significant direct effects on self-compassion ($\beta = 0.11$, $t = 3.04$, $p < 0.01$) and wisdom ($\beta = 0.11$, $t = 2.91$, $p < 0.01$). Self-compassion also had a significant direct effect on wisdom ($\beta = 0.10$, $t = 2.91$, $p < 0.01$), supporting its mediating role.

The indirect effects analysis (Table 5) further confirmed that both savoring ($\beta = 0.03$, $t = 3.60$, $p < 0.01$) and sensation seeking ($\beta = 0.03$, $t = 3.52$, $p < 0.01$) influenced wisdom indirectly through self-compassion, indicating partial mediation.

Model fit indices (Table 6) demonstrated an excellent fit of the proposed model to the data ($\chi^2/df = 2.23$, CFI = 1.00, GFI = 1.00, AGFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.039). The structural model with standardized estimates is illustrated in Figure 1. Overall, the findings support the adequacy of the proposed model in explaining wisdom among students.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Savoring	40.33	3.228	-0.749	-1.650
Sensation Seeking	99.833	5.356	-0.320	-1.747
Wisdom	43.122	3.228	-0.205	-1.975
Self-Compassion	74.435	3.446	0.339	-1.231

Table 3. Correlation Matrix of Research Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
Savoring	1			
Sensation Seek	0.362**	1		
Self-Compassion	0.233	0.196	1	
Wisdom	0.245	0.287	0.289**	1

**p < 0.01 *p < 0.05

Table 4. Standardized Direct Effect Coefficients

Variable	β	T	Sig
Direct effect of savoring on			
Self-Compassion	0.12	3.42	0.01
Emotion Regulation	0.13	3.94	0.01
Wisdom	0.12	3.35	0.01
Sensation Seeking			
Self-Compassion	0.11	3.04	0.01
Emotion- Regulation	0.11	3.02	0.01
Wisdom	0.11	2.91	0.01
Self-Compassion			
Wisdom	0.10	2.91	0.01

Table 5. Standardized Indirect Effect Coefficients

Indirect Effects	β	t-value	p
Savoring → Wisdom	0.03	3.60	0.01
Sensation Seeking → Wisdom	0.03	3.52	0.01

Table 6. Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Student Model

Fit Index	Value
Chi-square (χ^2)	2.23
Degrees of Freedom (df)	1
χ^2/df	2.23
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	1
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	1
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI)	0.98
RMSEA	0.039
p-value	0.135

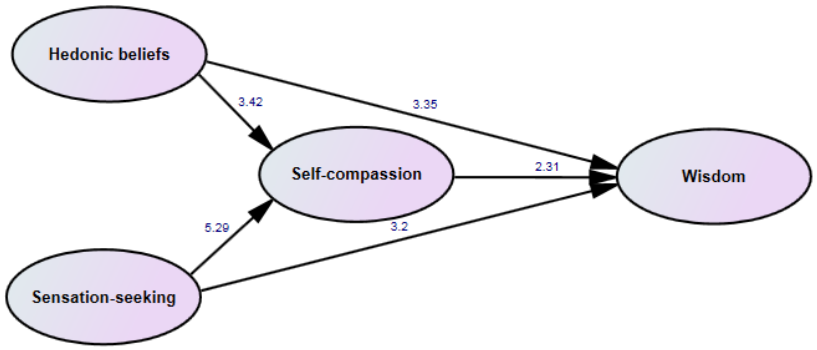

Figure 1. Research model with standardized estimates

Discussion

Given that this study was guided by specific hypotheses, the findings are discussed according to the proposed model and tested relationships. The proposed structural model explaining wisdom among students in Shahrekord demonstrated a good fit to the data. The fit indices ($\chi^2 = 2.23$, df = 1, $p = 0.135$; $\chi^2/df = 2.23$; GFI = 1.00; AGFI = 0.98; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA = 0.039) met established criteria for acceptable model fit, indicating that the hypothesized model adequately represents the observed relationships among variables.

Hypothesis 1: Direct Effect of Savoring Beliefs on Wisdom

The results supported the first hypothesis, showing that savoring beliefs had a significant positive direct effect on wisdom ($\beta = 0.12$, $t = 3.35$, $p < 0.01$). This finding is consistent with previous Iranian and international studies (Kord Noqabi & Vaisi, 2024; Kaveh Foroosani et al., 2023; Morāti et al., 2022, 2021). Savoring, a central construct in positive psychology, involves conscious attention to positive experiences and the use of emotion regulation strategies to enhance positive affect (Pitts, 2019). Prior research suggests that savoring facilitates psychological well-being by

enabling individuals to appreciate life experiences more deeply (Smith & Bryant, 2017). From the perspective of wisdom theory, this finding aligns particularly with the reflective dimension of wisdom, which emphasizes thoughtful reflection on life experiences, acceptance of personal strengths and limitations, and adaptive responses to challenges (Schmidt et al., 2012). Individuals who engage in savoring appear better equipped to draw meaning from experiences and respond to life events with greater balance and insight.

Hypothesis 2: Direct Effect of Sensation-Seeking on Wisdom

The second hypothesis was also supported, as sensation-seeking exerted a significant positive direct effect on wisdom ($\beta = 0.11$, $t = 3.02$, $p < 0.01$). This result aligns with prior findings (Eskandarnejad & Abdi, 2022; Javahari Mohammadi et al., 2020; Grossmann, 2016; Kalbāgh & Bodnik, 2023). According to Ardelt (2016), wisdom encompasses cognitive, reflective, and emotional dimensions that are closely linked to emotional health and mindfulness. Sensation-seeking may contribute to wisdom by exposing individuals to diverse emotional and experiential contexts, thereby facilitating meaning-making, emotional regulation, and adaptive decision-making. Wise individuals tend to accept life's fluctuations, derive meaning from challenges, and regulate emotional responses effectively (Lee, 2018). Thus, emotional engagement and experiential openness associated with sensation-seeking may support the development of wisdom when integrated adaptively.

Hypothesis 3: Mediating Role of Self-Compassion in the Relationship Between Savoring and Wisdom

The third hypothesis was confirmed, indicating that self-compassion significantly mediated the relationship between savoring beliefs and wisdom ($\beta = 0.03$, $t = 3.66$, $p < 0.01$). This finding is consistent with earlier studies (Kaveh Foroosani et al., 2023; Morāti et al., 2022, 2021; Elrefaei et al., 2021). Conceptually, wisdom is understood as a multidimensional construct involving cognitive insight, reflective perspective-taking, and emotional compassion (Glück, 2018; Grossmann, 2016). Self-compassion plays a foundational role in these dimensions by fostering emotional balance, reducing self-criticism, and promoting adaptive self-reflection. Savoring enhances positive emotional awareness, and when coupled with self-compassion, it appears to

strengthen individuals' capacity to integrate positive experiences into a coherent and wise life perspective.

Hypothesis 4: Mediating Role of Self-Compassion in the Relationship Between Sensation-Seeking and Wisdom

The fourth hypothesis was also supported, demonstrating that self-compassion mediated the relationship between sensation-seeking and wisdom ($\beta = 0.03$, $t = 3.59$, $p < 0.01$). This result aligns with previous research (Eskandarnejad & Abdi, 2022; Ahmadi Chegini et al., 2022; Walsh & Reims, 2015). Self-compassion appears to function as a regulatory mechanism that allows sensation-seeking individuals to process intense or risky experiences without excessive self-judgment. By providing emotional safety, self-compassion facilitates reflection, learning from failure, and emotional resilience (Keilham et al., 2018; March et al., 2018). Consequently, sensation-seeking tendencies can be transformed into opportunities for personal growth and integrative thinking—core elements of wisdom. Self-compassion thus promotes humility, openness, cognitive flexibility, and prosocial behavior, all of which contribute to wisdom development.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. First, reliance on self-report questionnaires may introduce mono-method bias and limit the depth of assessment. Second, the use of multiple lengthy instruments may have led to respondent fatigue. Future research should employ mixed-method designs, investigate cross-cultural variations in wisdom development, and examine neurological correlates using multimodal assessment approaches. Additionally, future studies could explore how self-compassion transforms sensation-seeking into reflective learning and emotional maturation pathways.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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