

## ***Future and Career Anxiety: The Contribution of Career Planning in Minimizing Quarter-Life Crisis on Final-Year Students***

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### **Abstract**

Quarter-life crisis is increasingly being discussed as a phase of uncertainty among young adults, one of the triggers of which is a lack of career planning, causing individuals to feel unprepared to face life after higher education. This study aimed to examine the role of career planning in quarter-life crises among students. The research method was a quantitative survey of 153 respondents, with the criterion being students aged 18–29 years who were studying or came from East Kalimantan. Data were collected using the Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ-12) scale by Petrov et al. (2021) and Career Planning by Wang et al. (2022) for students. Data analysis was conducted using simple linear regression through the JASP. The results showed that career planning influenced the level of quarter-life crisis among students with a significant value ( $p < 0.001$ ) and a contribution of 46%. This means that the higher the level of career planning, the lower the level of quarter-life crisis among students. These findings emphasize the importance of career planning for final-year students facing uncertainty of the future after graduation and managing stress in a more adaptive manner.

Keywords : career planning, quarter-life crisis, student

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### **BACKGROUND**

The final stage of college is a critical and stressful transition period for students. At this stage, individuals are not only expected to complete academic responsibilities, such as their thesis, but are also faced with social and family expectations to quickly become financially and professionally independent (Keane et al., 2021). The transition from the structured world of education to the unpredictable world of work can trigger psychological tension. According to Liputan, many final-year students experience life pressures, such as family expectations and heavy academic burdens (Aryani, 2025). This phenomenon can create a heavy cognitive and emotional burden (Izza & Lailiyah, 2024). Thus, it raises

questions about their competence and readiness to face the realities of a competitive job market..

Final-year students are in the most complex stage of human development, which is the transition from adolescence to adulthood. They are faced with a shift from an enjoyable phase to one full of demands (Putri et al., 2022). As young adults, individuals face the developmental task of confronting a social world that demands stability. The surrounding community often brings up questions about life achievements, such as “when will you graduate,” “where do you work,” or “when will you get married.” The inability to answer these questions often makes individuals feel pressured, unprepared to navigate adulthood, and experience emotional tension due to the process of adapting to new values (Hasyim et al., 2024; Robinson, 2019).



Emotional states that include anxiety, doubt, and confusion about the future are known as the quarter-life crisis (qlc).

The impact of a quarter-life crisis should not be underestimated. A study also found a connection between early adulthood crisis and suicidal ideation in a small number of participants (Alfaruqy & Indrawati, 2023). This aligns with previous literature, which states that this phase has a “dark side,” in which individuals interpret themselves as lost and wounded on their way to adulthood (Maulida et al., 2026). This condition can therefore hinder an individual's optimal development when planning for the future.

The quarter-life crisis is no longer a marginal psychological issue but has become a global phenomenon (Basrowi et al., 2024). Moreover, the world is currently entering a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) era, which can exacerbate the situation (Okonkwo et al., 2024; Widyastuti & Dewi, 2025). Consequently, individuals experiencing a quarter-life crisis tend to have a lower quality of life and higher stress levels (Kartika et al., 2025; Widyastuti & Dewi, 2025), which directly hampers their productivity. This directly hampers their productivity.

A quarter-life crisis is characterized by confusion. Previous research has emphasized that most problems during this phase center around work or careers (Robinson et al., 2025; Salsabila et al., 2023). Consequently, individuals feel “lost” and doubt their ability to face future careers.

In this phase, most people experience problems related to their careers. This instability triggers job-hopping behavior because individuals are dissatisfied with their achievements. One aspect is the crisis of loyalty toward companies. Changing jobs frequently, or the job-hopping phenomenon, is mostly done during this phase because of confusion and dissatisfaction with career accomplishments (Arifiani & Ardy Wiratama, 2025; Qonita & Puspitadewi, 2022). Therefore, having a well-thought-out career plan becomes necessary to navigate uncertainty and build optimism for the future.

One way to overcome this uncertainty is to have self-confidence in preparing for a career through career planning. Career planning is the process of identifying goals, developing skills, and formulating strategic steps to achieve personal success (Hareli et al., 2025). Proper planning acts as a proactive coping mechanism that turns anxiety into measurable actions (Chan & Brough, 2025). Previous research explains that confusion and dissatisfaction with the chosen career are the most influential factors in emotional instability when facing (Yeler et al., 2021). This is supported by Onuoha et al.'s (2025) findings (Onuoha et al., 2025), who state that individuals without a clear career direction tend to become stuck in a phase of stagnation and worsen the symptoms of a quarter-life crisis. Career confusion arises from mismatched abilities and desires, as well as dissatisfaction with career achievements caused by comparing oneself to others.

Other studies support that making the right career choice has a significant impact on reducing the level of quarter-life crisis among students (Asri, 2022). Individuals gain confidence in navigating life, especially through developmental processes. Recent research shows that

career adaptability, which includes planning, has a strong negative correlation with future anxiety; the more detailed the plans, the lower the psychological distress experienced (Dadoo & Medhi, 2024; Z. Zhang et al., 2022). Thus, individuals gain greater confidence in going through life transitions, especially

Although the relationship between readiness and career maturity has been widely studied, a significant empirical gap remains. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a new perspective: that career planning is not only a tool for achieving professional success but also a therapeutic tool for mental health. Based on this premise, the present study empirically examines the contribution of career planning in minimizing the level of quarter-life crisis among final-year university students. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions by enriching the body of developmental psychology literature regarding the preventive role of career management against emotional crises. Practically, the findings of this study will serve as a foundation for higher education institutions to redefine career guidance so that it is not merely a routine administrative service but rather a form of urgent psychological support to safeguard students' mental well-being as they navigate this transitional phase.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This quantitative correlational study examined the influence of career planning on quarter-life crisis. The participants in this study were 153 final-year university students in East Kalimantan, aged 18–29 years, selected using convenience sampling. This technique was used because the researcher did not have a complete list (database) of final-year students in East Kalimantan. Thus, the representation of respondents could still be maintained even though such a database was not available for sampling.

Data were collected using a Likert scale with four response options: very appropriate, appropriate, not appropriate, and very inappropriate. Scores ranged from 4 to 1. Quarter-life crisis was measured using an adaptation of the DCQ Scale by Petrov et al. (2022), which had been adapted into Indonesian using the forward-backward translation technique, comprising three dimensions: (1) disconnection and distress, (2) lack of clarity and control, and (3) transition and turning point. It consists of 12 items, with CFA results indicating a good model fit (GFI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.07; CFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.90). Similarly, career planning was adapted from the scale by Wang et al. (2023) with four dimensions: (1) interest, (2) abilities, (3) values, and (4) personality. It consists of 28 items, with results showing a good model fit (GFI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.05; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.91).

This study began with a literature review on career planning and quarter-life crisis to refine the problem formulation and study objectives. Subsequently, a correlational quantitative approach was applied to examine the influence of these two variables on students. The selection of respondents was based on the G\*Power calculation with a minimum threshold of 111 people. Questionnaires were then distributed both directly and

broadcast via social media (Instagram and WhatsApp). The collected data were analyzed using statistical software.

Simple linear regression analysis was used to measure the influence of career planning on quarter-life crisis among students. Hypothesis testing was conducted with the assistance of the Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP) application. Hypothesis testing in the regression model aims to establish the foundation of a data distribution consisting of a criterion variable (Y) and a single predictor variable (X) in the form of a linear relationship (Winarsunu, 2015).

## RESULTS

This study involved 153 participants. The distribution of participant characteristics based on five demographic aspects—gender, marital status, parental status, student category, and side jobs—is presented below.

Table 1. Demographic Distribution

|                         | Frequency  | Percent (%) |
|-------------------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>Gender</b>           |            |             |
| Male                    | 60         | 39.2        |
| Female                  | 93         | 60.8        |
| <b>Marital Status</b>   |            |             |
| Single                  | 150        | 98          |
| Married                 | 3          | 2           |
| <b>Parental Status</b>  |            |             |
| Intact (U)              | 122        | 79.7        |
| Separated (B)           | 16         | 10.5        |
| Motherless (P)          | 3          | 2           |
| Fatherless (Y)          | 10         | 6.5         |
| Orphan (YP)             | 2          | 1.3         |
| <b>Student Category</b> |            |             |
| Local                   | 93         | 60.8        |
| Wanderer                | 60         | 39.2        |
| <b>Side Job</b>         |            |             |
| Yes                     | 23         | 15          |
| No                      | 130        | 85          |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>152</b> | <b>100</b>  |

From the total 152 respondents, based on gender, there were more female respondents with 93 (60.8%) compared to male respondents with 60 (39.2%). Based on marital status, there were more single respondents with 150 (98%) compared to married respondents with 3 (2%). Regarding parental status, 122 respondents (79.7%) had both parents, 16 respondents (10.5%) were from divorced families, 10 respondents (6.5%) had lost their father, 3 respondents (2%) had lost their mother, and 2 respondents (1.3%) had lost both parents. In terms of student category, 93 respondents (60.8%) were locals and 60 respondents (39.2%) were from out of town. Regarding part-time work, 23 respondents (15%) answered yes, and 130 respondents (85%) answered no.

### Assumption Test

Table 2. Normality Test of Variables

| Variables       | Statistic | p    | N   |
|-----------------|-----------|------|-----|
| Career Planning | 0.093     | .145 | 153 |

Table 2. Normality Test of Variables

| Variables           | Statistic | p    | N   |
|---------------------|-----------|------|-----|
| Quarter-Life Crisis | 0.101     | 0.86 | 153 |

Based on the results in Table 2 of the normality assumption test using the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, both variables produced a sig value  $>0.050$ . Therefore, it can be concluded that the data are normally distributed.

Table 3. Linearity Test

| Variables                               | F      | p        | Note   |
|-----------------------------------------|--------|----------|--------|
| Career Planning–<br>Quarter-Life Crisis | 11.336 | $<0.001$ | Linier |

Based on the results in Table 3, the linearity test in this study shows an F value for linearity of 11.336 with a significance value ( $p < 0.001$ ). From these results, it can be concluded that the predictor and criterion variables in this study are linear or associated.

### Hypothesis Testing

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression Test

| Variables                               | R     | R <sup>2</sup> | F     | P        |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------|
| Career Planning–<br>Quarter-Life Crisis | 0.678 | 0.460          | 128.5 | $<0.001$ |

Based on Table 4, the results of the simple linear regression analysis show a significance value of  $p < 0.001$ . Since the significance value is less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ), it can be concluded that career planning has a significant influence on quarter-life crisis among final-year students. Thus, the alternative research hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) was accepted. The correlation test results show an R value of 0.678, indicating a strong relationship between the career planning variable and quarter-life crisis. Furthermore, the  $R^2$  (R Square) value is 0.460, indicating that the career planning variable contributes 46% of the influence on the quarter-life crisis. The remaining 54% is influenced by other variables outside this research model. In addition, the calculated F value of 128.5 further strengthens this regression model in accurately predicting the influence between variables.

### Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Table 5. Based on Gender

|      | Career Planning |           | Quarter-Life Crisis |           |
|------|-----------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|
|      | Laki            | Perempuan | Laki                | Perempuan |
| Mean | 57.07           | 55.86     | 34.38               | 33.08     |
| SD   | 7.841           | 5.656     | 5.292               | 4.850     |
| Min  | 41.00           | 35.00     | 20.00               | 12.00     |
| Max  | 84.00           | 70.00     | 48.00               | 48.00     |

As shown in Table 5, the average level of career planning among males is 57.07 (SD=7.841), which is higher than that of females at 55.86 (SD=5.656). The average level

of quarter-life crisis among males is 34.38 (SD=5.292), which is also higher than that of females at 33.08 (SD=4.850).

Table 6. Based on Marital Status

|      | Career Planning |         | Quarter-Life Crisis |         |
|------|-----------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
|      | Single          | Married | Single              | Married |
| Mean | 56.26           | 60.00   | 33.59               | 33.33   |
| SD   | 6.628           | 4.359   | 5.086               | 3.512   |
| Min  | 35.00           | 55.00   | 12.00               | 30.00   |
| Max  | 84.00           | 63.00   | 48.00               | 37.00   |

As shown in Table 6, the average level of career planning among married individuals is 60.00 (SD=4.359), which is higher than that among singles at 56.26 (SD=6.628). The average level of quarter-life crisis among singles is 33.59 (SD=5.086), which is higher than that among married individuals at 33.33 (SD=3.512).

Table 7. Based on Side Job

|      | Career Planning |       | Quarter-Life Crisis |       |
|------|-----------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
|      | No              | Yes   | No                  | Yes   |
| Mean | 56.10           | 57.65 | 34.30               | 33.46 |
| SD   | 6.625           | 6.450 | 4.617               | 5.131 |
| Min  | 35.00           | 47.00 | 12.00               | 27.00 |
| Max  | 84.00           | 74.00 | 48.00               | 47.00 |

As shown in Table 7, the average level of career planning among respondents with side jobs is 57.65 (SD=6.450), which is higher than that among those without side jobs at 56.10 (SD=6.625). The average level of quarter-life crisis among respondents without side jobs is 34.30 (SD=4.617), which is higher than 33.46 (SD=5.131).

Table 8. Based on Parental Status

|      | Career Planning |       |       |       |       |
|------|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|      | B               | P     | U     | Y     | YP    |
| Mean | 57.25           | 52.67 | 56.16 | 57.50 | 59.00 |
| SD   | 4.768           | 3.215 | 6.924 | 6.187 | 5.657 |
| Min  | 50.00           | 49.00 | 35.00 | 48.00 | 55.00 |
| Max  | 70.00           | 55.00 | 84.00 | 69.00 | 63.00 |

As shown in Table 8, the highest average level of career planning was found among respondents with YP (orphans) parental status at 59.00 (SD=5.657), while the lowest was among respondents with P (motherless) parental status at 52.67 (SD=3.215).

Table 9. Based on Parental Status

|      | Quarter-Life Crisis |       |       |       |       |
|------|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|      | B                   | P     | U     | Y     | YP    |
| Mean | 34.75               | 29.67 | 33.39 | 34.20 | 39.00 |
| SD   | 2.620               | 0.577 | 5.214 | 6.179 | 2.828 |
| Min  | 29.00               | 29.00 | 12.00 | 27.00 | 37.00 |
| Max  | 39.00               | 30.00 | 48.00 | 48.00 | 41.00 |

As shown in Table 9, the average level of quarter-life crisis was highest among respondents with YP (orphans) parental status at 39.00 (SD=2.828) and lowest among respondents with P (motherless) status at 29.67 (SD=0.577).

Table 10. Career Planning

| Category  | Interval | F   | (%)  | Min/Max |
|-----------|----------|-----|------|---------|
| Very Low  | <36      | 1   | 0.7  |         |
| Low       | 36-47    | 52  | 34.0 |         |
| Medium    | 48-57    | 84  | 54.9 | 35/84   |
| High      | 58-68    | 9   | 5.9  |         |
| Very High | >68      | 7   | 4.6  |         |
| Total     |          | 153 | 100  |         |

As shown in Table 10, the value categorization is divided into five categories: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high. The results show that the majority of respondents are at the moderate level (84 respondents, or 54.9%) and at the low level (52 respondents, or 34%).

Table 11. Quarter-Life Crisis

| Category  | Interval | F   | (%)  | Min/Max |
|-----------|----------|-----|------|---------|
| Very Low  | <21      | 3   | 2.0  |         |
| Low       | 21-27    | 2   | 1.3  |         |
| Medium    | 28-33    | 76  | 49.7 | 12/48   |
| High      | 34-39    | 60  | 39.2 |         |
| Very High | >39      | 12  | 7.8  |         |
| Total     |          | 153 | 100  |         |

Based on the results in Table 11, the value categorization is divided into five categories: very low, low, medium, high, and very high. The results show that the majority of respondents are at the medium level (76 respondents, or 49.7%), with 60 respondents (39.2 %) at the high level.

## **DISCUSSION**

Career planning makes a significant contribution ( $p < 0.001$ ), with an influence contribution of 46%. These findings demonstrate that career planning plays a crucial role in reducing quarter-life crisis (QLC) among final-year students; therefore, the research hypothesis is accepted. Dynamically, career planning acts as a cognitive buffer that transforms future uncertainty into measurable steps (Demirci & Hatun, 2025; Jia et al., 2022; Q. Zhang et al., 2025). The presence of career planning can reduce psychological distress caused by ambiguous transitional phases (Dadoo & Medhi, 2024; Ünal et al., 2026).

Based on research data, the majority of students' career planning falls into the moderate and low categories. This indicates that new students possess basic awareness but lack well-developed execution strategies (Anyango et al., 2024; Creed et al., 2021; Zewude et al., 2025). Concrete steps, such as internships or technical skill development, are needed to strengthen professional readiness (Sengupta & Datta, 2023; Zhou et al., 2022). Without real strategies, students' self-understanding will remain at the exploration stage, with no tangible achievements (Jackson & Li, 2021; Reddy, 2023; Stephen, 2024).

Measured career exploration helps students objectively identify relevant opportunities and competencies. This identification process is a manifestation of strong self-assessment skills that facilitate future professional success (Conley et al., 2025; Foster et al., 2025; Mara et al., 2025). Assessing one's own capacity through proper career identification is a sign of individual independence in determining one's life direction (Azhenov et al., 2023; Manan & Haidar, 2021; Taylor et al., 2022). Future career success greatly depends on the accuracy with which individuals assess their interests and talents from an early stage (Eva et al., 2020; Marciniak et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2024).

Careers serve as indicators of the future and reflect an individual's stability and life satisfaction. Thoughtful career choices provide economic certainty and support for the well-being of the mind and emotions (Laila et al., 2025; Qiong, 2026; Thomson et al., 2022). Structured planning helps students accommodate their desired lifestyles while avoiding professional failures (Jabed Hosen et al., 2023; Kwee, 2020; Murcahyanto et al., 2022). A stable future begins with an individual's ability to realistically visualize their career goals (Grosemans et al., 2020; O'Donnell et al., 2025; Wake & O'Donnell, 2024).

A well-planned career aspiration serves as a benchmark for students' success in facing the uncertainties of early adulthood. Individuals need to strengthen themselves to accomplish the developmental tasks of becoming an ideal and independent adult (Axelrod, 2024; Mehta & Arnett, 2023; Reifman & Niehuis, 2023). The ability to control oneself and one's environment is a result of thorough planning (Abdi et al., 2023; Presbitero & Teng-Calleja, 2022; Sinuraya et al., 2022). Students who fail to plan their careers tend to become trapped in prolonged role

confusion (Ogunsemi, 2025; Rahimah et al., 2022; Yanuar & Vrisaba, 2022).

College students experiencing a quarter-life crisis often worry about job opportunities after graduation. This anxiety arises from the developmental tasks involved in the transition to adulthood, which come with demanding expectations (Hapsari & Noverli, 2025; Kardinal, V. et al., 2025; Maharani & Jaro'ah, 2025). Complaints about the alignment between jobs and skills become an emotional burden that reduces life satisfaction (Balqis et al., 2023; Robinson et al., 2025; Veda & Rahayu, 2023). This crisis can manifest as frustration if not addressed promptly through intensive career guidance (Azza et al., 2025; Marlina, 2024; Noveriyanti et al., 2025).

Orphaned students showed the highest career planning scores as a survival strategy. The absence of primary parental support compelled the development of an internal locus of control to ensure future financial security (DogonchiMitra et al., 2022; Febriantje & Amelasasih, 2025; Schepisi, 2024). However, this premature independence also increases the psychological burden due to the loss of a stable emotional support system (Blake et al., 2024, 2025; Dariotis et al., 2023).

Most students in this study experienced a moderate to high level of quarter-life crisis, and the triggers are multifactorial. These include low self-confidence, anxiety about the future, and fear of disappointing one's parents (Dharmajayanti et al., 2025; Hairunisa et al., 2025). This condition is exacerbated by individuals' tendency to engage in negative social comparisons on social media with peers perceived as more successful, which then generates emotional responses, including frustration, hopelessness, and disappointment (Azza et al., 2025; Simarmata et al., 2025). Therefore, it is important to promptly address these various emotional responses to recover from the quarter-life crisis.

In addition, students need to be proactive in solving the problems they experience in a supportive environment for QLC. Previous studies have shown that a supportive environment positively impacts reducing individual levels of QLC (Sari et al., 2025; Maulida et al., 2026). Positive interactions that can be provided by the environment, such as material and non-material assistance, attention, care, empathy, as well as offering advice, counsel, and information, can help individuals overcome their problems (Alamsyah et al., 2025; Basuki & Djudiyah, 2025). It is also necessary to seek professional assistance, such as effective counseling, to resolve the various problems associated with QLC (Maulida et al., 2026; Noveriyanti et al., 2025; Sahrah et al., 2023). It is important to find solutions to quarter-life crisis issues; however, this study is still focused on the quantitative survey method; thus, the emotional dynamics of students in facing QLC cannot be explored in depth.

## **CONCLUSION**

Career planning significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ) contributes 46% toward minimizing quarter-life crisis among final-year students in East Kalimantan. The more mature the career

planning, the lower the levels of anxiety and transitional crisis experienced by students. This finding confirms that having a clear professional direction acts as a psychological protective factor in facing early adulthood. Higher education institutions need to redefine career services as a form of integrated psychosocial support. Improvements in campus bureaucratic performance should be realized through strong industry partnerships, CV writing training, interview simulations, and the provision of adaptive job vacancy access. These efforts aim to transform student anxiety into measurable career readiness. Future research should enrich the data by expanding respondent characteristics, such as examining the influence of birth order and family economic status. The use of mixed methods is highly recommended to deeply explore issues related to QLC. This is essential for formulating effective psychological intervention designs to help students navigate the transition period with resilience.

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