



Exploring the Quarter Life Crisis: Management Dimensions and Factors Influencing Early Adulthood Transitions Across Cultures and Educational Backgrounds

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to identify the factors that influence the quarter-life crisis in early adulthood. A qualitative method was employed to reveal and understand this phenomenon within its unique context as experienced by individuals. Data were collected through observation and interviews and were analyzed using coding techniques. The findings indicate that anxiety about the future, pressure from family, fear of disappointing parents, and low self-confidence are key factors. Individuals also tend to compare themselves with others, particularly those deemed more successful. Various emotional responses, including frustration, hopelessness, and disappointment, were identified. The study also highlights the role of religious beliefs in coping with the crisis, although not all participants found this approach effective. Support from family and close friends is considered essential in overcoming the crisis, along with accepting one's life process and engaging in self-exploration. Educational institutions can support early adults by offering mentorship, career guidance, and stress management programs, helping students navigate the quarter-life crisis and transition smoothly into adulthood while promoting emotional well-being and resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

Early adulthood marks a crucial transition period as individuals begin to assume responsibility for their careers, finances, and personal lives, forming a distinct adult identity through roles such as full-time employment, independent living, and long-term relationships (Mehta, 2023; Reifman, 2023, Thouin et al., 2023). In this stage, often referred to as emerging adulthood (18-29 years), individuals experience a shift from adolescence towards greater social,

educational, and economic autonomy. However, this phase also involves an 'in-between' state, where individuals are not yet fully integrated into adult responsibilities, such as stable employment, marriage, or permanent living arrangements. This transitional period is often characterized by instability and uncertainty, with individuals experiencing various life changes that can lead to feelings of confusion, anxiety about the future, and a heightened fear of failure (Sulimani-Aidan, 2022; Napoli et al., 2023).

The term "quarter life crisis," first introduced by Robbins and Wilner (2001), describes the psychological and emotional turmoil individuals face as they navigate this uncertain phase. Heightened instability, overwhelming choices, and a sense of panic and helplessness mark it. Emerging adults may feel unprepared for the drastic shifts they encounter, such as transitioning from school to the workforce, navigating an uncertain future, and grappling with personal identity crises. These feelings are often exacerbated by external pressures from family, peers, and societal expectations (Jiayao, 2022; Ji-hoon, 2024)). The crisis can manifest differently based on gender, with women more likely to experience relationship-focused crises, such as divorce or family conflicts, and men facing career-related struggles, such as job dissatisfaction or unemployment (Randall et al., 2023; Agbaria 2023).

In the context of early adulthood, this quarter-life crisis is further influenced by cultural and educational factors. A study by Yeler et al. (2021) found that early adults in Turkey often perceive their lives as more complex and challenging due to the increasing pressures of work and financial responsibilities. These challenges often result in frequent job changes and difficulty adjusting to the responsibilities of adulthood, especially when transitioning directly into professional life without a college degree. Additionally, the research revealed that cultural and educational backgrounds significantly shape how individuals experience the quarter-life crisis, influencing their approach to financial independence, self-reliance, and adult responsibilities (Raginie et al., 2021).

Given these complexities, understanding the quarter-life crisis requires exploring the various management dimensions and factors that influence early adulthood transitions. This study aims to investigate how cultural, educational, and societal factors contribute to the experience of quarter-life crises and how individuals manage the pressures of this critical life stage. By examining these factors, the research provides a deeper understanding of the quarter-life crisis phenomenon, offering insights into how individuals navigate the challenges of emerging adulthood across different backgrounds.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, as explained in recent literature: Researchers aim to describe the life experiences of informants by using bracketing techniques to suspend prejudice and analyze data from the textural (what is experienced) and structural (essential themes) sides in order to understand the essence of social phenomena in depth (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). This research employs a phenomenological approach because its focus is on the factors that influence quarter-life crises in early adulthood. Phenomenology seeks to understand humans in terms of the framework of thinking and acting based on the person's judgment (Moleong, 2010).

The informants of this research are individuals in the early adult age category. The number of informants used in this research totals three individuals, meeting the following criteria: early adult individuals aged 20-35 years who are experiencing problems related to a quarter-life crisis.

In this study, the author conducted a free guided interview, where the interviewer used an interview guide in the form of a list of questions derived from factors that influence quarter-life crises (Nash & Murray, 2009). The responses were then analyzed by coding. To test the credibility of research on factors affecting quarter-life crisis in early adulthood, the author employs the triangulation method, utilizing data sources that include comparing the circumstances and perspectives of informants with various opinions and views of others who know the informants regarding the factors that affect their quarter-life crisis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

In this study, several main factors were found that influenced the occurrence of quarter-life crisis in three informants who were undergoing a transition phase towards adulthood. Based on the results of interviews and observations, anxiety about the future, feeling unprepared to become an adult, and feeling unsuitable for life expectations were the main themes found. Informant , who was 26 years old, said that he felt stressed by the uncertainty of work and the future, and felt that his life would be monotonous.

Meanwhile, Informant I, who was 24 years old, felt confused about his life plans and future, especially in terms of work and personal relationships. Informant A, who was 25 years old, expressed disappointment because of dreams and hopes that had not been achieved, as well as feelings of being left behind compared to his friends who already had permanent jobs and stable lives. The three informants also showed feelings of inferiority and often compared

themselves to other people who were more successful.

The following table presents several interview excerpts, indicators that emerged from the excerpts, and the identities of the informants related to the statements:

Table 1. Results of Interviews with Informants

Interview Excerpt	Indicators	Informant
"I feel anxious whenever I think about my future. Sometimes I feel like I have no direction, and seeing my friends already have steady jobs and more stable lives makes me feel left behind."	Anxiety about the future, social comparison	L (26 years old)
"I feel very confused. It seems like there is no clear plan for my life, and that makes me afraid of failure."	Feeling unprepared for adulthood, confusion about the future	I (24 years old)
"I am disappointed with what I have achieved, it seems like nothing is in line with what I dreamed of."	Disappointment, frustration, feeling left behind	A (25 years old)

Table 1 shows that anxiety about the future and social comparison are the primary factors influencing feelings of a quarter-life crisis among informants. Anxiety arises when they feel unable to achieve their life expectations, as in the statement of Informant L, who feels depressed because of the uncertainty of work and the future. Social comparisons made by the three informants with other more successful people worsen feelings of inferiority and dissatisfaction with themselves. For example, Informant A feels disappointed with himself because he believes his life does not meet the standards he has set, as he expressed in his statement about unfulfilled dreams. The decrease in self-confidence experienced by informants is also influenced by their perceptions of the success of others. In this case, social comparison not only worsens feelings of inferiority but also creates standards that are difficult to achieve in their lives. This feeling of dissatisfaction is intensified by unrealistic expectations of themselves, which are often driven by the ideal life picture they see on social media or around them. For example, Informant I revealed that he often feels anxious and inferior compared to his friends who have achieved success more quickly. This worsens feelings of inadequacy and increases the fear of failure. The three informants demonstrated how the social comparison was a reinforcing factor in their quarter-life crisis, influencing the way they perceived themselves and their future.

Additionally, the observation results revealed that the three informants shared the same uncertainty about their future. Informant I, for example, often showed signs of confusion during the interview, especially when planning the next steps in his life. Informant L also showed signs of deep anxiety when talking

about his work and future. This is in line with the researcher's observations, which showed that the three informants felt they did not have complete control over their future, which gave rise to feelings of anxiety and frustration.

The three informants felt anxious and depressed because of the uncertainty of life they experienced, especially related to work, life goals, and comparisons with other more successful people. Feelings of being unprepared to become adults and disappointment with life achievements that did not match expectations were the main factors that drove the quarter-life crisis.

The uncertainty experienced by the three informants was not only limited to the work aspect but also included feelings of being trapped in a life transition that had no clear direction. They felt that their lives were not going according to the plans they had made so feelings of deep disappointment and frustration arose. For example, Informant L felt that his career was not developing as expected, while Informant I felt confused about the direction of his life after graduating from college. The feeling of being unprepared to become an adult emerged when they were faced with significant responsibilities, such as full-time work and managing finances, which gave rise to a feeling of incompetence in dealing with them. The inability to achieve the standard of living they had imagined, both in terms of career and personal life, caused these three informants to feel alienated and dissatisfied with their achievements. This exacerbated the feelings of anxiety they felt about the future and further strengthened their sense that they were facing an existential crisis that was difficult to overcome.

Anxiety and social comparison are the main patterns found among the three informants. They often feel that their lives are not aligning with their expectations, which ultimately gives rise to frustration and a desire to escape reality. This anxiety is closely related to uncertainty about work and life goals, as well as feelings of being left behind compared to friends or others whom they consider more successful. Anxiety and social comparison create a negative cycle that worsens individuals' feelings about themselves and their future. When someone constantly compares themselves to others, especially those who are considered more successful, it often leads to feelings of dissatisfaction and a sense of being left behind. Uncertainty about work and life goals is a significant trigger for individuals who feel that they cannot meet the standards they expect of themselves. This feeling worsens anxiety about the future because they worry that their life choices will not be in line with what they want or what is considered 'normal' by their surroundings. This frustration often drives them to avoid reality or even take steps back, such as avoiding major decisions or postponing further life planning. Thus, social comparison and anxiety not only damage individuals' self-view but also prevent them from taking concrete steps towards improving their lives as they are trapped in feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that anxiety about the future, social comparison, and life uncertainty are the primary factors influencing the occurrence of quarter-life crises in individuals in early adulthood. This finding aligns with the existing literature, as explained by Agustiarini (2023) and Hafnidar (2024), which reveals that the quarter-life crisis phase is often characterized by feelings of anxiety and confusion about the future, as well as pressure to meet social and personal expectations. This anxiety is significantly influenced by external factors, including expectations from family, friends, and society, as well as comparisons made by individuals with those who are perceived as more successful. However, although these findings support existing theories, some differences have also been found in more specific social and cultural contexts. For example, the findings in this study indicate that the three informants believed that the support of family and friends was crucial in overcoming the quarter-life crisis. This finding aligns with the results of Charoensukmongkol et al. (2022) and Lewin et al. (2023), which demonstrated that social support has a significant impact on the intensity of the crisis experienced. However, although this social support is important, all three informants in this study felt that they did not receive enough support, which exacerbated their feelings of failure and uncertainty.

The theoretical implication of this finding is the importance of a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the quarter-life crisis, especially in the context of social comparison and external pressure. Additionally, the practical implication is the need for more effective interventions from educational and social institutions to provide sufficient emotional support for individuals transitioning to adulthood. Programs such as career guidance, psychological counseling, and stress management training can help individuals overcome the anxiety and uncertainty they face, as well as provide space for them to explore themselves and determine their life direction.

In this case, social support, whether from family, friends, or mentors, can be a significant factor in mitigating the intensity of a quarter-life crisis (Ratnasari et al., 2023; Hasyim et al., 2024). Therefore, families and educational institutions need to create a supportive environment where individuals can feel accepted and empowered to face life's challenges (Waters et al., 2022; Hadiloo, 2023). In addition, this finding also demonstrates that religion and spiritual beliefs can play a significant role in providing emotional calm and stability. However, not all individuals feel the same benefits from this religious aspect, depending on the depth of their relationship with religion.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of understanding individual differences in coping with quarter-life crises, particularly in social, cultural, and

family contexts. While some individuals feel adequately supported by their environment, others feel isolated and pressured by external expectations. Therefore, a more personalized and sensitive approach to individual needs is necessary to help them navigate this transition phase more effectively.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study's results and the discussion regarding the factors affecting quarter-life crisis in early adulthood, it is concluded that the three informants are experiencing a quarter-life crisis. This conclusion is based on factors that influence quarter-life crises, namely internal factors, which include Identity, hopes and dreams, religion, and spirituality. In contrast, external factors include romantic relationships, family and friends, academic challenges, and work life. However, each informant has different conditions and reasons.

In internal factors, the three informants have the same factors that cause the quarter-life crisis, such as Identity problems, hopes, and dreams; the three informants are currently feeling confused, worried about their future, feel they are not ready to become adults, find it challenging to overcome the problems they feel and compare themselves with others. Feelings of disappointment, despair, and a sense of failure followed, along with anger and self-blame, as their hopes and dreams did not align with what the informants had expected. The factors of religion and spirituality expressed by the three informants reveal different views on religion.

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