

Cyberpsychological Analysis: The Effect of Emotional Regulation via Online Communities on the Quarter-Life Crisis Among Young People in Medan

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Abstract

Early adulthood is a transitional period characterised by academic, career and work demands, interpersonal relationships, and uncertainty about the future, all of which can trigger a quarter-life crisis. This study aims to analyse the influence of emotional regulation on the quarter-life crisis and to identify the most dominant aspects of emotional regulation amongst young adults in the city of Medan. The study employed a quantitative approach using a simple linear regression design. The sample comprised 348 individuals aged 18–25 years, selected via purposive sampling. Data were collected using a 27-item emotional regulation scale and an 18-item quarter-life crisis scale. Both instruments demonstrated good reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.959 and 0.879, respectively. Analyses were conducted using SPSS 20.0 via descriptive statistics, assumption tests, and simple linear regression. The results of the study indicate that emotional regulation has a significant effect on the quarter-life crisis ($R = 0.552$; $R^2 = 0.304$; $F = 151.343$; $p < 0.001$), accounting for 30.4 per cent of the variance. The aspect of 'limited access to emotion regulation strategies' was the most dominant (26.3 per cent), followed by 'non-acceptance of emotional responses' (20.7 per cent) and 'lack of emotional clarity' (18.7 per cent). These findings fill a research gap regarding the inconsistencies in the results of previous studies in the context of early adulthood in the city of Medan. It was concluded that the greater the difficulty in regulating emotions, the higher the likelihood of experiencing a quarter-life crisis. These results underscore the importance of strengthening skills in emotional regulation, adaptive coping, career planning and decision-making for young adults.

Introduction

Early adulthood, spanning the ages of 18–25, is a developmental period characterised by various demands and changes, such as the formation of one's identity, education, career planning, employment, interpersonal relationships, and preparation for a more independent life (Putri & Anggraeni, 2026). At this stage, individuals begin to face a range of important choices regarding their future. The sheer number of these choices can lead to uncertainty, confusion about the direction of their lives, and concerns about whether they will achieve their desired goals. These circumstances are linked to the phenomenon known as the 'quarter-life crisis', a period during which young adults experience doubt, anxiety, confusion, pressure and uncertainty when determining the course of their future lives (Hasyim et al., 2024). (Damayanti & Lestari, 2023) People in their 20s face a range of demands relating to education, careers, work, interpersonal relationships and the achievement of life goals, which can trigger feelings of uncertainty or a 'quarter-life crisis', particularly amongst students who are in the process of transitioning into adulthood. In dealing with such pressures and uncertainty, emotional regulation is a crucial aspect, as the ability to recognise, accept, understand and manage emotions can help individuals respond to various challenges in a more adaptive manner. Conversely, difficulties in accessing emotional regulation strategies, controlling impulses, maintaining goal-oriented behaviour, and accepting and understanding emotions can make it harder for individuals to cope with the demands of their studies, careers, work and future planning (Schmitt et al., 2025). Emotional regulation plays a key role in helping young adults understand and manage their emotions, maintain goal-oriented behaviour, and cope with the pressures and uncertainties of the transition to adulthood. However, previous research on the relationship between emotional regulation and the quarter-life crisis has yielded inconsistent results, which may be

influenced by individual characteristics and environmental contexts. The city of Medan provides a relevant context due to its diverse dynamics in education, employment, careers, social life and future planning. Therefore, this study is important to gain an empirical understanding of the influence of emotional regulation on the quarter-life crisis amongst young adults in the city of Medan.

This study aims to determine the levels of emotional regulation and quarter-life crisis, and to analyze the influence of emotional regulation on the quarter-life crisis amongst young adults aged 18–25 in the city of Medan, including the interrelationship between various aspects of emotional regulation in coping with the dynamics of early adulthood. It is hoped that this study will provide theoretical benefits for the development of psychological research on emotional regulation and the quarter-life crisis in early adulthood, as well as serving as a reference for future research. In practical terms, this study is expected to help young adults understand the importance of emotional management, whilst also serving as a basis for consideration by universities, counsellors, psychology practitioners, youth organizations' and the wider community in developing support, psychological services, career planning and personal development programmes for young adults.

This study has several limitations, particularly regarding the characteristics of the respondents, which were limited to individuals aged 18–25 in the city of Medan, selected using purposive sampling; consequently, any generalization to other groups or regions should be made with caution. Data were also collected via a self-report questionnaire, which relies on the respondents' perceptions and honesty. The study focused solely on emotional regulation and the quarter-life crisis; consequently, other factors such as social support, economic circumstances, family, personality, academic performance and employment were not analysed. Furthermore, the quantitative approach used is not yet capable of providing

an in-depth description of the respondents' psychological dynamics, whilst online data collection and the specific research period also allow for the possibility of participation bias and changes in the respondents' circumstances. The interpretation of emotional regulation must also take into account that the instrument measures difficulties in emotional regulation; consequently, the direction of the scores must be understood in accordance with the characteristics of the instrument used.

The uniqueness of this study lies in its examination of the quarter-life crisis in early adulthood, which has frequently been linked to psychological factors, including emotional regulation; however, previous research has yet to yield consistent findings. This gap is exacerbated by the limited number of studies specifically examining aspects of emotional regulation difficulties in early adulthood in the city of Medan. Consequently, this study addresses this research gap by analysing the influence of emotional regulation on the quarter-life crisis and identifying the aspects of emotional regulation associated with this condition. The novelty of the study lies in its focus on the context of young adults in the city of Medan and its more specific analysis of the dimensions of emotional regulation difficulties in relation to the quarter-life crisis.

Method

This study employs a quantitative approach aimed at examining the influence of emotional regulation on the quarter-life crisis amongst young adults in the city of Medan. A quantitative approach was adopted because the research data consists of numerical figures, which are subsequently analysed using statistical techniques to test the research hypotheses (Mohajan, 2020). The variables in this study comprise emotional regulation as the independent variable (X) and the quarter-life crisis as the dependent variable (Y).

Emotional regulation is operationally defined as an individual's ability to recognise, understand, accept, control and manage emotional responses when faced with various

situations, particularly negative emotions. The measurement of emotional regulation in this study is based on the theory (Mardiawan, 2017), which include limited access to emotion regulation strategies, difficulties engaging in goal-directed behaviour, difficulties with impulse control, non-acceptance of emotional responses, lack of emotional awareness, and lack of emotional clarity. The higher the score obtained, the greater the individual's level of difficulty in regulating their emotions.

In practical terms, a quarter-life crisis is a psychological condition experienced by individuals in early adulthood, characterised by confusion, anxiety, stress, feelings of despair, a sense of being trapped in a difficult situation, negative self-perception, and concerns regarding interpersonal relationships. The measurement of this variable is based on the concept of (Afandi et al., 2023). The higher the score obtained, the more severe the quarter-life crisis experienced by the individual.

The study population consisted of young adults residing in the city of Medan, aged between 18 and 25 years, in line with the characteristics of young adulthood. Based on data from the Medan City Central Statistics Agency for 2024, the population within the age group forming the basis for the study population totalled 572,714 people. The research sample was determined using purposive sampling, i.e. the selection of respondents based on characteristics predetermined in accordance with the research objectives (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024).

The sample size was determined using the Isaac and Michael table with a 5 per cent margin of error, resulting in a total of 348 respondents. Mathematically, the determination of the sample size according to Isaac and Michael can be expressed by the formula:

$$s = \frac{\lambda^2 NPQ}{d^2(N-1) + \lambda^2 PQ} \quad (1)$$

Here, (s) is the sample size, (N) is the population size, (λ^2) is the chi-square value

corresponding to the error rate, (P) is the proportion of correct responses, (Q) is the proportion of incorrect responses, and (d) is the specified error rate. With a population of 572,714 people and a 5 per cent error rate, the sample size used in the study was 348 people.

Research data were collected using a questionnaire or psychological scale based on the Likert scale model. The questionnaire was distributed online using Google Forms via social media and digital platforms. Respondents were first provided with an explanation of the study's objectives and gave their consent via an informed consent form. The research instruments comprised an emotional regulation scale and a quarter-life crisis scale, with four response options: Strongly Agree (SS), Agree (S), Disagree (TS) and Strongly Disagree (STS).

The emotional regulation scale refers to aspects of (Gratz & Roemer, 2004) and adapted from an emotional regulation measurement tool with high initial reliability. Following pilot testing, the instrument used comprised 27 items that met the validity and reliability criteria. Meanwhile, the quarter-life crisis scale drew on aspects identified by Robbins and Wilner and was adapted from Afandi's instrument. Following pilot testing, 18 items were found to meet the criteria and were used in the study.

The study was conducted in the city of Medan from 22 May to 14 June 2026. Data was collected from individuals aged 18–25 residing in the city of Medan. A total of 348 respondents took part, and all the data collected met the study criteria and were therefore suitable for analysis. The questionnaires were distributed online via WhatsApp and TikTok, as well as in person at several locations frequented by young adults. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were provided with information regarding the purpose of the study, data confidentiality and consent to participate.

The pilot test of the measurement instrument was conducted between 4 and 22 April 2026 amongst young adults in the city of Medan. The pilot test analysis was carried out

using SPSS version 20.0. The pilot test of the emotional regulation scale revealed that, out of 36 items, 9 were excluded. After the items that did not meet the criteria were removed, 27 items remained, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.959. On the quarter-life crisis scale, out of 26 items, 8 were excluded, leaving 18 items with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.879.

Validity testing was carried out to determine the ability of each item to measure the construct under investigation. An item was deemed valid if it had a Corrected Item-Total Correlation of ≥ 0.30 . Based on the test results, the emotional regulation scale had 27 valid items out of 36, whilst the quarter-life crisis scale had 18 valid items out of 26.

Reliability testing was carried out using Cronbach's alpha. An instrument is considered reliable if its Cronbach's alpha value is ≥ 0.60 . The test results showed that the emotional regulation scale had a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.959, whilst the quarter-life crisis scale had a value of 0.879. Thus, both instruments demonstrated good internal consistency and are suitable for use in this study.

Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 20.0 for Windows. The analysis began with descriptive statistics to characterise the research data, followed by assumption tests prior to conducting simple linear regression analysis. The assumption tests carried out included normality and linearity tests.

A normality test was used to determine whether the research data were normally distributed or not, using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test. The data were deemed to be normally distributed if the significance value was greater than 0.05. Subsequently, a linearity test was conducted to determine whether the relationship between emotional regulation and the quarter-life crisis was linear. The relationship is deemed linear if the significance value for linearity is less than 0.05.

Hypothesis testing was carried out using simple linear regression analysis to determine the effect of emotional regulation (X) on the quarter-life crisis (Y). The simple linear regression equation used is:

$$Y = a + bX$$

Where, based on the equation above, (Y) represents the quarter-life crisis, (a) is a constant, (b) is the regression coefficient, and (X) represents emotional regulation. Decision-making is based on the significance level; that is, if ($p < 0.05$), the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted and there is a significant effect of emotional regulation on the quarter-life crisis. Conversely, if ($p > 0.05$), H_a is not supported.

Results And Discussion

The research was conducted from 25 May 2026 to 13 June 2026 in the city of Medan, using Google Forms as the data collection tool. The research subjects comprised 348 young adults residing in the city of Medan. Based on the data collected, the characteristics of the research subjects were then analysed according to gender, age, highest level of education, marital status, current problems, and several conditions relating to difficulties in determining life direction, concerns about achieving dreams, confusion in choosing a career, and the ability to control negative emotions when facing problems.

In terms of gender, the study was dominated by female respondents, numbering 265 or 76.14 per cent, whilst male respondents totalled 83 or 23.86 per cent. This composition indicates that the number of female respondents in this study was more than three times that of male respondents. The predominance of female respondents warrants attention when interpreting the research findings, as psychological experiences, developmental issues, and the way individuals view the future may exhibit different characteristics based on various demographic factors.

In terms of age, the respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years. The 22-year-old age group was the largest, comprising 99 people or 28.45 per cent, followed by the 20-year-old age group with 59 people or 16.95 per cent, and the 21-year-old age group with 56

people or 16.09 per cent. Furthermore, there were 44 respondents aged 19, or 12.64 per cent; 40 aged 23, or 11.49 per cent; 27 aged 18, or 7.76 per cent; 14 aged 24, or 4.02 per cent; and 9 aged 25, or 2.59 per cent. The majority of respondents were in the 20–23 age group. This indicates that the research sample primarily comprises individuals at a stage of development where issues such as education, identity formation, career planning, independence, interpersonal relationships and future orientation become increasingly relevant. The predominance of 22-year-olds also suggests that the research findings largely represent the experiences of individuals in a transitional phase from academic life to the broader demands of adult life.

Based on highest level of education, the majority of respondents had completed upper secondary school, totalling 268 people or 77.01 per cent. Respondents with a bachelor's degree (S1) numbered 75 people or 21.55 per cent, whilst those with a diploma (D3) numbered 3 people or 0.86 per cent and those with a master's degree (S2) numbered 2 people or 0.57 per cent. This composition indicates that this study primarily involved individuals whose highest level of education was at secondary school level, even though the majority of respondents, based on their status, were students. This suggests that some respondents were still in the process of continuing their education to university level after completing secondary school. This educational context is relevant because the transition period from secondary education to higher education, or from higher education to the world of work, can be a time that requires individuals to begin making choices regarding the direction of their education, career, employment and life goals.

When analysed by status, 285 respondents, or 81.90 per cent, were students. Meanwhile, 29 respondents, or 8.33 per cent, were unemployed, whilst 34 respondents, or 9.77 per cent, were in employment. The predominance of students indicates that the main characteristic of the research sample is that of early-adulthood individuals who are still within the formal education system. This

situation is strongly linked to the issues identified in the study, particularly academic and career-related issues. Students in early adulthood generally begin to face the demands of deciding on a field of study, planning their careers, developing their skills, and preparing for independence after completing their education. Consequently, the high proportion of students helps to explain why academic and career issues were the two most frequently reported problems by respondents.

Based on the problems experienced by respondents recently, academic problems were the most prevalent, affecting 149 respondents or 42.81 per cent. Career and employment problems came next, affecting 112 respondents or 32.18 per cent. Furthermore, friendship-related problems were experienced by 40 respondents (11.49 per cent), family problems by 24 respondents (6.90 per cent), and relationship problems by 23 respondents (6.61 per cent). The findings indicate that the most prominent issues in the respondents' lives relate to educational demands and uncertainty regarding their future employment and careers. When these two categories are combined, 261 respondents, or approximately 75 per cent of the total sample reported experiencing academic, career or employment-related problems. This demonstrates that issues concerning educational attainment and preparation for professional life constitute a highly dominant aspect of the experiences of young adults.

These findings are further reinforced by the respondents' accounts of the difficulties they face in determining the direction of their lives. A total of 237 respondents, or 68.10 per cent, stated that they found it difficult to determine the direction of their lives, whilst 111 respondents, or 31.90 per cent, stated that they did not experience such difficulties. This means that more than two-thirds of the respondents experienced difficulties in determining the direction they wished to take in life. Analytically, this situation indicates a tendency towards uncertainty regarding future direction amongst the majority of the research subjects. The difficulty in determining

one's life direction can be seen as an issue that relates not only to personal choices but also to education, employment, career, the achievement of goals, and the demands of becoming an increasingly independent individual in early adulthood.

This picture becomes even clearer when viewed through the lens of respondents' concerns about the possibility of their dreams not being realised. A total of 312 respondents, or 89.66 per cent, stated that they felt worried if their dreams were not realised, whilst only 36 respondents, or 10.34 per cent, stated that they did not feel worried. This proportion is one of the most prominent findings regarding the characteristics of the research subjects. Nearly nine out of ten respondents expressed concern regarding the realisation of their dreams. This indicates that a focus on the future plays a significant role in the respondents' lives, yet at the same time, the future is also a source of anxiety.

A total of 286 respondents, or 82.18 per cent, stated that they felt anxious or confused about choosing a suitable job, whilst 62 respondents, or 17.82 per cent, stated that they did not experience these feelings. These findings indicate that uncertainty regarding employment is an issue faced by the majority of respondents. This high figure is relevant given that the majority of respondents were students, as students in early adulthood are not only expected to complete their education but also to begin considering a job that aligns with their abilities, interests, education and life goals.

On the other hand, the research findings also show that the majority of respondents stated they were able to control negative emotions when facing problems. A total of 289 respondents, or 83.05 per cent, replied that they were able to control negative emotions, whilst 59 respondents, or 16.95 per cent, stated they were unable to control negative emotions when facing problems. These findings present an interesting picture when compared with the high levels of worry, difficulty in determining one's life direction, and anxiety regarding career choices.

Although the majority of respondents face various uncertainties and pressures relating to the future, the majority still perceive

themselves as having the ability to control negative emotions when facing problems.

Table 1. Overview of the Characteristics and Psychological Conditions of Early-Adult Research Subjects in the City of Medan

Aspect	Main Result	N	Percentage
Gender	Female	265	76.14%
Age	22 years old	99	28.44%
Education	Senior High School	268	77.01%
Status	University Student	285	81.89%
Main Problem	Academic-related	149	42.81%
Difficulty in Determining Life Direction	Yes	237	68.10%
Worry About Not Achieving Dreams	Yes	312	89.65%
Anxiety/Confusion in Determining Career	Yes	286	82.18%
Ability to Control Negative Emotions	Yes	289	83.04%

It can be seen from Table 1 that the research subjects were predominantly female, aged 22, with a high school education as their highest level of education, and were university students. The most common issues experienced were academic in nature. The majority of respondents also found it difficult to determine their direction in life, were concerned about achieving their dreams, and felt anxious about choosing a suitable career; however, they still felt capable of managing their negative emotions when facing problems.

It can be seen that, in general, emotional regulation amongst young adults in Medan falls into the moderate category. This indicates that the majority of respondents possess sufficient ability to recognize, manage, and control their emotional responses when facing various problems, although this ability is not yet fully optimised. Meanwhile, the 'quarter-life crisis' also generally falls into the moderate category, indicating that respondents experience various forms of doubt, anxiety and confusion regarding their future lives, but these conditions have not yet reached a severe level.

A comparison between hypothetical and empirical scores shows that the average empirical emotional regulation score is slightly higher than the hypothetical average. This indicates that the respondents' emotional regulation abilities generally tend to be better than would be expected based on the

hypothetical scores. Conversely, the average empirical 'quarter-life crisis' score is slightly lower than the hypothetical value, suggesting that the level of quarter-life crisis experienced by respondents is generally relatively under control and does not yet show a very high prevalence.

When analysed by gender, both men and women generally fall into the 'moderate' category for emotional regulation. Women showed a more pronounced tendency towards the moderate category, whilst a similar pattern was observed for the quarter-life crisis, with the majority of both male and female respondents falling into the moderate category.

Based on age, emotional regulation and the quarter-life crisis showed relatively consistent patterns, as the majority of age groups fell into the 'moderate' category. However, at older ages, there is a tendency for the proportion of respondents in the high category to increase for both emotional regulation and the quarter-life crisis. This may indicate that as individuals approach the transitional phase towards a more independent adult life, they face increasingly complex demands relating to education, work, interpersonal relationships and future planning.

When viewed in terms of highest level of education, respondents with a high school or bachelor's degree background were mostly

in the moderate category, both for emotional regulation and quarter-life crisis. Meanwhile, groups with higher levels of education showed a tendency towards different categories; however, the relatively small number of respondents means that this pattern cannot yet be used to draw firm conclusions.

Based on status, students constitute the most dominant group, with the majority falling into the 'moderate' category in terms of emotional regulation. This suggests that students in early adulthood are relatively capable of managing their emotions, but still face various demands that may affect their emotional stability. Among both those who are not yet in employment and those who are, the majority also fall into the 'moderate' category, although a tendency towards the 'high' category is more evident in certain groups. This suggests that an individual's activity status may be linked to the nature of the demands and pressures they face, particularly in the process of adjusting to the responsibilities of adult life.

When viewed in terms of the problems currently being experienced, academic issues are one of the most prominent contexts, followed by career and work issues, family, romantic relationships, and friendships. Despite facing these various issues, the majority of respondents remained in the 'moderate' category for emotional regulation. This suggests that the presence of problems does not necessarily mean an individual has poor emotional regulation. On the contrary, respondents appear to retain the ability to manage their emotional responses even whilst in stressful situations.

With regard to emotional regulation, it was found that limitations in accessing emotional regulation strategies were the most prominent aspect. These findings indicate that the respondents' main issue was not merely an inability to control their emotions, but was more closely related to limitations in identifying or employing appropriate strategies when faced with negative emotions. Difficulties in maintaining goal-oriented behaviour and acceptance of emotional

responses also showed a moderate trend. Meanwhile, emotional awareness and clarity in understanding emotions showed greater variation. Psychologically, this may mean that some respondents are able to recognise the emergence of emotions, but are not always able to understand the source of those emotions or determine the most effective strategies to manage them.

Regarding the 'quarter-life crisis' variable, the majority of respondents also fell into the moderate category. This suggests that respondents are experiencing psychological dynamics related to the process of seeking life direction, planning for the future, work, achieving goals, and interpersonal relationships. However, the level of crisis experienced generally has not yet reached extreme levels.

From the perspective of the quarter-life crisis, anxiety emerged as one of the most prominent aspects, followed by negative self-perception and confusion regarding decision-making. These findings suggest that the respondents' primary concerns relate to uncertainty about life choices and worries about whether the decisions they make will lead them to the life they hope for. Conversely, aspects such as feelings of depression and despair tended to fall more within the low category. This suggests that although respondents experienced anxiety and confusion, these conditions had not generally developed into dominant feelings of depression or despair.

The picture of difficulties in determining one's life direction further reinforces these findings. Respondents who reported difficulties in determining the direction of their lives were predominantly in the 'moderate' category of the quarter-life crisis. A similar pattern was also observed regarding concerns about failing to achieve their dreams, as well as anxiety or confusion in choosing a suitable career. This implies that issues concerning the future, the achievement of goals, and career choices constitute an important part of the quarter-life crisis experience among young adults in this study.

Interestingly, the majority of respondents who stated they were able to manage negative emotions when facing problems still fell into the 'moderate' category of the quarter-life crisis. This finding suggests that the ability to regulate emotions does not

automatically eliminate the experience of a quarter-life crisis. Individuals may be quite capable of managing their emotions, yet still experience anxiety, confusion and uncertainty about the future.

Table 2. Categorisation of Levels of Emotional Regulation and Quarter-Life Crisis among Young Adults in the City of Medan

Variabel	N	Mean Empirik	SD	Rendah	Sedang	Tinggi
Regulasi Emosi	348	70,57	14,78	44 (12,6%)	221 (63,5%)	83 (23,9%)
Quarter Life Crisis	348	43,90	7,98	60 (17,2%)	249 (71,6%)	39 (11,2%)

It can be seen from Table 2 that emotional regulation and quarter-life crisis among young adults in the city of Medan generally fall into the moderate category. This indicates that the majority of respondents have emotional regulation abilities and levels of quarter-life crisis that are adequate or moderate.

Based on the results of the assumption tests, the research data meet the requirements for simple linear regression analysis. The results of the normality test show that the variables of emotional regulation and quarter-life crisis have significance values above 0.05; therefore, both variables are deemed to be normally distributed. Furthermore, the results of the linearity test showed a significance value for linearity of 0.000, whilst the deviation from linearity was 0.828. These results indicate that there is a significant linear relationship between emotional regulation and quarter-life crisis, meaning that the simple linear regression analysis can proceed.

The results of the regression analysis indicate a significant relationship between emotional regulation and the quarter-life crisis. The correlation coefficient (R) of 0.552 indicates a fairly strong relationship between the two variables, whilst the R-squared value of 0.304 indicates that emotional regulation accounts for 30.4 per cent of the variation in the quarter-life crisis. Consequently, 69.6 per cent of the variation in the quarter-life crisis is influenced by other factors not analysed in this study. The results of the ANOVA test also show an F-value of 151.343 with a significance level of 0.000; therefore, the regression model is deemed significant, and emotional regulation

can be used as a predictor of the quarter-life crisis among young adults in the city of Medan.

Based on the results of the regression coefficient test, a significance value of 0.000 indicates that the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. This means that there is a significant relationship between emotional regulation and the quarter-life crisis. Given the positive direction of the regression coefficient, an increase in emotional regulation scores is followed by an increase in quarter-life crisis scores. However, the interpretation of the direction of this relationship needs to be adjusted in line with the scoring system of the emotional regulation instrument used. If a higher emotional regulation score indicates greater difficulty in regulating emotions, then these results suggest that the greater the difficulty in emotional regulation, the more severe the quarter-life crisis. Conversely, if a higher score actually indicates better emotional regulation ability, then the meaning of this positive relationship needs to be explained differently based on the instrument's construct.

In the analysis based on emotional regulation, limited access to emotion regulation strategies was the aspect that contributed most significantly to the quarter-life crisis, with an R value of 0.512 and an R-squared of 0.263. This indicates that limited access to emotion regulation strategies accounts for 26.3 per cent of the variation in the quarter-life crisis. The next aspect is non-acceptance of emotional responses, with an R value of 0.455 and an R-squared of 0.207, followed by a lack of emotional clarity, with an

R value of 0.432 and an R-squared of 0.187. Meanwhile, 'difficulties with impulse control' had an R value of 0.396 and an R-squared of 0.157, whilst 'difficulties engaging in goal-directed behaviour' had an R value of 0.350 and an R-squared of 0.123. 'Lack of emotional awareness' showed the lowest contribution, with an R value of 0.208 and an R-squared of 0.043.

Discussion

The study involved 348 respondents aged between 18 and 25. This age range corresponds to early adulthood, a period characterised by various developmental demands, such as determining one's life path, education, employment, career, interpersonal relationships and future planning (Robbins & Wilner, 2001) explains that people in their 20s are prone to experiencing a quarter-life crisis because they face a range of choices and demands as they decide on the course of their future lives.

Based on the descriptive findings, the respondents' emotional regulation fell into the moderate category, whilst their quarter-life crisis tended to fall into the low to moderate category. This suggests that the majority of respondents are still able to cope with the demands of early adulthood, although they continue to experience doubts and concerns about the future. These findings are consistent with (Tini et al., 2025) which found that the empirical mean for the quarter-life crisis was lower than the hypothetical mean, suggesting that respondents' levels of quarter-life crisis tended to be low. The difference between the empirical and hypothetical means provides a descriptive picture and does not determine whether or not there is an influence between the variables.

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that emotional regulation has a significant effect on the quarter-life crisis, accounting for 30.4 per cent of the variance. This means that emotional regulation is one of the factors associated with the quarter-life crisis, whilst the remainder is influenced by

other factors outside the scope of this study. This finding can be explained by Gross's theory, which views emotional regulation as an individual's ability to influence the emotions that arise, the way in which they experience those emotions, and how they are expressed. This ability is particularly important in early adulthood, as individuals must cope with various pressures relating to their studies, careers, work and decisions about their future.

The research findings indicate a positive correlation: the higher the emotional regulation score, the higher the quarter-life crisis score. However, this interpretation must be considered in the context of the instruments used. The aspects of emotional regulation in this study include limited access to emotion regulation strategies, difficulties engaging in goal-directed behaviour, impulse control difficulties, non-acceptance of emotional responses, lack of emotional awareness, and lack of emotional clarity, which essentially describe difficulties in emotional regulation. Consequently, the positive relationship is more accurately interpreted to mean that the greater an individual's difficulty in regulating their emotions, the higher their tendency to experience a quarter-life crisis.

These findings differ from (Saputro & Widiyawati, 2025) which found that emotional regulation has no effect on the quarter-life crisis. Differences were also found with (Larasati & Pratitis, 2025) which indicates a negative correlation: the better the emotional regulation, the lower the incidence of quarter-life crisis. These differences in findings may be attributed to variations in respondent characteristics, research location, age range, and the instruments used to measure emotional regulation. Consequently, the findings of this study suggest that the relationship between emotional regulation and quarter-life crisis may vary depending on the characteristics and measurement methods employed in each study.

In terms of respondent characteristics, the majority were university students aged 22. This is relevant to (Karpika & Segel, 2021)

which explains that one's 20s are a period when individuals begin to face important decisions regarding education, career, work, relationships and their future. (Arnett et al., 2014) It also explains that the transition into early adulthood is accompanied by increasing demands and responsibilities that can affect an individual's psychological well-being.

The issues most frequently experienced by respondents were academic, followed by career and employment. These findings indicate that the demands of education and preparation for entering the world of work are the main sources of problems for the respondents. This situation may also explain the high proportion of respondents who find it difficult to determine the direction of their lives, worry that their dreams will not be realised, and feel anxious or confused about choosing a suitable job. Consequently, academic and career issues play a significant role in the uncertainty experienced by young adults.

In the analysis of emotional regulation, 'limited access to emotion regulation strategies' emerged as the most dominant factor, contributing 26.3 per cent to the quarter-life crisis. This indicates that an individual's limited ability to identify and utilise effective strategies when facing negative emotions is the aspect most closely linked to the quarter-life crisis. Individuals who face pressure but struggle to find the right way to manage their emotions are more likely to experience confusion, anxiety and difficulty in coping with life's demands. This finding aligns with Gross's view that the selection and use of emotion regulation strategies are a crucial part of generating adaptive emotional responses.

Meanwhile, the aspects of 'non-acceptance of emotional responses' and 'lack of emotional clarity' also showed a relatively significant contribution. This suggests that difficulty in accepting negative emotions and an inability to understand one's emotional state can intensify the experience of a quarter-life crisis. Conversely, 'lack of emotional awareness' made the smallest contribution, although it still showed a significant

association. Therefore, it is not only emotional awareness that is important, but also an individual's ability to accept, understand and manage those emotions effectively.

Regarding the quarter-life crisis variable, the anxiety aspect falls into the moderate category. This indicates that respondents experience worry, doubt and uncertainty about the future, but this has not yet fully hindered their daily activities. These findings are consistent with (Robinson, 2015) which suggests that the quarter-life crisis in early adulthood can be of moderate severity, whereby individuals are still able to carry out their daily activities despite experiencing stress and uncertainty about their future.

Conclusion

Theoretically, this study shows that difficulties with emotional regulation are significantly associated with the quarter-life crisis among young adults in the city of Medan, with $R = 0.552$, $R^2 = 0.304$, $F = 151.343$, and $p < 0.001$. Difficulties with emotional regulation account for 30.4 per cent of the variance in quarter-life crisis, whilst the remaining 69.6 per cent is influenced by other factors outside the scope of this study. The positive relationship indicates that the greater an individual's difficulty in regulating their emotions, the higher their likelihood of experiencing a quarter-life crisis. The aspect of 'limited access to emotion regulation strategies' was the most dominant, contributing 26.3 per cent, followed by 'non-acceptance of emotional responses' at 20.7 per cent and 'lack of emotional clarity' at 18.7 per cent. Meanwhile, a lack of emotional awareness showed the lowest contribution, at 4.3 per cent. These findings reinforce the understanding that a quarter-life crisis is not only related to the emergence of negative emotions, but also to an individual's ability to accept, understand and manage those emotions when facing the demands of education, career, work and uncertainty about the future.

In practical terms, the research findings indicate that young adults need to

strengthen their skills in managing negative emotions, particularly in identifying appropriate emotion-regulation strategies, accepting their emotions, understanding their emotional states, and developing problem-solving skills, mindfulness and adaptive coping. Given that 81.9 per cent of respondents were students, higher education institutions need to strengthen psychological support services that are not only focused on academic achievement but also encompass emotional management, decision-making, future planning, and career uncertainty. This is all the more important as 82.18 per cent of respondents experienced anxiety or confusion in determining a suitable career path, and 42.81 per cent reported academic problems as their primary concern. Furthermore, the high levels of concern about failing to achieve one's dreams (89.65 per cent) and difficulties in determining one's life direction (68.10 per cent) highlight the need for programmes on life planning, career development, goal-setting and mentoring for young adults. Psychological interventions should also not focus solely on emotional regulation, but should encompass the ability to recognise, understand, accept and respond to emotions in an adaptive manner. Universities, youth organisations and community organisations can play a role through mentoring programmes, counselling, leadership development, career preparation, peer support and future planning. However, as emotional regulation accounts for only 30.4 per cent of the variation in the quarter-life crisis, its management cannot focus solely on emotional regulation but must be integrated with academic, career, social, financial and interpersonal support, as well as psychological counselling.

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Author Contributions

This article was written by two individuals, Simbolon, J., Simbolon, H who have read and approved the published version of this manuscript, Simbolon, J., Simbolon, H designed the study and analyzed the data, while Simbolon, J., Simbolon, H performed the laboratory work. Simbolon, J., Simbolon, H, wrote the manuscript. They drafted the original manuscript, introduction, results, prepared the discussion, methodology, and conclusion. Simbolon, J., Simbolon, H also contributed ideas to the research process, data processing, translation into English, review, and editing. All members of the research team collaborated at every stage until this article was completed.

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Conflicts of Interest

This research is conducted to provide information to the public regarding the research that has been conducted so that it can be used for educational purposes. In addition, this research is used by researchers for lecturer performance loads and accreditation needs of study programmes and institutions

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