

## ***The Role of Internal Locus of Control in Quarter-Life Crisis***

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### **Abstract**

Master of Psychology students who are generally in early adulthood will tend to utilize their knowledge and expertise to achieve their goals because they are in the achievement stage. However, when are unable to respond to the pressure, it will cause feelings of anxiety, stress, and another psychological problem. The various crises experienced by Master of Psychology students during the early adult stage are called quarter-life crisis. This study aims to determine the relationship between internal locus of control and quarter-life crisis. This research is a quantitative type with correlational techniques. The participants were selected using the purposive sampling method with the characteristics of Master of Psychology students at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya aged 22-30 years. Data analysis techniques using Spearman's Rho show a score of  $r_{xy} = -0.270$  with sig. 0.015 ( $p < 0.05$ ). It means that the higher the internal locus of control, the lower of quarter life crisis. This research found that locus of control internal effectively contributed 7.29% to quarter life crisis. Furthermore, Master of Psychology students at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya experienced a moderate quarter life crisis, with 50 students or 61.7% of the 81 total respondents.

**Keywords:** Locus of control internal; Quarter life crisis; Master of psychology student

### **Abstrak**

Mahasiswa Magister Psikologi yang umumnya berada pada usia dewasa awal akan cenderung memanfaatkan pengetahuan dan keahliannya untuk mencapai tujuan karena pada saat yang sama mereka dalam tahap pencapaian. Namun, ketika individu tersebut tidak dapat merespon tekanan yang sedang dihadapi akan menimbulkan perasaan cemas, stress bahkan masalah psikologis lainnya. Berbagai krisis yang dialami Mahasiswa Magister Psikologi saat tahap dewasa awal dinamakan quarter life crisis. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui hubungan antara locus of control internal dengan quarter life crisis. Penelitian merupakan jenis kuantitatif dengan teknik korelasional. Teknik pengambilan partisipan menggunakan metode purposive sampling dengan karakteristik yakni Mahasiswa Magister Psikologi Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya berusia 22-30 tahun. Teknik analisis data menggunakan Spearman's Rho menunjukkan skor  $r_{xy} = -0.270$  dengan sig. 0.015 ( $p < 0.05$ ), artinya ada hubungan negatif yang signifikan antara locus of control internal dengan quarter life crisis pada Mahasiswa Magister Psikologi. Semakin tinggi locus of control internal maka semakin rendah quarter life crisis. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa locus of control internal memiliki sumbangan efektif terhadap quarter life crisis sebesar 7.29%. Hasil penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa Mahasiswa Magister Psikologi Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya mengalami quarter life crisis yang berada dalam kategori sedang dengan jumlah 50 mahasiswa atau sebesar 61.7% dari 81 total responden.

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**Kata kunci :** *Locus of control internal; Quarter life crisis; Mahasiswa Magister Psikologi*

## **Introduction**

Adulthood is commonly divided into developmental stages: early adulthood (18–40 years), middle adulthood (40–60 years), and late adulthood (60 years and above). Early adulthood refers to a period of role adjustment accompanied by various problems or crises, emotional tension, periods of social isolation, shifts in values, and self-adjustment to new lifestyles. Based on this perspective, early adulthood is often considered a stage of instability. However, it is also a phase in which individuals explore their identity, try different possibilities, and seek opportunities to change their lives especially in building romantic relationships and careers as well as a stage in which individuals focus more on themselves (Arnett, 2004).

Carrying out developmental tasks during this stage is not easy. Some individuals may struggle to cope with changes at each developmental phase. Therefore, it is possible that such difficulties also occur among master's (graduate) students, who are generally in early adulthood. Master's or postgraduate students are individuals who pursue advanced education after completing undergraduate studies (S1). As is widely known, master's students must write a thesis as one of the requirements to complete their studies and obtain a graduate (master's) degree (Erko, 2015). This thesis research also helps master's students identify their specific academic interests. This aligns with K. Warner Schaie's lifespan model, which explains that individuals enter the stage of achievement in early adulthood. At this stage, individuals utilize their knowledge and skills to accomplish goals such as career planning and family formation (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009).

Students in early adulthood also strive to develop strategies for the future, identify their identity through interests and abilities, and determine the professional fields they intend to pursue. On the other hand, Santrock (2011) explains that this exploration process may generate anxiety and confusion about the future, or even social rejection from the surrounding environment. This is consistent with Azzahra (2023), who found that when individuals are unable to respond effectively to pressures they face, they may experience anxiety, stress, or other psychological problems. The crises experienced by Master's students in Psychology during early adulthood are often referred to as a quarter-life crisis.

Robbins and Wilner (2001) introduced the concept of the quarter-life crisis through their book *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties*, describing it as an identity crisis that emerges when individuals feel unprepared to deal with the transition from adolescence to adulthood, as well as the shift from academic life to "real-world" demands. Research by Robinson et al. (2020) reported that 33% of early adults experienced developmental crises within one year after leaving university. In addition, 45% of adults aged 30 and above reported having experienced a developmental crisis between the ages of 20 and 29. Another study by Artiningsih (2021) showed that 80% of early adults in the study sample experienced quarter-life crisis at moderate to high levels.

The problems identified by the researcher among three master's students in Psychology at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya were related to quarter-life crisis. Subject A experienced difficulties with time management between coursework and employment. In addition, workplace problems could not always be solved through academic knowledge alone, but required additional skills, practical experience, and adaptive capacity. Subject A also experienced occasional worry or negative emotions that emerged during decision-making. Family-related issues included a mismatch between

parental advice and personal interests, and poor communication with siblings, which often led to misunderstandings.

Meanwhile, Subject B experienced financial difficulties while pursuing graduate studies. Subject B also sometimes felt sad when observing others' achievements that seemed easier or faster. Subject C showed worry and negative emotions such as disappointment and sadness, and sometimes experienced low self-esteem due to not yet being financially independent and unable to generate personal income. Based on the phenomena above, it can be concluded that quarter-life crisis is influenced by individuals' beliefs in themselves. This is consistent with Amalia (2021), who argued that individuals who are unable to create or utilize available opportunities in accordance with their needs and personal values tend to feel unstable when interacting with their environment. However, individuals who believe in themselves may experience different outcomes. Such beliefs subsequently influence behavior and actions. As explained by Rotter (1966), internal locus of control refers to an individual's belief that life events are under their personal control.

Rotter (1966) defined internal locus of control as an individual's belief that they can control events or their own destiny through their abilities, rather than through luck, fate, or other people. Rotter's theory was later developed by Levenson (1981) into the IPC locus of control model, which consists of three dimensions: (a) the internal dimension, where individuals believe that events in their lives are influenced by personal control through ability and effort; (b) the external powerful others dimension, where individuals believe that powerful people around them influence their lives; and (c) the external chance dimension, where individuals believe that destiny, fate, opportunity, and luck shape their lives. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between internal locus of control and quarter-life crisis among Master's students in Psychology at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya.

## Research Method

This study employed a quantitative approach using a correlational design. The population consisted of Master's students in Psychology at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, totaling 129 students ([Academic Bureau Data, Even Semester 2023](#)). Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique for selecting participants based on specific considerations or criteria determined by the researcher ([Sugiyono, 2013](#)). The inclusion criteria were active Master's students in Psychology at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya aged 22–30 years. This criterion was applied because master's students who experience quarter-life crisis are still within the early adulthood age range.

The research instrument was a questionnaire distributed directly from July 4 to July 8, 2024, to Master's students in Psychology at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. A total of 81 students met the age criteria (22–30 years). However, due to participants' limited time availability, 26 students requested to complete the questionnaire online. Quarter-life crisis was measured using a 40-item scale, consisting of 20 favorable and 20 unfavorable items, developed by the researcher based on the aspects proposed by Robbins and Wilner (2001). The quarter-life crisis scale underwent content validity assessment by several psychology experts and was evaluated using Aiken's V formula (1985), with items considered valid if the V score was at least 0.50. In addition, the scale was tested for construct validity using corrected item total correlation, yielding values ranging from 0.336 to 0.825 after five rounds of analysis. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha produced a coefficient of 0.947. Internal locus of control was measured

using the IPC Locus of Control Scale developed by Levenson (1981) and translated by Azwar (2012). This scale was developed based on Rotter's I-E Locus of Control theory (1966).

## Results

Table 1. Mean Scores of Each Variable

Variabel	Mean Empirik	Mean Hipotetik	Std. Empirik	Std. Hipotetik	Category
<i>Quarter Life Crisis</i>	62,123	69	19,278	15,3	Low
<i>Locus of Control Internal</i>	37,740	28	6,621	2,6	High

Based on the table above, the findings indicate that the empirical mean of quarter-life crisis (62.123) is lower than the hypothetical mean (69). This suggests that the level of quarter-life crisis among respondents tends to be low. Furthermore, the internal locus of control in this study shows an empirical mean (37.740) that is higher than the hypothetical mean (28), indicating that respondents tend to have a high level of internal locus of control. These findings emphasize that internal locus of control is one of the factors that can reduce the level of quarter-life crisis.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of the Quarter-Life Crisis Variable

Variable	Variable	Variable	Variable	Variable
<i>Quarter Life Crisis</i>	X < 42	Low	18	22.2%
	42 ≤ x ≤ 81	Moderate	50	61.7%
	81 ≥ x	High	13	16 %
Total			81	100%

The descriptive analysis table above shows that the level of quarter-life crisis among Master's students in Psychology at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya falls into three categories. The low category, with score ranges below 42, accounts for 22.2% of respondents. The moderate category, with score ranges between 42 and 81, represents the largest proportion at 61.7%. Meanwhile, the high category, with scores above 81, comprises 16% of respondents. Therefore, it can be concluded that the tendency of quarter-life crisis experienced by Master's students in Psychology at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya in this study is predominantly in the moderate category, amounting to 61.7% or 50 students.

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis of the Internal Locus of Control Variable

Variable	Score Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Internal Locus of Control	X < 31	Low	10	12.3%
	31 ≤ X ≤ 44	Moderate	66	81.5%
	X ≥ 44	High	5	6.2%
	Total		81	100%

Based on the descriptive analysis table, the level of internal locus of control among Master's students in Psychology at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya is classified into three categories. The low category, with scores below 31, accounts for 12.3% of respondents. The moderate category, with scores ranging from 31 to 44, represents 81.5% of respondents. The high category, with scores above 44, comprises 6.2% of respondents. Thus, it can be concluded that the tendency of internal locus of control among Master's students in Psychology at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya in this study is predominantly in the moderate category, totaling 81.5% or 66 students.

Table 4. Normality Test

Variable	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic	df	Sig.	Interpretation
Quarter-Life Crisis	0.957	81	0.008	Not Normally Distributed

This study employed the Shapiro-Wilk test using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0 for Windows to assess data normality. The normality test results for the quarter-life crisis variable from 81 participants show a significance value of  $p = 0.008 < 0.05$ , indicating that the data distribution is not normal.

Table 5. Linearity Test

Variable Relationship	F	Sig.	Interpretation
Quarter-Life Crisis - Internal Locus of Control	0.969	0.512	Linear

The linearity test examining the relationship between internal locus of control and quarter-life crisis among 81 participants yielded a significance value of  $p = 0.512 > 0.05$ , indicating that there is a linear relationship between internal locus of control and quarter-life crisis.

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing Results

Variables	$r_{xy}$	Sig.	Interpretation
Internal Locus of Control - Quarter-Life Crisis	-0.270	0.015	Significant

Hypothesis testing in this study employed Spearman's Rho correlation using SPSS version 25. The results show a correlation coefficient of  $r_{xy} = -0.270$  with a significance value of 0.015 ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating a significant negative relationship between internal locus of control and quarter-life crisis among Master's students in Psychology at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. Additionally, internal locus of control contributed an effective contribution of only 7.29% to quarter-life crisis. This suggests that internal locus of control accounts for a relatively small portion of variance, while other factors outside the scope of this study contribute more substantially to quarter-life crisis.

## Discussion

The results of this study indicate a significant negative relationship between internal locus of control and quarter-life crisis among Master's students in Psychology. This means that the higher the level of internal locus of control

possessed by individuals, the lower their level of quarter-life crisis, and vice versa. Individuals with a well-developed internal locus of control tend to regulate themselves more carefully. This ability helps Master's students in Psychology to understand various situations and effectively cope with problems when facing challenges, thereby reducing emotional tension and experiences of quarter-life crisis.

Similar findings were reported by Fadilla (2023), who found that locus of control significantly influences quarter-life crisis. Specifically, internal locus of control was negatively associated with quarter-life crisis, whereas external locus of control showed a positive association among early adults. Individuals with an internal locus of control are better able to cope with challenges during the quarter-life crisis phase because they tend to develop higher self-awareness, resilience, and personal growth. In contrast, individuals with a tendency toward an external locus of control experience higher levels of quarter-life crisis because they perceive the world as an unsafe place and believe they have little or no control over life events.

Another study conducted by Mudrikah (2024) showed that the majority of postgraduate students experiencing quarter-life crisis had low levels of optimism, accounting for 80.1% of the total sample. When students have low self-confidence, they tend to experience difficulty making decisions during a quarter-life crisis, as they doubt their competence and feel incapable of dealing with ongoing changes. Levenson (1981), in his theory of internal locus of control, stated that individuals with an internal locus of control believe that the events they experience are the result of personal control through their abilities and efforts. Similarly, Phares (1976) explained that individuals with an internal locus of control consistently attribute life events to internal factors, as they believe that what happens in their lives is largely caused by their own actions.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis using Spearman's rho correlation, which yielded a correlation coefficient of  $r = -0.270$  with a significance value of 0.015 ( $p < 0.05$ ), it can be concluded that there is a significant negative relationship between internal locus of control and quarter-life crisis among Master's students in Psychology at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. This indicates that higher levels of internal locus of control are associated with lower levels of quarter-life crisis. Conversely, lower levels of internal locus of control are associated with higher levels of quarter-life crisis among these students.

### **Recommendations**

Several recommendations can be proposed based on the findings of this study. Master's students in Psychology are encouraged to apply an internal locus of control in their daily lives, particularly by focusing on their circle of control, in order to reduce the level of quarter-life crisis they experience. By doing so, students may better regulate their lives through increased awareness of behavioral control, especially when confronted with difficult situations or during the quarter-life crisis phase. Master's students with an internal locus of control tend to maximize their abilities without comparing their achievements to those of others.

This study has limitations related to the relatively small number of participants, totaling only 81 respondents. This limitation was due to time constraints and the specific inclusion criteria applied. Therefore, future research is expected to involve a larger and more diverse sample. In addition, this study focused solely on internal locus of control as a factor influencing quarter-life crisis. Future studies are recommended to examine other contributing factors, such as emotion regulation, self-awareness, and self-efficacy, as well as to consider changes in emerging trends related to quarter-life crisis.

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