

## The Role of Quarter-Life Crisis Toward Personal Growth Initiative in Emerging Adulthood

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**Abstract.** Many people experience a quarter-life crisis at the age of 27th, which is considered an emerging adulthood phase, which affects the individual's personal growth initiative. This research was done to see the impact of the quarter-life crisis towards personal growth initiative. The method used for this research is quantitative correlational with the sample of 18-29 years old and domiciled in Surabaya. Data collection was done with an online questionnaire with a total of 107 respondents. Most of them are female, with the percentage of 54.2%, and aged 18 years old, with the percentage of 29.9%. Linear hypothesis test showed significant result with  $p$  value  $<0.001$ , and  $\beta$  -0.382. It means that the quarter-life crisis has negatively impacted personal growth initiative, meaning a higher quarter-life crisis would lead to lower personal growth initiative. This research is done in hope that readers would be able to understand how quarter-life crisis can affect their personal growth initiative.

**Keywords:** emerging adulthood, personal growth initiative, quarter-life crisis

**Abstrak.** Banyak orang mengalami quarter-life crisis di usia 27 tahun yang tergolong sebagai fase emerging adulthood dan diduga mampu mempengaruhi tingkat personal growth initiative individu. Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk menguji hipotesis penulis terkait pengaruh keberadaan quarter-life crisis terhadap personal growth initiative. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kuantitatif korelasional dengan partisipan berusia 18-29 tahun dan berdomisili di Surabaya. Pengambilan data yang dilakukan menggunakan kuesioner online dengan total responden berjumlah 107. Responden terbanyak berjenis kelamin perempuan dengan persentase sebesar 54,2% dan usia paling banyak 18 tahun dengan persentase 29,9%. Berdasarkan analisis data melalui uji hipotesis linear, didapatkan hasil signifikan dengan  $p$  value  $<0.001$ ,  $\beta$  -0.382. Hal ini berarti quarter-life crisis berpengaruh negatif terhadap personal growth initiative. Jadi, semakin tinggi quarter-life crisis maka semakin rendah tingkat personal growth initiative. Melalui penelitian ini, pembaca diharapkan bisa lebih memahami jika quarter-life crisis mempengaruhi personal growth initiative individu yang sedang mengalaminya.

**Kata kunci:** emerging adulthood, personal growth initiative, quarter-life crisis

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Facing numerous life choices can trigger personal growth to achieve one's desired life quality, which is known as the personal growth initiative (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). According to Yang and Chang (2014), personal growth initiative has a positive relationship with psychological adjustment function or adaptability in facing everyday life challenges. Researchers also mentioned that personal growth initiative consists of four dimensions, which are Readiness for Change, meaning having the readiness to make specific change(s) towards oneself, Planfulness, meaning the ability to map out a strategy to grow, Using Resources, meaning knowing well the assets available, whether it's material or immaterial, and lastly, Intentional Behavior, meaning being able to carry out the personal growth process. Personal Growth Initiative includes the cognitive components of self-efficacy, including beliefs, attitudes, and values that support personal growth. It involves implementing these cognitions across growth domains, meaning the behavioral components put into practice the cognitions related to personal growth, initiating the transition process (Robitschek, 1998).

On the other hand, confusion caused by the variety of life choices, constant changes, and panic due to feelings of helplessness can cause a crisis in life, which is called the quarter-life crisis (Robbins & Wilner, 2001). According to Atwood and Scholtz (2008), the quarter-life crisis is a stage of development, where everyone is to be shaped into having strong character. However, if an individual doesn't manage to pass this stage correctly, they would experience psychological disorders such as anxiety, stress, and frustration. Fischer (2008) also defined quarter-life crisis as the fear of the continuation of life in the future, that emerges around the age of mid 20s. Based on the previous statements, the quarter-life crisis

can be defined as a developmental stage that emerges when an individual encounters changes due to leaving their comfort zone, and facing instability and numerous life choices, which makes them feel helpless and afraid of facing the future. Quarter-life crisis also consists of seven dimensions, which is Indecisiveness, desperation, negative self valuation, trapped in difficult situations, anxiety, stress, interpersonal relation anxiety (Agustin, 2012).

Based on a survey conducted in 2017, 75% of people at the age of 27 in East Java, Indonesia, have experienced or experiencing quarter-life crisis, showing indications in the form of excessive fear of the future, anxiety, and helplessness. The common problems that people generally experience during the quarter-life crisis is academic confusion, career plans, and marriage (Budiarti, 2021). The impact of the quarter-life crisis makes an individual feel left behind, because they perceive other people around the same age or gender as having better achievements than they do, causing the individual to lose their identity (in terms of career, relationships, and hope) (Suyono, Tsana, Kumalasari, Asteria, & Fitriana, 2021; Fischer, 2008). Therefore, they would choose to not hang out with them. Consequently, individuals who are experiencing the quarter-life crisis tend to withdraw from the environment.

Another impact of the quarter-life crisis can be motivation derivation, especially for those in their mid 20s, also known as emerging adulthood (Agustin, 2012). Because, they often get success standards from the environment and from their own perceptions. Decreased motivation occurs because to fulfill the standards is not based on a strong self determination to achieve them but to satisfy the society (Sondakh & Theresa, 2020).

But, despite all the negative impact, there are also some positive impacts on individuals that go through quarter-life crises such as individual resilience. According to Gempito and Yuwono (2022), quarter-life crisis will lead an individual to a certain behavior that pushes them to achieve resilience such as becoming more religious, responsible, and being able to self-evaluate to look for better solutions for their problems.

Emerging adulthood is the developmental stage that occurs after the individual has passed through adolescence and before entering early adulthood (Arnett, 2004). This phase occurs after the dependent period in the childhood and adolescent phase has passed, but on the other hand, in this phase, the individual has not been able to carry responsibilities as an adult so they explore themselves and their world view more. This exploration contributes in making emerging adulthood a phase of instability, because in their efforts to explore themselves, individuals experience changes more often in terms of love, education, and work, compared to other stages of development (Tanner, Arnett, & Leis, 2008).

In research conducted by Pinggolio (2015), it is said that individuals in emerging adulthood have a vulnerability to experiencing the quarter-life crisis as a result of pressure from work, relationships, and various expectations to become truly successful people. When viewed as a potential problem, the quarter-life crisis can basically be linked to the theory of self-fulfilling prophecy to describe conditions in which an individual's expectations will come true for him. This happens because of a psychological reaction that causes an individual to meet certain expectations (Somad, 2020). To sum it up, certain expectations cause the individual to try to make it happen and in the process, they

will face many changes and choices that trigger a quarter-life crisis.

Both the quarter-life crisis and personal growth initiative have been studied before. There is a research on the quarter-life crisis which discusses the quarter-life crisis from a work area perspective (Robinson, 2018). There is also research that discusses how personal growth initiatives affect positive factors in supporting one's life quality, such as family functioning and self-autonomy (Anantasari, Pawitra & Dharma, 2021). Another study examined the effect of self-esteem in partner selection in early adult women who experienced the quarter-life crisis. In this study, the quarter-life crisis is only a form of respondent criteria in the research area (Rosalinda & Michael, 2019). There are also those who explain the relationship between personal growth initiative and external factors such as parents' expectations (Palupi, Woro, & Salma, 2020). Other studies offer interventions to get through the quarter-life crisis (Syifa'ussurur, Husna, Mustaqim, & Fahmi, 2021).

The discussion between the variables of the quarter-life crisis and personal growth initiative has not been widely discussed side by side. Previous research is more based on work settings, factors that support individual development and those that are external, quarter-life crisis as research subject criteria, and interventions that can help individuals get through the quarter-life crisis. Meanwhile, this research aims to discuss the quarter-life crisis from a broader perspective, by seeing it from different aspects in life, such as intrapersonal and other life aspects in general. This study wants to discuss how a quarter-life crisis, as a conflict, can actually have a positive effect on psychological functions, namely personal growth initiatives. The author also places the quarter-life crisis as the main variable to be

researched, in relation to how it is able to foster personal growth initiatives.

According to Robinson (2015), when a person experiences the quarter-life crisis, there are 5 phases to be faced. The first phase is the emergence of various feelings when choosing and deciding the life choices to be lived. The second phase is having a very large life-changing motivation. The third phase is when the individual dares to leave their career to seek new experiences despite it being in a condition. The fourth phase is when the individual is able to determine and control the direction of his life goals. Fifth phase is to live a new experience or life in accordance with one's wishes and interests.

Going back to its own definition, there are two possible outcomes to occur as someone goes through the quarter-life crisis phase. An individual can either successfully pass through the quarter-life crisis and develop as a person, or the second possible outcome, failing at defeating the crisis and has the potential to experience stress and anxiety disorders. The outcome mentioned is also in accordance with the meaning of life theory coined by Viktor Frankl, where individuals will find their life purpose through an evaluation process of their own condition, direction of life, and environmental values that interact in the individual's life (Hanafi, Hidayah, & At, 2018). One of the phenomena that encourage people to experience this evaluation process is through conflicts such as the quarter-life crisis phase.

According to this, the authors hypothesize that the quarter-life crisis has the potential to increase the personal growth initiative of an individual. This is due to the stress that is undeniably experienced as one goes through the quarter-life crisis phase. However, stress is not always destructive. Eustress (a form of stress) is able to increase one's productivity

and encourage individuals to develop to get out of the crisis (Musabiq & Karimah, 2018). As previously explained, ideally, individuals who successfully get out of the quarter-life crisis phase may develop into better individuals or otherwise, will be left in a bad mental state. However, in reality, according to Budiarti (2021), there are still a big portion of individuals who are failing at stepping out of the quarter-life crisis. This study aims to determine the effect of the quarter-life crisis on personal growth initiatives. That way, individuals can get familiar with the factors that influence personal growth initiatives when they are in a quarter-life crisis.

## **METHOD**

This study uses the quantitative correlational research method which aims to determine the effect of the quarter-life crisis on personal growth initiative. The participants of the study are those in the age range of 18 - 29 years old (Emerging Adulthood) who are domiciled in Surabaya. The age range was chosen because it is the phase where individuals in general are facing a number or significant pressure from the adulting process (Agustin, 2012). The number of samples taken is based on the calculation of the rule of thumb (VanVoorhis & Megan, 2007), with a total of at least 50 people, and the author successfully collected the number of 107 respondents. The sampling technique used in this study is Accidental Sampling which is related to the ease of access around the Surabaya area.

Data collection was carried out through an online questionnaire compiled in google form. The questionnaire will be distributed by the Researchers in the form of a google form link through social media, such as Whatsapp, Line, Instagram and other platforms, but adjusted to the intended demographic. The duration of the distribution

of the specified questionnaire is from the date of 26th of October up to 8th of November. As a form of appreciation and encouragement to attract participants in filling out the google form, the research team provides a reward in the form of an e-money balance worth IDR 50,000 for 3 lucky participants. The selection of winners will be determined based on the results of the lottery conducted at the end of the data collection period. As a form of ethical procedure, participants will fill out the informed consent provided by the researcher on the first page of the form, and will only fill out the questionnaire if they have agreed to all the requirements listed.

The instrument for measuring quarter-life crisis was developed by Hassler (2010) and translated into Bahasa by Inayah Agustin (Agustin, 2012). This tool identifies whether an individual is experiencing a quarter-life crisis with the highest score of 150 and 72 becomes the benchmark. With a minimum number of 72, it is categorized as being in a quarter-life crisis condition. This instrument has been validated by Husain (2022) and has Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.930. There are 25 items (favorable) with answer choices using a Likert scale with a score range of 1 (very uncharacteristic of me) to 6 (very characteristic of me).

The instrument developed by Robitschek, Yang, Villalba, and Shigemoto (2019) is to identify one's personal growth initiative. There are 9 items (favorable) with answer choices using Likert scale and score range of 1 (very uncharacteristic of me) to 6 (very characteristic of me). This instrument has been validated by Salim and Yuliawati (2021) and has a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability of 0.724-0.829. Data analysis will be carried out by a data analysis software, JASP.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### a. Demographic Data

These following are the demographic data of respondents in this study:

Table 1. Demographic Data of Study Respondents for Gender and Age

Demographic Data		
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	58	54.206
Male	49	45.794
Total	107	100.000
Age	Frequency	Percentage
18	32	29.907
19	36	33.645
20	24	22.430
21	6	5.607
22	4	3.738
24	1	0.935
26	1	0.935
29	3	2.804
Missing	0	0.000
Total	107	100.000

The gender of most involved participants in our study were females with the number of 58 participants (54.2%) and males adding up to 49 with a percentage of 45.8%. The age of most involved participants in our study were 19th y.o with a percentage of 33.6%, followed by 18th y.o with a percentage of 29.9%, which are considered as individuals under the transition to adulthood.

### b. Variable Reliability Test

Table 2. Variable Reliability

#### Quarter-Life Crisis and Personal Growth Initiative Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CITC
QLC	0.936	0.283-0.754
PGI	0.855	0.399-0.733

Quarter-Life Crisis Reliability Test showed the amount of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.936 and CTIC with the number range from 0.283 - 0.754. Whereas Personal Growth Initiative Reliability Test showed the amount of

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.855 and CTIC with the number range from 0.399 - 0.733. It showed that the results of the Quarter-Life Crisis and Personal Growth Initiative in this study is Reliable.

### c. Scale Test

Table 3. Quarter-Life Crisis Test Result

Total QLC	
Mean	92.991
Std. Deviation	24.102
Minimum	40.000
Maximum	141.000

Based on the table above, the total score of Quarter-Life Crisis on the overall respondents showed an average of 92.9, way above the number that shows the presence of Quarter-Life Crisis, which is 72 according to Hassler (2009).

Table 4. Linear Regression per Quarter-Life Crisis Dimension

Dimensions	Unstandardized	<i>p</i>
Indecisiveness	-0.559	0.066
Desperation	-0.268	0.489
Negative Self Valuation	0.258	0.161
Trapped in Difficult Situations	-0.423	0.051
Anxiety	-0.672	0.172
Stress	0.694	0.046
Interpersonal Relation Anxiety	-0.269	0.270

According to the Significance test between the quarter-life crisis dimensions and personal growth initiative, Stress and Negative Self Valuation is the only dimensions that showed  $\beta$  positive. Which means the higher the individuals stress and

negative self valuation, the higher the personal growth initiative too. But only the stress dimension showed significant results toward personal growth initiative with *p value* less than 0.05.

### d. Hypothesis Test

The linear regression hypothesis test came up with a significant result, showing *p value* = less than 0.001, *F* is 17.901,  $\beta$  is -0.382, meaning higher quarter-life crisis would lead to lower personal growth initiative, with  $R^2$  in the amount of 0.146 as how the quarter-life crisis affects personal growth initiative.

The result of this study is contrary to the hypothesis. The result shows that the presence of the quarter-life crisis has a significant role toward personal growth initiative. This is proven by the linear regression hypothesis test that showed significant results between the independent and dependent variables. Important to note, even if there was significance found, it has also been proven negative, meaning that higher quarter-life crisis would lead to lower personal growth initiative.

There are some factors that could possibly cause the result as it was. The majority of respondents are around 18-19 years old, whereas quarter-life crisis claim to be affecting people emerging into adulthood more (18-29 years old). It is possible that the respondents might just enter the phase of the quarter-life crisis where they haven't been motivated enough to develop personal growth initiative. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the hypothesis is also based on the eustress theory where individuals will only be able to increase their productivity and develop themselves once they face the right amount of stress and get the right motivation to help them get out of a crisis (Musabiq & Karimah, 2018).

It is also important to note that different sex affects how vulnerable individuals are to quarter-life crisis. According to a research conducted by Brebner (2003), women are known to be more vulnerable to negative emotions than men. It means that they are more vulnerable to quarter-life crisis, considering individuals are more likely to experience negative emotions during this crisis.

Some quarter-life crisis dimensions can also be the cause of the negative correlation found between the variables used in the study. The anxiety and interpersonal relation anxiety can cause the personal growth initiative to decrease. According to Sitompul (2021), the correlation between psychological distress like anxiety, can significantly affect the personal growth initiative. The higher the anxiety, the lower one's personal growth initiative will be. This is similar to the writer's study. But it is important to keep in mind that the previous research conducted the study on respondents with childhood abuse history. So there are also other factors affecting the study.

In this case, the results showed that two out of seven dimensions of the quarter-life crisis positively affected the personal growth initiative. Those two dimensions are stress and negative self evaluation. But only the stress dimension has high significance. The other five dimensions however negatively affect the personal growth initiative, even though their significance impacts are low. It means that higher stress will lead to higher personal growth initiative. The term "stress" here refers to Eustress, which is a form of stress that is able to increase one's productivity and encourage individuals to develop to get out of a crisis (Musabiq & Karimah, 2018). This is also the reason why this study resulted in a negative impact between the quarter-life crisis and personal

growth initiative, because the other five dimensions showed a negative impact, whereas one of them is positive but has low impact.

There wasn't any previous research that studied the same variables in one as the writers. But there is similar research that studies the correlation between personal growth initiative and future time perspective by Mutiasari and Sunawan (2021), where the result showed that the higher the individual's personal growth initiative, the greater their future time perspective is. Future time perspective was defined as individual thoughts of what one's future would be like (Mutiasari & Sunawan, 2021), considering that the quarter-life crisis is related to the anxiousness and helplessness of facing the future, as mentioned in the introduction.

It's obvious that both of these variables are related in some way. The future time perspectives create a certain picture of the future an individual wants. And then, in the process of achieving it, individuals might be facing obstacles that can lead to the quarter-life crisis. But there is also some difference when it comes to these variables or the studies that lead to different results. In the previous study, the personal growth initiative acts as the independent variable, whereas in this study, it acts as the dependent variable.

## CONCLUSIONS

The result of this research is contradictory with the hypothesis. According to the linear regression hypothesis test, it is shown that quarter life has a significant negative impact toward the personal growth initiative. This means that a higher quarter-life crisis would lead to lower personal growth initiative. The rest also showing the *p value* is less than 0.001, *F* is 17.901, and  $\beta$  is -0.382. But further analysis on quarter life crisis

dimensions proved that not all of them negatively impact personal growth initiative. Two out of seven dimensions of the quarter-life crisis positively affected the personal growth initiative. Those two dimensions are stress and negative self valuation, while the other five are Indecisiveness, desperation, trapped in difficult situations, anxiety, and interpersonal relation anxiety. But we need to keep in mind that this research also has a weakness because of the scale limitations that can only identify whether individuals are currently experiencing quarter-life crisis or not, but unable to identify the severity of quarter-life crisis that individuals are experiencing. Also, the sample in this research is unable to represent the entire population due to the less variative age presentation in the range of emerging adulthood phase, which is 18-29 years old, yet the sample in this research was mostly aged 18-19.

## Suggestions

### Theoretical Advice

- The majority of participants were under 18 & 19 years old so the research data cannot represent the overall sample. Thus, the upcoming research was expected to be able to collect data with more variative age presentation between the emerging adulthood age range and not just limited to certain age in that range so that the collected data can represent the research sample criteria.
- Scale used in this research can only identify whether individuals are currently experiencing quarter life crisis or not. But the scale was unable to identify the severity of the quarter life crisis that individuals are experiencing. With that being said, further study was expected to be able to find and use a scale that can also categorize the severity of quarter life crises that individuals are experiencing. If the severity was able to

be measured, the analysis of the research data can be rated more accurately.

### Practical Advice

- As practitioners, teachers can give out socialization targeted for their students in the age range of late adolescent and early adult stages, regarding the general understanding of the quarter-life crisis. This socialization would introduce students to a self help anticipation method, personal growth initiative development as the proper response towards the quarter life crisis that they might experience in the future or are currently experiencing. This socialization is expected to guide individuals in making choices that would increase their personal growth initiative, minimizing the negative impact of the quarter-life crisis, thus maximizing its positive impact.

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