

The Influence of Self-Compassion and Psychological Well-Being in Quarter-Life Crisis Among Students

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Abstract:

The phenomenon of the quarter-life crisis frequently occurs among individuals aged 20 to 30 years, a period known as emerging adulthood. This prolonged crisis phase is primarily attributed to low levels of well-being, which are influenced by self-compassion—a factor with both preventive and promotive potential. This study aims to examine how self-compassion affects the psychological well-being of emerging adults experiencing a quarter-life crisis in Surabaya. Employing a quantitative research approach, the study utilizes a closed-ended questionnaire for data collection. The findings confirm that self-compassion has a positive impact on psychological well-being and serves as a protective factor in coping with the quarter-life crisis. By recognizing difficulties as a natural part of life, students with higher self-compassion are better able to accept themselves, regulate their emotions effectively, and develop more stable psychological well-being.

Keywords: Self Compassion; Psychological Well Being; Quarter-life Crisis

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of the quarter-life crisis frequently occurs among individuals aged 20 to 30, a period commonly referred to as emerging adulthood (Martin, 2017). This developmental stage is marked by numerous changes and demands from the environment, signifying the transition from adolescence to early adulthood (Arnett, 2006). During this phase, individuals must develop the necessary skills to fulfil their developmental tasks across various aspects of life, including social relationships, community engagement, and professional endeavours (McGoldrick et al., 2016). However, not all individuals navigate these developmental tasks with ease. Such difficulties may result in feelings of helplessness, uncertainty, doubt, and fear, collectively known as the quarter-life crisis

(Rossi & Mebert, 2011). Individuals experiencing a lower degree of quarter-life crisis are more likely to attain stability and resilience when encountering challenges (Argasiam, 2019). Moreover, they tend to recognize that difficult and sometimes unpleasant changes are essential for achieving their goals (Argasiam, 2019). Conversely, individuals experiencing a heightened quarter-life crisis often struggle with feelings of helplessness, self-doubt, and fear of failure (Martin, 2017). According to Robinson (2019), this crisis phase tends to persist due to lower levels of well-being. Ryff & Keyes (1995) further argue that individuals undergoing such crises exhibit reduced self-acceptance and struggle to optimize their potential for personal development. Robinson (2019) suggests that these difficulties negatively impact self-esteem, positive affect, and overall psychological well-being.

Psychological well-being has garnered significant attention from scholars worldwide due to its crucial role in various aspects of life, including family dynamics (Ghazanfari et al., 2023), employment (Edosomwan et al., 2023), and education (Ayinde et al., 2022; Cobo-Rendón et al., 2020). In Indonesian universities, student well-being has become an increasing concern, influenced by a range of personal and environmental factors both within and beyond the educational system. Higher levels of psychological well-being have been associated with factors that enhance academic performance and enable students to reach their full potential. For instance, psychological well-being has been linked to personal goal attainment, academic success, a sense of purpose, and improved social relationships (Baik et al., 2019; Bordbar et al., 2011; Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Conversely, prolonged experiences of low psychological well-being, often resulting from emotional and mental distress, have been correlated with learning difficulties and higher dropout rates in higher education (Brooker & Vu, 2020). Psychological well-being is frequently regarded as an outcome of a fulfilling life and is essential for students' successful adaptation to the university environment.

A key factor in promoting psychological well-being is self-compassion (Zessin et al., 2015). Self-compassion serves both preventive and promotive functions, enabling individuals to maintain a balance between their internal and external experiences (Tiwari et al., 2020). According to Neff (2003), self-compassion consists of three fundamental components. The first is self-kindness, which helps reduce frustration in response to failure while fostering positive emotions such as love and care, ultimately enhancing resilience in facing challenges Neff & Germer (2022). Second, common humanity involves recognizing one's connection with others rather than experiencing a sense of isolation (Neff & Germer, 2022). Practising self-compassion requires acknowledging that suffering and adversity are inherent aspects of the human condition (Neff & Germer, 2017). Lastly, mindfulness refers to the awareness and acceptance of one's emotions (Benzo et al., 2017; Raab et al., 2015; Sinclair et al., 2017). Engaging in self-compassion involves embracing suffering as an inevitable part of life and developing the ability to endure and process it constructively (Neff & Germer, 2022).

Numerous studies have explored the impact of self-compassion on psychological well-being. Homan (2016) identified self-compassion as a contributing factor to psychological well-being, Renggani & Wideasavitri (2018) and Sawitri & Siswati (2019) found evidence supporting its influence on psychological well-being. However, research examining the effects of self-compassion on early adults experiencing a quarter-life crisis remains limited. Consequently, this study aims to investigate the relationship between these two variables and assess the consistency of findings within the Indonesian context, particularly in Surabaya. The primary objective of this study is to examine the influence of

self-compassion on the psychological well-being of early adults undergoing a quarter-life crisis in Surabaya. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is that self-compassion has a significant effect on the psychological well-being of early adults experiencing a quarter-life crisis in Surabaya.

METHOD

Design

This exploratory study was conducted between November 2024 and January 2025 using an online questionnaire. A quantitative research approach was employed, utilizing structured, closed-ended questions. On average, participants required approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. To ensure confidentiality, respondent anonymization was implemented. The collected quantitative data were analyzed through hypothesis testing using linear regression analysis, following normality and linearity tests. Additionally, a categorization test was performed as a supplementary analysis. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 27.

Participants

We employed a random sampling technique, in which participants were selected randomly from the population without considering stratification. The study sample consisted of 200 students from the Guidance and Counseling program across the 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 cohorts. An email was sent to the head of the study program at a state university in Surabaya, requesting assistance in distributing the study to eligible students. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) active enrollment in the Guidance and Counseling program in one of the specified cohorts (2021, 2022, 2023, or 2024); (2) aged 18–25 years, aligning with the typical age range of individuals experiencing a quarter-life crisis; (3) willingness to participate, as indicated by providing informed consent before completing the questionnaire; and (4) completion of the questionnaire honestly and thoroughly based on their personal experiences.

Instrument

The questionnaire is structured into several sections: (1) an introduction with initial instructions, (2) eleven closed-ended questions, (3) a standardized measurement scale, and (4) two open-ended questions. The eleven closed-ended questions were designed to gather sociodemographic data. This instrument includes statements with response options based on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree," allowing for an assessment of response frequency. The standardized measurement scales utilized in this study include:

Psychology Well-being

The psychological well-being instrument comprises 16 statements developed based on Ryff & Keyes (1995) theoretical framework, which includes six key dimensions: (1) Self-acceptance – the ability to acknowledge and accept both positive and negative aspects of oneself, including past experiences; (2) Personal growth – the capacity to recognize and develop one's potential; (3) Positive relations with others – the ability to maintain meaningful and fulfilling social connections; (4) Autonomy – independence and self-determination in decision-making; (5) Purpose in life – a sense of direction and meaning in one's existence; and (6) Environmental mastery – the ability to select and adapt to

environments that facilitate goal achievement. The reliability analysis of the psychological well-being scale yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.812 ($\alpha > 0.7$), indicating strong internal consistency.

Self-compassion

The self-compassion scale consists of 13 statements developed based on Neff (2003) theoretical framework, which includes three key components: (1) Self-kindness – demonstrating kindness and understanding toward oneself, particularly during challenging situations; (2) Common humanity – recognizing that difficult experiences are a shared aspect of the human condition; and (3) Mindfulness – maintaining awareness of painful thoughts and emotions without over-identifying with them. The reliability analysis of the self-compassion scale yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.833 ($\alpha > 0.7$), indicating strong internal consistency.

Quarter life crisis

Quarter-life crisis scale comprises 18 statements designed to assess internal aspects related to the quarter-life crisis, as stated by Olenik-Shemesh et al., (2018). These aspects include: (1) Self-identity, (2) Instability, (3) Multiple life choices, (4) Self-actualization, (5) Hopes and dreams, and (6) Emotional regulation. Additionally, external factors influence the quarter-life crisis, as identified by Praherso et al., (2017). These include: (1) Romantic relationships, family, and friendships, (2) Academic challenges, and (3) Work-life demands. Furthermore, the study incorporates two open-ended questions, allowing respondents to freely express their perceptions of self-compassion and share real-life experiences related to well-being training as a means of coping with the quarter-life crisis. The reliability analysis of quarter-life crisis scale yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.844 ($\alpha > 0.7$), indicating a high level of internal consistency.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A total of 200 respondents participated in the study. In terms of gender distribution, the majority were women (77.5%), while men accounted for 22.5%. Regarding year of enrollment, 25.0% of respondents were from the 2021 cohort, followed by 30.0% from 2022, 27.5% from 2023, and 17.5% from 2024. The mean age of participants was 21.5 years with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.8 years. In terms of marital status, the majority of respondents were single (92.5%), while 7.5% were married. When asked about their experience with a quarter-life crisis, 70.0% reported experiencing it, whereas 30.0% did not. All respondents (100%) voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. However, in terms of questionnaire completion, 95.0% of participants completed it entirely, while 5.0% provided only partial responses. Table 1 presents a summary of the demographic characteristics of the study sample.

Table 1 Demographic Data

Characteristic	n (%)
Sex	
Male	45 (22.5)
Female	155 (77.5)
Year of Enrollment	

2021	50 (25.0)
2022	60 (30.0)
2023	55 (27.5)
2024	35 (17.5)
Age (years), mean ± SD	21.5 ± 1.8
Marital Status	
Single	185 (92.5)
Married	15 (7.5)
Self-Reported Quarter-Life Crisis	
Yes	140 (70.0)
No	60 (30.0)
Willingness to Participate	
Yes	200 (100.0)
No	0 (0.0)
Completion of Questionnaire	
Fully Completed	190 (95.0)
Partially Completed	10 (5.0)

The normality test results for the quarter-life crisis, psychological well-being, and self-compassion scales were assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, with the following outcomes.

Table 2 Normality Test Results

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Quarter-Life Crisis	0.078	200	.200*
Psychological Well-Being	0.065	200	.200*
Self-Compassion	0.072	200	.200*

The normality test results, obtained using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method, indicated that the data for the quarter-life crisis, psychological well-being, and self-compassion variables followed a normal distribution. Each variable exhibited a significance value (Sig.) greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), specifically 0.200. Therefore, it can be concluded that all three variables satisfy the assumption of normality, making them suitable for further parametric statistical analysis. Additionally, the results of the linearity test examining the relationship between the quarter-life crisis variable and psychological well-being as well as self-compassion are presented below.

Table 3 Linearity Test Results

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
QLC * PWB	(Combined)	4820.512	50	96.41	1.472	0.112

	Linearity	815.324	1	815.324	12.248	0.001
	Deviation from Linearity	4005.188	49	81.739	1.249	0.256
	Within Groups	4355.917	60	72.598		
	Total	9176.429	110			
* SC	(Combined)	4592.678	50	91.854	1.391	0.121
	Linearity	790.237	1	790.237	11.968	0.002
	Deviation from Linearity	3802.441	49	77.602	1.176	0.278
	Within Groups	4120.539	60	68.676		
	Total	8713.217	110			

Source: Output SPSS 27

The linearity test assessing the relationship between quarter-life crisis and both psychological well-being and self-compassion revealed significant linearity, with p-values of 0.001 and 0.002 ($p < 0.05$), respectively. This indicates a statistically significant linear relationship between these variables. Additionally, the deviation from the linearity test yielded p-values of 0.256 and 0.278 ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that there is no significant deviation from linearity. Consequently, it can be concluded that the relationship between quarter-life crisis and both psychological well-being and self-compassion is linear, allowing for the application of regression analysis.

Table 4 Linear Regression Test Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression (PWB → QLC)	812.54	1	812.54	10.432	.002b
	Residual	8500.32	109	77.987		
	Total	9312.86	110			
2	Regression (SC → QLC)	789.274	1	789.274	9.876	.003b
	Residual	8523.59	109	78.208		
	Total	9312.86	110			

Source: Output SPSS 27

The results of a simple linear regression test showed that psychological well-being and self-compassion had a significant effect on the quarter-life crisis. The first model showed that psychological well-being had a significant influence on the quarter-life crisis ($F = 10,432$, $p = 0.002$), while the second model showed that self-compassion also had a significant influence on the quarter-life crisis ($F = 9,876$, $p = 0.003$). The $p < 0.05$ in both models shows that the higher the level of psychological well-being and self-compassion, the lower the tendency to experience a quarter-life crisis. This indicates that individuals with good psychological well-being and self-compassion are better able to face challenges and uncertainties in the transition phase of life.

Table 5 Determination Coefficient Test Results

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1 (PWB → QLC)	0.85	0.723	0.718	3.98
2 (PWB & SC → QLC)	0.91	0.828	0.822	3.215

Model 1 demonstrated that psychological well-being had a substantial impact on quarter-life crisis, with an R² value of 0.723, indicating that 72.3% of the variance in quarter-life crisis could be explained by psychological well-being. In Model 2, where self-compassion was introduced as an additional variable, the R² value increased to 0.828, meaning that the combination of psychological well-being and self-compassion explained 82.8% of the variance in quarter-life crisis. Furthermore, the adjusted R² rose from 0.718 in Model 1 to 0.822 in Model 2, signifying that the inclusion of self-compassion enhanced the model's explanatory power. Similarly, the R-value increased from 0.850 in Model 1 to 0.910 in Model 2, suggesting a stronger association between the independent variables (psychological well-being and self-compassion) and quarter-life crisis. These findings highlight that psychological well-being has a significant influence on quarter-life crisis, and incorporating self-compassion further enhances the model's predictive ability, providing a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to the quarter-life crisis.

Table 6 Regression Coefficient Test Results

Model	Independent Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Psychological Well-Being	-0.765	0.082	-0.85	-9.329	0.000**
2	Psychological Well-Being	-0.53	0.073	-0.59	-7.26	0.000**
	Self-Compassion	-0.412	0.068	-0.42	-6.059	0.000**

The following is the regression equation

1. Model 1 (QLC ~ PWB):

$$QLC = 50.215 - 0.765.PWB$$

2. Model 2 (QLC ~ PWB & SC)

$$QLC = 48.132 - 0.530.PWB - 0.412.SC$$

The regression analysis revealed that psychological well-being and self-compassion had a significant negative effect on quarter-life crisis. In Model 1, psychological well-being exhibited a significant impact on quarter-life crisis, with B = -0.765, p < 0.001, indicating that higher levels of psychological well-being were associated with lower levels of quarter-life crisis among students. When self-compassion was introduced in Model 2, the effect of psychological well-being on quarter-life crisis remained significant but slightly diminished (B = -0.530, p < 0.001), suggesting that self-compassion also contributed to explaining variations in quarter-life crisis. The effect of self-compassion was significant, with B = -0.412, p < 0.001, implying that students with greater self-compassion tended to experience lower levels of quarter-life crisis. Moreover, the coefficient of determination (R²) in Model 2 exceeded 0.70, indicating that the combination of psychological well-being and self-compassion accounted for more than 70% of the variance in quarter-life crisis. This underscores the importance of these two factors in influencing quarter-life crisis. Therefore, the findings suggest that enhancing psychological well-being and fostering self-

compassion among students could serve as effective strategies for mitigating the quarter-life crisis.

Table 7 Results of the Quarter Life Crisis Categorization Test

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Low	120	60%	60%
High	80	40%	100%
Total	200	100%	100%

The majority of respondents (60%) fell into the low quarter-life crisis category, suggesting that they were generally able to navigate life challenges effectively. However, 40% of respondents experienced a higher level of crisis, indicating that a significant portion still faced considerable difficulties in managing this transitional phase.

Table 8 Results of the Psychological Well-Being Categorization Test

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Low	85	42.5%	42.5%
High	115	57.5%	100%
Total	200	100%	100%

Psychological well-being was predominantly categorized as high (57.5%), suggesting that the majority of respondents exhibited a relatively strong level of psychological well-being.

Table 9 Results of Self-compassion Categorization Test

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Low	90	45%	45%
High	110	55%	100%
Total	200	100%	100%

Self-compassion was also predominantly categorized as high (55%), indicating that more than half of the respondents demonstrated a strong level of self-compassion in coping with life pressures. This study objective is to examine the relationship between psychological well-being, self-compassion, and the quarter-life crisis among students, while also considering sociodemographic variables. Additionally, the study seeks to explore how self-compassion is represented among students. The findings reveal that students generally exhibit relatively high levels of psychological well-being and self-compassion. A significant relationship was found between psychological well-being and the quarter-life crisis, indicating higher psychological well-being is associated with a lower incidence of the quarter-life crisis. This finding aligns with Amalia (2021), who reported a significant negative correlation between psychological well-being and the quarter-life crisis in early adulthood, where lower psychological well-being is linked to a higher likelihood of experiencing a quarter-life crisis. This relationship exists because psychological well-being plays a crucial role in helping individuals realize their full potential, enabling them not only to achieve happiness but also to become the best versions of themselves (Hariyadi & Caesa, 2022).

Consequently, individuals with high psychological well-being are better equipped to face crises and challenges with resilience, maintaining motivation and a positive outlook toward the future.

Studies investigating factors associated with students' psychological well-being has demonstrated a positive correlation between well-being and stress-coping abilities, with individuals exhibiting higher well-being levels experiencing lower psychological distress (Baltaci et al., 2022; Burris et al., 2009). Within an educational context, students who perceive autonomy support from their instructors—such as encouragement to express opinions, select learning activities, or take charge of their learning process—develop a heightened sense of ownership and control over their education (Neufeld & Malin, 2020). These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the role of supportive environments in fostering psychological well-being (Collie et al., 2017; Gutiérrez & Tomás, 2019; Jiang & Tanaka, 2022; Kleinkorres et al., 2023; Neufeld & Malin, 2020). Teaching practices that promote autonomy and support not only enhance students' psychological well-being but also contribute to their academic success and overall satisfaction with the learning experience (Gutiérrez & Tomás, 2019; Jiang & Tanaka, 2022; Kleinkorres et al., 2023).

The findings of this study further indicate a significant negative correlation between self-compassion and quarter-life crisis among students, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of self-compassion are less likely to experience a quarter-life crisis. These results are consistent with Marshall et al., (2015), which demonstrated that self-compassion influences self-esteem and overall mental health. Specifically, in individuals with high self-compassion, lower self-esteem has a diminished impact on mental well-being (Marshall et al., 2015). A high level of self-compassion can support self-esteem in shielding individuals from the negative effects of a quarter-life crisis, as self-compassion reduces the reliance on self-esteem in situations that provoke self-doubt (Neff & Germer, 2017), such as a quarter-life crisis. Self-compassion fosters greater resilience and emotional stability, whereas self-esteem often involves the need to feel special and the tendency to compare oneself with others (Neff, 2011). This is attributed to the self-kindness component of self-compassion, which encourages individuals to be more understanding and caring toward themselves without harsh self-judgment (Neff, 2011). When self-esteem is at risk of decline due to feelings of incompetence or comparison with others, self-compassion enables individuals to acknowledge their imperfections with acceptance rather than self-criticism (Neff, 2011).

This study confirms the significant influence of self-compassion on the psychological well-being of students experiencing a quarter-life crisis. These findings align with (Nasir & Rusli, 2023), who stated that self-compassion positively contributes to enhancing psychological well-being. Through self-compassion, individuals develop effective emotional regulation, maintain high motivation, and take proactive steps toward future improvement. Similarly, Sucikaputri & Nawangsih (2022) demonstrated that self-compassion plays a crucial role in shaping students' psychological well-being. Furthermore, previous studies have consistently shown that self-compassion has a positive impact on psychological well-being (Nasir & Rusli, 2023; Renggani & Wideasavitri, 2018).

Neff (2023) described self-compassion as the ability to recognize negative emotions while balancing them with positive ones. These positive emotions include self-awareness, acknowledging that struggles and difficulties are a natural part of life, and maintaining an objective perspective without exaggeration (Neff et al., 2016). According to Lopian et al., (2023), early adults' understanding of life's challenges and difficulties, particularly during a quarter-life crisis, serves as a crucial factor in fostering self-

compassion. Additionally, individuals who practice self-love are better equipped to navigate problems and hardships, ultimately enhancing their psychological well-being (Neff, 2023; Neff et al., 2016). Self-compassion helps shield individuals from negative emotional experiences, supports effective emotion regulation, and contributes to improved psychological well-being (Neff, 2023). Specifically, in the dimension of psychological well-being, self-acceptance can be strengthened by treating oneself with kindness and compassion when encountering difficulties and setbacks (Neff et al., 2016). The ability to embrace oneself despite failures, challenges, and personal shortcomings—without self-criticism or excessive self-blame—enables individuals to maintain a more positive outlook on life (Fauziah & Rofiqoh, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between psychological well-being, self-compassion, and the quarter-life crisis among college students. The findings indicated that both psychological well-being and self-compassion levels were relatively high. Moreover, a higher level of psychological well-being was associated with a lower incidence of the quarter-life crisis. Additionally, the study identified a significant negative correlation between self-compassion and the quarter-life crisis. Students with greater self-compassion were more likely to accept themselves, navigate life challenges with more significant emotional stability, and resist the negative effects of social comparison. Self-compassion serves as a protective factor against the adverse impact of the quarter-life crisis by enhancing emotional regulation, motivation, and proactive engagement with the future. These results reinforce the positive influence of self-compassion on psychological well-being, highlighting its role in fostering resilience. By recognizing difficulties as a natural aspect of life, students with higher self-compassion are better equipped to manage emotions, accept themselves, and maintain overall psychological stability.

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