


RESEARCH ARTICLE

The role of life meaningfulness on the quarter-life crisis of university students in Indonesia's new capital

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ABSTRACT

The policy of moving the national capital from Jakarta to East Kalimantan has caused pros and cons. The government is trying to equalize the economy. However, the younger generation, namely students, are still plagued by problems, namely quarter-life crisis, which has an impact on their mental health. This study examines the role of meaningfulness of life on the quarter-life crisis in students living in Indonesia's new capital city. This research design is a simple linear regression with purposive sampling to 511 students ($n = 511$) who study or come from East Kalimantan. Data was collected through Robinson's Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ-12) Scale instrument and Stegger's Meaning in Life Questionnaire scale students. The results showed a significant effect of meaning in life on quarter-life crisis in college students. However, there are differences in the influence of its aspects, namely the presence of meaning and searching for meaning aspects of a quarter-life crisis. Therefore, individuals find significant value in undergoing a crisis to rise to become new individuals who are meaningful in life.

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INTRODUCTION

The policy of moving the national capital from Jakarta to East Kalimantan is a hot topic of discussion, but there are pros and cons. The government is trying to achieve economic equality in each region so that it is not focused on the island of Java. However, the location of the relocation destination is not fully prepared. Developing the Indonesian capital in East Kalimantan will cause problems for the community. Economic issues have not fully recovered. East Kalimantan has 129 thousand unemployed people (Kaltim Post, 2021). East Kalimantan has an open unemployment rate of 6.83% of the total labor force or above the national unemployment rate, so East Kalimantan is ranked 7th and 1st among other provinces on the same island (Redaksi2, 2022). The population migration that occurs provides concerns for local communities, such as not being able to compete with migrants from outside Kalimantan, opportunities to participate in development, and property rights in the use of land that is being used (Fristikawati et al., 2022).

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Local students who are expected to become essential figures in regional development are still psychologically constrained. In 2020, a student in Samarinda allegedly hanged himself because he was depressed that he had not graduated for seven years, and his thesis was often rejected by his lecturers (Daton & Ika, 2020). In 2021, a female student in Samarinda committed suicide after an argument with her boyfriend (Selasar, 2021). This little phenomenon that arises cannot be separated from high levels of anxiety. Based on research from Zuhaedah and Milkhatun (2022), it is stated that students in Samarinda experience the majority of anxiety at severe and very severe levels. It was recorded that 35.5% of respondents were at the level of intense anxiety, and 19.5% of respondents were at the level of very severe anxiety out of a total of 369 respondents. This is one of the crises experienced by most of those aged 18 years and over in East Kalimantan.

The phenomenal problems of life at 18 years of age and above always raise questions from society. The crisis of individuals towards a new life such as work, marital status, relationships, and others from adolescence to adulthood. This situation also causes individuals in this transition to question their lives and become confused about what they have gone through. Then, review the past and whether what has been done is helpful for the next life that will be lived in the future (Herawati & Hidayat, 2020). This emotional state is called a quarter-life crisis.

The quarter-life crisis was first coined by Robbins and Wilner in 2001 in their book "Quarter-life Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties." Quarter-life crisis is a phenomenon that occurs in individuals in early adulthood, roughly between their 20s and early 30s, where they experience confusion, uncertainty, and anxiety about life goals, careers, relationships, and personal identity. This crisis is similar to the mid-life crisis but occurs at a younger age. The majority are experienced in their 20s. Mixed emotional responses include worry, doubt, confusion about abilities, and finding purpose in life. This aligns with longitudinal research from Smith et al. in 2011 through interviews with 230 respondents, portraying adult life as a reality of confusing, problematic, sad, and sometimes dangerous confusion (Yeler et al., 2021). They interpret themselves as lost and wounded at these ages. Thus, it can be concluded that people experience many problems in early adulthood. It would not be wrong to say that it has a "dark side" despite its positive aspects (Yeler et al., 2021).

There are several problems faced in this phase, namely, dreams and hopes, which are about the confusion of each individual regarding objectives and hopes for the future. Second, academic challenges relate to why individuals pursue and complete their education but are just starting or are already interested in other fields. Third, religion and spirituality are an individual's confusion about his spirituality, ranging from whether the religion he adheres to is the right choice to whether he values his religion. Fourth, work and working life is an individual stuck between wanting a job or career that interests him or adapting to the needs of the times for high income and, ultimately, financial success. Fifth, friends, love, and family relationships represent the confusion of identifying one's true self and the desire to participate in human relationships. Sixth, self-identity relates to the chaos of finding the meaning of life in adulthood (Nash & Murray, 2010).

The impact of a quarter-life crisis varies, with the negative leaning more towards the negative. Emotional instability (Arnet, 2004), increased stress (Robinson & Wright, 2013; Walshe, 2018; Nabila, 2020), worry (Karpika & Segel, 2021), high anxiety (Robinson, 2019; Anggraini & Aqila, 2022), decreased mental health (Henderson, 2019) can even lead to depression (Black, 2010; Rossi & Mebert, 2011) because individuals feel pressured by the uncertainty of the future, primarily related to career and personal life.

The role of life meaning in a quarter-life crisis is significant because it can help individuals overcome the negative impacts of this period. The meaning of life can improve individual psychological well-

being, the need for positive relationships with others, a good environment, self-acceptance, autonomy, and life goals (Garcia et al., 2014). Finding the meaning of life impacts emotional stability, reducing depression in students aged 19-25 years (Utomo & Meiyuntari, 2015; Purnamasari, 2018). Achieving life goals is a form of life satisfaction because of the meaning of the life lived.

Previous research by Habibie, Syakarofath, and Anwar (2019) found that religiosity affects the level of individual quarter-life crisis. Individuals need to increase their religiosity to overcome the psychological dynamics experienced. In addition, religiosity makes it easier for individuals who provide a value backing in the search for the meaning of life because religion is educative (Puspito in Fitriani, 2016). This study aims to see the role of meaningfulness of life in the influence of career planning on quarter-life crises in students who are residents of new national capitals. Academic benefits are an addition to references related to the millennial phenomenon in the literary world to enrich the treasures of science, especially in psychology.

METHOD

This research uses quantitative methods with a causal relationship approach. That is an approach that aims to measure the level of influence of independent variables (variables that influence) on dependent variables (variables that are controlled) (Sugiyono, 2016). The sample was 511 students who studied or came from East Kalimantan and were selected through the purposive sampling technique. The student respondents ($n = 511$) ranged in age from 18 to 29 years, with an average age of 20.3 and $SD = 1.635$. There were 216 male respondents (42.3%) and 295 female respondents (57.7%). The research to be carried out is divided into three stages, namely the preparation stage, the implementation stage, and the analysis stage. The preparation stage begins with the researcher deepening the material through theoretical studies. Then, do back translation on the three measuring instruments and test them. Researchers distributed quarter-life crisis scales directly and online forms in the implementation stage. Measuring instruments are distributed to active students who come from or study in East Kalimantan aged 18-29 years. Finally, the analysis stage analyzes the results of distributing the two scales to the subjects. The data that has been obtained is then inputted and processed using the SPSS version 24.

The instrument used to measure the level of quarter-life crisis is the development of the Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ-12) Petrov, Robinson, and Arnett (2022) scale containing ten items. This instrument includes three subscales: disconnection & difficulty, lack of clarity & control, and transition & turning points with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.780. Example of item 1: "I think my life is meaningless." The instrument for measuring the level of career planning used is the development of Gould's Career Planning scale (1979), which contains 16 items with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.867. This instrument includes four subscales: career plans, career involvement, identity resolution, and adaptation. Example of item 1: "I have not decided what career goals I want."

The instrument for measuring the meaningfulness of life uses the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) scale from Stegger et al. (2006), with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.831. This instrument has two subscales: searching for meaning and presence of meaning. Example item 1 is "I understand the meaning of my life." All instruments in this study are in the form of a Likert scale with a 4-point type ranging from "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," and "strongly disagree."

The analysis used a simple linear regression test to test whether there is a significant effect of meaningfulness of life on quarter-life crisis using the SPSS-24 version.



Figure 1. Hypothesis framework

RESULT

Table 1. Demographics of respondents (n = 511)

Category	n (%)
Gender	
Male	216 (42.3%)
Female	295 (57.7%)
Marital status	
Single	504 (98.6%)
Married	7 (1.4%)
Educational level	
Diploma 3	23 (4.5%)
Diploma 4	55 (10.8%)
Undergraduate	428 (83.7%)
Master	5 (1%)
Parental status	
Intact parents	395 (77.3%)
Fatherless	45 (8.8%)
Motherless	18 (3.5%)
Divorced	45 (8.8%)
Orphans	8 (1.6%)

Table 2 uses a simple linear regression test to obtain a significant value of the meaningfulness of life variable on the effect of career planning on the quarter-life crisis of .005. The effect can be substantial if the considerable value is below .05. Thus, it can be concluded that meaningfulness of life significantly influences the quarter-life crisis, and the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2. Simple linear regression

R ²	T	P	Explanation
0.016	-2.839	0.005	Significant

Table 3 uses multiple regression tests to obtain a significant value of the presence and searching variables, which are aspects of meaningfulness of life during the quarter-life crisis. The effect can be substantial if the sig value is below .05. The moderating effect of presence is < .001 with a value of B = -.500. The effect of searching is .001 with a B value of .221. Thus, it can be concluded that these two variables have a significant moderating influence on the effect of career planning on the quarter-life crisis.

Table 3. Multiple linear regression on aspects of life meaningfulness

Variable	T	p	B	R ²
Presence	-6.754	<.001	-0.500	0.289
Searching	3.233	0.001	0.221	

DISCUSSION

This study examines the role of meaningfulness of life on students' quarter-life crisis. This finding is consistent with research by Habibie, Syakarofath, and Anwar (2019), who found that religiosity affects reducing individual quarter-life crises. The meaning of life can be more easily found through the value of religiosity (Puspito in Fitriani, 2016). The results of the study in Table 2 show that there is a significant effect of meaningfulness of life on the quarter-life crisis in college students with a

substantial value ($p = 0.005 < 0.05$) and a T-value (-2.839). This means that the higher the moderator on the influence of these variables and the influence of career planning on the quarter-life crisis, the more it is influenced by other variables.

Finding meaning in the life crisis process improves the quality of life and reduces the negative impact of a quarter-life crisis. This supports research from Nabila (2020). This aligns with research from Maher, Muna, & Maimouna (2017), which states that finding the meaning of life positively impacts improving mental health by reducing the level of individual quarter-life crisis.

However, Stegger's version of life's meaning has differences. Individuals achieving life's purpose have two conditions: searching with an active nature and finding with a passive nature. In Table 3, different results were found between searching and presence. Searching has no significant effect on the quarter-life crisis. At the same time, presence significantly affects individual quarter-life crises with a negative T value. This means that the higher the appreciation of the meaning of life, the weaker the level of a quarter-life crisis. This finding supports the research of Kiang and Fuligni (2010), which states that the meaning of life with these two aspects in its use as a research variable has different results. Presence tends to have positive results that are theoretically acceptable and stable in contrast to searching, which is still unclear (Kiang & Fuligni, 2010; Allan et al., 2016).

In addition, there are conceptual differences. The meaning of life theory is multi-dimensional. Each aspect can stand alone as a theory. Conceptually, the theory and measurement of the presence of meaning tends to discuss goals in life, and searching for purpose tends to discuss the initiative of making meaning of life goals (King & Hicks, 2021). This impacts the measuring instruments used, which are different in the direction of the relationship from the meaningfulness of life. So, it is necessary to review the searching aspects of the definition and indicators (Newman & Nezlek, 2019).

Searching for meaning increases stress. Although it is an essential human motivation, it can stress individuals because the goal is pleasure or power (Newman & Nezlek, 2019). In addition, the search for meaning in life requires individuals to continue to understand life events, while daily events or circumstances fluctuate in nature, which stresses individuals. This stress can harm individual psychology, such as depression, neuroticism, life satisfaction, and self-esteem (Steger et al., 2006). Therefore, the process of finding meaning is a state that continues to be trained so that the goal is not just happiness but meaningfulness (Allan et al., 2016).

The presence of meaning reduces anxiety because the meaning of life is easier to find. Anxiety can reduce the level of psychological well-being of individuals. The presence of meaning through positive appreciation of the experiences that have been received increases the level of psychological well-being of individuals. Research by Parola et al. (2022) states that students with a good presence of meaning also impact their psychological well-being. Good psychological conditions also affect making the right career decisions by reducing the indecision of choosing a career (Parola et al., 2022). Students need to be able to understand the experiences that have been passed positively to improve psychological well-being and career planning for the better.

Stegger's theory is considered the conclusion of two views on the meaning of life, namely Baumeister and Frankl. Baumeister (2002) believes that the meaning of life is an individual need. This need requires individuals to seek meaning regarding values, goals, success, and self-esteem. Meanwhile, Frankl (2017) believes that the meaning of life is finding meaning through accepting the wisdom of the events experienced with the reasons why they should stay alive or die as an effect produced by individual behavior and not just pleasure or power.

In addition, there are individual differences in life's meaning based on culture. This starts from how the parenting model has been given to children (Indrawati & Muthmainah, 2022). The individualist culture of the West has an impact on individual initiative. The Western parenting model is centered on independence. Individuals are more active in assessing everything based on personal paradigms and not from social paradigms.

In contrast, eastern culture, with its collectivism, tends to harmonize (Wang et al., 2021). This harmony is based on the values adopted by the environment, one of which is the family. Personal values tend to be obscured in connection with the social. Social norms are upheld so that they seem to force individuals. The meaning of life in each aspect is different based on culture. Research by Lewis et al. (2017) strengthens by explaining that there are differences in levels between aspects of the meaning of life. Eastern cultures, namely Asia, dominate the level in the presence of meaning (presence), while Western cultures, namely Latin, American, and European, search for meaning (searching). This difference relates to how Eastern cultures tend to accept values from experienced events and values from other people to be lived, whether the value creates social harmony or not. In contrast to Western cultures, they tend to have the initiative to seek values based on their values. This value is born from how individuals can solve the problems they face (Wang et al., 2021).

The meaning of life is closely related to how individuals perceive virtue (wisdom) based on culture. This is in line with the research from Wang et al. (2021) explains how the difference lies. Eastern culture emphasizes collectivism, and Western culture instills individualism. Collectivism relies on the value of togetherness and harmony, which reduces individual values as a reference for virtue. So, social support is needed to help the meaning of life, which tends to be passive. The meaning of life is found in the experiences encountered. These values come by themselves or from the views of others, not by self-initiative to search. This contrasts Western culture, which leans towards individualist values that reduce the values of togetherness and harmony. Virtue is interpreted as something that can solve something in a personal life. So that individuals are required to take the initiative to find these values.

Quarter-life crisis can be accelerated by doing various things, such as being open to the environment. The emotional instability experienced tends to make individuals close to their surroundings. They feel trapped in various obligations and unable to decide what to do. Individuals usually feel pressured by others, family, partners, or social circles to stay in relationships despite dissatisfaction (Robinson, 2019). Therefore, the environment needs to provide support so that individuals can be open to the problems they face. This support can be found through effective counseling services to solve various quarter-life crisis problems (Rahmania & Tasaufi, 2020; Septamara, Prasetiawan, & Prasetya, 2022). Therefore, individuals need to find the right environment and do not need to worry about finding related professionals, such as counselors, to solve the problems they face.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis described above, it can be concluded that meaningfulness of life significantly affects the quarter-life crisis in college students. These results indicate that finding meaning in life can reduce the quarter-life crisis in college students. However, one aspect of the meaning of life does not contribute significantly, namely the searching for meaning aspect, in contrast to the presence of meaning aspect, which consistently reduces the level of a quarter-life crisis. Future researchers can qualitatively explore the meaning of life and the psychological dynamics of individuals in the quarter-life crisis phase. As well as being able to test its relationship with parenting and parental education level. So that it can be an input for further research. Meanwhile, practical advice is given to students

to find a supportive environment as a support for finding the meaning of life and solving problems experienced during a quarter-life crisis so that it does not have an impact on reducing mental health.

DECLARATION

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Author contribution statement

Alfiesyahrianta Habibie contributed to conducting research design, creating Google forms for data collection, distributing scales, analyzing research results, and writing the manuscript. Yulia Sholichatun and Iin Tri Rahayu served as supervisors who guided and approved the research development, supervised the data collection process, and reviewed the results and manuscript.

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Data access statement

The data described in this article are not publicly available, so that the research results can be seen directly in the presented manuscript.

Declaration of interest's statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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