EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND PEER SOCIAL SUPPORT AS PREDICTORS OF QUARTER-LIFE CRISIS IN EARLY ADULTHOOD

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ABSTRACT

Quarter-life crisis (QLC) represents a critical developmental challenge characterized by anxiety and instability, yet the comparative impact of internal emotional resources versus external support remains underexplored. This study investigated the predictive power of emotional intelligence and peer social support on QLC among early adults. A quantitative correlational design was employed involving 122 purposively sampled respondents identified as fresh graduates or unemployed individuals facing directional uncertainty. Multiple regression analysis revealed that both variables significantly negatively predicted QLC. Notably, emotional intelligence emerged as the dominant predictor with an effective contribution of 24%, whereas peer social support contributed only 6.6%. These findings theoretically suggest that internal emotional regulation is far more critical than external validation in navigating transitional crises. Practically, this implies that psychological interventions for early adults should prioritize emotional intelligence training over solely increasing social interactions to foster resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings have needs and activities that must be fulfilled at each stage, which are referred to as developmental tasks (Rosalinda & Michael, 2019). In a psychological study, adult development is classified into three stages: early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood (Herawati & Hidayat, 2020). Early adulthood occurs from 18 years old to approximately 40 years old, when physical and psychological changes accompany the loss of reproductive capacity (Hurlock, 2006). Early adulthood is a developmental phase marked by identity exploration, increasing autonomy, and complex psychosocial adjustments, which are accompanied by various challenges, such as emotional stress, social isolation, demands of commitment and dependency, shift in values, encouragement for creativity, and adaptation to a new way of living (Putri, 2019). Moreover, adulthood is a crisis period; individual will have negative emotions, such as doubt, worry, anxiety, and irritation when they begin to assess the amount of control they currently have over their lives. This condition is commonly conceptualized as a quarter-life crisis (QLC), characterized by heightened anxiety, self-doubt, and emotional instability (A. S. Anggraeni & Hijrianti, 2023).

Quarter-life crisis is a new term referring to the development of a human's socio-emotional development. Individuals close to 25 years old usually face new challenges, such as career, marital status, and a more mature perspective when they transition from adolescence to adulthood (Herawati & Hidayat, 2020). Quarter-life crisis has significant life

challenges, where emotions and cognition become complex (Muttaqien & Hidayati, 2020). Triggers of quarter-life crisis include difficulty in finding a career that aligns with interests, difficulty in decision-making, fear, and unexpected changes. Low self-confidence towards one's ability, a bad opinion of oneself, and the influence of social media that makes individuals compare their success with others are factors that can cause new problems in this period (Hafarinto et al., 2024).

News published on Universitas Gajah Mada's site (Grehenson, 2022) discusses a study by a Universitas Gajah Mada student regarding the phenomenon of quarter-life crisis among adolescents. This study demonstrates that early adulthood, particularly in 18-29-year-olds, is a phase prone to confusion, anxiety, and identity crisis. The findings of this study show that quarter-life crisis is triggered by various pressures, including career uncertainty, social pressure, and demands for independence immediately. These phenomenon causes psychological impacts, such as stress, depression, and lost direction in life. Another news published in TheWeek.com (Coleman, 2024) demonstrates that many early adults in the United States are having serious mental health crises, yet this issue is often unnoticed by the public. A Harvard Study in 2023 showed that 36% of people aged 18-25 experienced anxiety, and 29% of them experienced depression, a percentage that is nearly double compared to adolescents aged 14-17. Most of them feel lonely, lost, and find no meaning in their studies or careers. Factors, such as pandemic, economic uncertainty, high residence price, lack of social connection, and lack of emotional support, also exacerbate this condition.

Emotional intelligence, as one of the independent variables, is based on theory proposed by Arnett (2015), which explained that quarter-life crisis is influenced by identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities or optimism, These factors require individuals to be able to recognize, manage, and adapt emotional in facing challenges so that emotional intelligence is considered relevant in influencing the level of quarter-life crisis. Issom and Aprilia, as cited in Nugsria et al. (2023), stated that emotional intelligence is one of the elements that support effective adaptation to keep individuals away from stressful situations during quarter-life crisis, which correlates with emotional intelligence because individuals often experience stress during quarter-life crisis. Individuals with strong emotional intelligence, which enables them to adapt effectively to new situations, are less likely to experience stress. Andriani (2014) argues that emotional intelligence is defined as an individual's ability to understand, manage, and control emotions in order to respond constructively to any condition that causes emotions to develop. Thus, emotional and social abilities will be better able to overcome various challenges that occur during self-maturation.

Peer social support, as a dependent variable, is based on Nash & Murray (2010), who stated that quarter-life crisis is influenced by external factors, such as relationships with friends, lovers, and family. Peer support is important because it helps individuals facing confusion and emotional pressure in the identity exploration process and transition to adulthood. Peer social support is a social support from peers that can provide information related to what adolescents should do in an effort to socialize with their environment. Moreover, it can also provide feedback on what adolescents do in their social group and environment and provide opportunities for adolescents to test various roles in resolving crises in shaping optimal self-identity (Saputro & Sugiarti, 2021). Kang and Im, as cited in Pangestu & Nurhadianti (2024), stated that peer social support is a type of assistance provided by peers in the form of emotional, instrumental, and information support.

Despite the growing body of literature on quarter-life crisis, most existing studies tend to focus on individual predictors in isolation, such as self-efficacy (Muttaqien & Hidayati, 2020) or demographics. There remains a research gap regarding the simultaneous examination of internal and external resources in mitigating this crisis. This study specifically selects Emotional Intelligence to represent the internal capacity for self-regulation and Peer Social Support as the primary external buffer. Investigating these two variables concurrently is critical to determine which resource internal emotional stability or external social validation plays a more decisive role in helping early adults navigate the transition period.

The higher the social support received by an individual, the lower the level of quarter-life crisis experienced. Early adulthood individuals who receive strong social support from their environment, such as family, friends, and relatives, tend to manage anxiety more effectively, have better self-confidence, and reduce the risk of stress during the transition to adulthood (Sigar et al., 2023). By considering the complexity of challenges faced by individuals in the quarter-life crisis period, this study aims to examine the role of emotional intelligence and peer social support as key factors in stress management and enhancing adaptation during the early adulthood transition, so that it can provide a scientific contribution and practical solution for the development of psychological well-being in this developmental stage.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence, peer social support, and quarter-life crisis in early adulthood individuals aged 18-40 years old. The samples of the study were determined using a purposive sampling technique. The criteria of respondents were fresh graduates, unemployed, and having confusion regarding direction in life, achievement pressure, or future uncertainty. The minimum sample size of 100 respondents was calculated using G*Power software version 3.1.9.7 according to the initial effect size value of 0.1, significance level of 0.05, power of 0.8, and two predictor variables. The reference for the R-squared value was from the study of Rivanda & Nofriza (2024) and Asrar & Taufani (2022), with the final effect size of 0,4048.

Data were collected using three Likert-scale psychological instruments adapted from the theoretical dimensions of Robbins & Wilner (2001) for assessing quarter-life crisis, including indecisiveness, hopelessness, negative self-evaluation, feeling trapped in a difficult situation, anxiety, depression, and worry about interpersonal relationships. The theoretical dimensions of Salovey and Mayer (Goleman, 2002) for assessing emotional intelligence are self-awareness, emotional management, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The theoretical dimensions of Sarafino & Smith (2011) for assessing peer social support are emotional or esteem support, tangible or instrumental support, informational support, and companionship support. Each scale consisted of favorable and unfavorable items that were tested for their validity, with a minimum item-total correlation of 0.30, and reliability, with a minimum Cronbach's Alpha of 0.7, using SPSS version 15.0.

Data were collected online using Google Forms and disseminated through social media platforms, including Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and X. Before conducting a hypothesis test, the data were tested for normality and linearity. Regression analysis with two predictors was used to test the major hypothesis regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer social support on quarter-life crisis. Meanwhile, to test minor hypotheses involving the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable, Pearson correlation analysis (product-moment) was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Description

a) Gender

The number of respondents in this study was 122, consisting of 117 females (96%) and 5 males (4%). A detailed distribution of respondents' characteristics is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Gender

Gender	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Frequency	117	5	**122**
Percentage	64%	36%	**100%**

b) Age

Respondents in this study were between 18 and 28 years old, with the majority being 22 years old. Complete distribution of respondents' age is presented in the following table:

Table 2. Age

Age	Age									Total
	18	**19**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**26**	**28**	
Frequency	1	5	25	35	38	13	3	1	1	**122**
Percentage	1%	4%	20%	29%	31%	11%	2%	1%	1%	**100%**

c) Education

Most respondents in this study had a bachelor's degree. Complete distribution of respondents' education is presented in the following table:

Table 3. Education

Education	Education			Total
	Senior High School/Equivalent	**Diploma III**	**Bachelor's Degree**	
Frequency	43	1	78	**122**
Percentage	35%	1%	64%	**100%**

Categorization

Table 4. Categorization Data

Categorization	Categorization					
	Quarter-Life Crisis		Emotional Intelligence		Peer Social Support	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	8	6.56%	14	11.48%	7	5.74%
High	30	24.59%	31	25.41%	34	27.87%
Moderate	51	41.80%	45	36.89%	47	38.52%
Low	24	19.67%	25	20.49%	26	21.31%
Very Low	9	7.377%	7	5.74%	8	6.56%
Total	**122**	**100%**	**122**	**100%**	**122**	**100%**

Based on the results of categorization in **Table 4.** categorization quarter-life crisis, there are 8 respondents included in the very high category, 30 respondents in the high category, 51 respondents in the moderate category, 24 respondents in the low category, and 9 respondents in the very low category at the level of quarter-life crisis. Overall, respondents' level of quarter-life crisis is in the moderate category. Based on the results of categorization in **Table 4.** categorization emotional intelligence, there are 14 respondents included in the very high category, 31 respondents in the high category, 45 respondents in the moderate category, 25 respondents in the low category, and 7 respondents in the very low category at the level of emotional intelligence. Overall, this result shows that the majority of respondents have moderate emotional intelligence. Based on the results of categorization in **Table 4.** categorization peer social support, there are 7 respondents included in the very high category, 34 respondents in the high category, 47 respondents in the moderate category, 26 respondents in the low category, and 8 respondents in the very low category at the level of peer social support. Overall, this result shows that most respondents have moderate peer social support.

Assumption Test

a) Normality Test

The normality test is one of the parts of the classical assumption test to find out whether the data are normally distributed. In this study, a normality test was used to evaluate the data distribution from three variables: quarter-life crisis, emotional intelligence, and peer social support. Data are declared normally distributed if the significance value (p) is higher than 0.05. The technique used in this study was the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test with the Asymptotic approach. The results of the test showed that the quarter-life crisis variable had a significance value of 0.623 ($p > 0.05$), with a K-SZ value of 0.753. Thus, it can be concluded that the data were normally distributed. The emotional intelligence variable was also normally distributed, with a significance value of 0.832 ($p > 0.05$) and K-SZ of 0.624. Meanwhile, peer social support obtained a significance value of 0.146 ($p > 0.05$) and K-SZ of 1.144, indicating that the data were also normally distributed.

Table 5. Normality Test

No.	Variable	K-SZ	p (0.05)	Description
1.	Quarter-Life Crisis	0.753	0.623	Normally Distributed
2.	Emotional Intelligence	0.624	0.832	Normally Distributed
3.	Peer Social Support	1.144	0.146	Normally Distributed

b) Linearity Test

The linearity test is one of the assumptions that must be fulfilled in correlation analysis. The results of the linearity test can be seen in the following table:

Table 6. Linearity Test

Variable	F	Sig (p)	Description
Emotional Intelligence and Quarter-Life Crisis	0.783	0.758	Linear

Peer Social Support and Quarter-Life Crisis	1.266	0.183	Linear

The results of the linearity test between emotional intelligence and quarter-life crisis variables showed an F value of 0.783 with a significance level (p) of 0.758 ($p > 0.05$). This value indicates that the relationship between emotional intelligence and quarter-life crisis is linear. The results of the linearity test between peer social support and quarter-life crisis variables showed an F value of 1.266 with a significance level (p) of 0.183 ($p > 0.05$). This value indicates that the relationship between peer social support and quarter-life crisis is linear.

Hypothesis Test

a) Major Hypothesis Test

Table 7. Major Hypothesis Test

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Squared	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig (p)
1 Regression	0.497	0.247	0.235	12.197	19.542	0.000

The results of regression analysis showed a significance value of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.01$) with a coefficient $Rx_1,2y$ of 0.497, indicating that there is a significant relationship between X_1 (emotional intelligence) and X_2 (peer social support) on Y (quarter-life crisis). Thus, the hypothesis stating that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and peer social support on quarter-life crisis is accepted, with an effective contribution of 24.7%.

b) Minor Hypothesis Test

The result of the minor hypothesis test is to find out the negative relationship between emotional intelligence with quarter-life crisis, and peer social support with quarter-life crisis. Which can be seen in the following table:

Table 8. The Result of Correlation Analysis

Variable	R	R Squared	Sig (p)
Emotional Intelligence * Quarter-Life Crisis	-0.490	0.240	0.000
Peer Social Support * Quarter-Life Crisis	-0.257	0.066	0.004

Based on the data in Table 8. the result of correlation analysis emotional intelligence*quarter-life crisis, the relationship between emotional intelligence and quarter-life crisis variables has a correlation coefficient (Rx_1y) of -0.490, with a significance value of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.01$). This finding indicates a very significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and quarter-life crisis. This means that the higher the level of emotional intelligence (X_1), the lower the level of quarter-life crisis (Y). On the other hand, if the emotional intelligence is low, the tendency to experience a quarter-life crisis will be higher. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there is a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and quarter-life crisis can be accepted. The effective contribution of emotional intelligence to quarter-life crisis was 24%.

Based on the data in Table 8. the result of correlation analysis Peer Social Support*Quarter-Life Crisis, the relationship between peer social support and quarter-life crisis variables has a correlation coefficient (Rx_1y) of 0.715, with a significance value of $p = 0.004$ ($p < 0.01$). This result indicates a very significant negative relationship between peer social support and quarter-life crisis. This means that the higher the level of peer social support (X_2), the lower the level of quarter-life crisis (Y). On the other hand, the lower the peer social support, the higher the tendency to experience a quarter-life crisis. Thus, the hypothesis stating that there is a negative relationship between peer social support and quarter-life crisis can be accepted. The effective contribution of peer social support on quarter-life crisis was 6,6%.

Emotional intelligence is important for an individual as it enables them to control emotions that may influence every action taken and to maintain a good self-resilience in achieving success (Scet al., 2013). Felix et al. (2019) state that emotional intelligence influences problem-solving strategies carried out by an individual. An individual with high emotional intelligence will immediately find the cause of their mood changes when facing problems or stressful situations, is able to assess and manage emotions objectively, and is not overwhelmed by emotions, so the individual is able to consider various appropriate strategies to solve problems they are facing during the crisis. Emotional intelligence (EI) is

the ability to recognize, understand, and effectively regulate one's own emotions and those of others. EI includes components such as the perception and understanding of emotions, the use of emotions to enhance cognitive processes, and emotional regulation in personal and interpersonal contexts. EI is measured through various instruments, such as the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), which assess aspects such as self-awareness, empathy, impulse control, and social skills (Antonopoulou, 2024). Emotional Intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and use one's own emotions and the emotions of others effectively in various situations, which can be measured through various models and related attributes, such as emotion perception, emotion understanding, emotion management, and interpersonal relationships (Laxmi, 2025).

Early adults who are assumed to have low emotional intelligence is an early adulthood that is difficult to express their opinions honestly, blames others for their emotions, faces problems emotionally, has difficulty to adapt with new environment, acts impulsively, is easily discouraged, is not accepting criticisms from others, does not care about others, is not able to establish relation with others, and often has conflicts with others. Early adults with these abilities, when facing a quarter-life crisis, are easily to feel anxious, irritability, easily offended, not thinking about the consequences of actions taken, difficult to solve their problems, pessimistic, reluctance to take action, and easy frustration, so early adults have difficulty to get through their quarter-life crisis (I. L. Anggraeni & Rozali, 2023).

Salovey & Mayer (1990) stated that when early adults with low emotional intelligence face their quarter-life crisis, they will have difficulty to adapt to changes that occur in the early adulthood, feel anxious and worry about what will happen in the future, lack of motivation in achieving dreams, not confident in their abilities to achieve success, have difficulty in decision making, and easy to compare themselves with other's achievements. Thus, early adults have difficulty escaping from depressed feelings when facing a quarter-life crisis. Individuals in the quarter-life crisis phase who have high emotional intelligence are able to manage emotions effectively, while individuals in the quarter-life crisis phase who have low emotional intelligence may have stress or other psychological disorders (Swantara & Supriyadi, 2020). The relationship between QLC and emerging adulthood is very close; QLC is considered to be an impact of entering emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood (from approximately 18 to 40 years of age) is a significant transition period that includes physical, cognitive, and social role changes (Aziz et al., 2022). Early adulthood is a developmental phase that is inherently vulnerable to triggering a quarter-life crisis. The transitional nature of this period coupled with the pressures of achieving a stable identity, career, and relationships often creates a gap between personal expectations and reality, which manifests as identity and existential crises (Ramadani et al., 2025). Based on several statements above and referring to the results of the major hypothesis test in Table 7, it can be declared that emotional intelligence and peer social support affect quarter-life crisis in early adulthood.

The first minor hypothesis test in Table 8 shows that there is a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and quarter-life crisis, with an effective contribution of 24%. It can be concluded that the higher the level of emotional intelligence (X_1), the lower the level of quarter-life crisis (Y). On the other hand, if the emotional intelligence is low, the tendency to experience a quarter-life crisis will be higher. The finding in this study aligns with the results of the study by Inayati et al. (2024) entitled "*The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and Quarter-Life Crisis in Final Year Students*", where this study explained that emotional intelligence has a negative relationship with quarter-life crisis because emotional intelligence can cause the tendency to experience quarter-life crisis.

The result of the second minor test in Table 8 shows that there is a significant negative relationship between peer social support and quarter-life crisis, with an effective contribution of 6.6%. It can be concluded that the higher the level of peer social support (X_2), the lower the level of quarter-life crisis (Y). On the other hand, the lower the peer social support, the higher the tendency to experience a quarter-life crisis. The finding in this study is in line with the results of the study by Nababan & Aulia (2024) entitled *"Hubungan antara dukungan sosial teman sebaya dengan quarter life crisis pada fresh graduate Universitas Negeri Padang"*, which explains that the role of peer social support on quarter-life crisis is to provide emotional and social support that is effective in reducing anxiety, stress, and pressure arising during emotional crisis in early adulthood.

Based on the categorization of quarter-life crisis data in Table 4, the level of quarter-life crisis possessed by early adults in this study is included in the moderate category, with a percentage of 41%. The results of the categorization show that respondents in this study are able to manage quarter-life crisis fairly effectively. Although a quarter-life crisis is a turbulent phase, respondents in this study show good resilience and adaptation in facing the pressure, so they do not reach a severe level of quarter-life crisis or significantly disrupt daily functioning. At a moderate level, it indicates that the

quarter-life crisis experienced by early adults serves as a factor that triggers changes, reflection, and personal development; if it is not properly managed, it can contribute to their personal growth and emotional stability (Azza et al., 2025).

The categorization of emotional intelligence data in Table 4 suggests that the level of emotional intelligence possessed by early adults in this study is at a moderate level, with a percentage of 37%. The results of this categorization indicate that respondents in this study can be conditioned fairly well. Emotional intelligence with quarter-life crisis in early adults used the emotional intelligence scale instrument and found that the level of emotional intelligence in early adults is varied, with several categories, including moderate (Danisa & Falah, 2025). High emotional intelligence is correlated with the ability to recognize, understand, and manage personal emotions and the emotions of others. This helps individuals to be more adaptive in resolving conflicts, such as increasing constructive problem-solving and reducing the tendency to be involved in aggressive conflict and avoidant behavior (Tahir & Quratulain, 2024).

Moreover, the results of peer social support categorization in Table 4 show that the level of peer social support possessed by early adults in this study is at a moderate level, with a percentage of 38%. The results of this categorization indicate that respondents in this study can be conditioned fairly well. Peer support can trigger feelings of anxiety and a sense of competitiveness, no longer a source of comfort. Thus, although peer social support is generally considered important, in this context, the level of peer social support may increase stress and contribute to burnout, particularly if the support creates excessive competition and social pressure (Puspaningrum & Ruby, 2024). Lan & Wang (2019), in a study entitled "*Direct and interactive effects of peer support and resilience on psychosocial adjustment in emerging adults with early left-behind experiences*," state that peer social support in early adulthood plays a significant role in positive psychosocial adjustment, reinforcing the importance of peer social support at a moderate level for emotional development and social behavior.

This study absolutely has limitations:
1. Data collection was conducted online, causing the researcher to have difficulty ensuring that respondents understood the statements on the instrument and responded honestly and openly so that the responses are not biased.
2. This study only focuses on early adult individuals, so the results of the study cannot be generalized to adult individuals.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that emotional intelligence and peer social support are significant predictors of quarter-life crisis in early adulthood. Emotional intelligence emerged as the strongest contributor, indicating that individuals with higher emotional regulation abilities experience lower levels of psychological distress during this transitional period. Peer social support also plays a meaningful role in alleviating emotional strain, although its contribution is comparatively smaller. These findings underscore the importance of developing emotional competencies and supportive peer environments to promote psychological well-being among young adults. Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its online data collection method and age-specific sample. Future research is recommended to involve longitudinal designs and broader age groups to enhance generalizability.

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