



# From vulnerability to growth: strengthening intrapersonal capacity to overcome the quarter life crisis

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# From vulnerability to growth: strengthening intrapersonal capacity to overcome the quarter life crisis

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## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

Quarter-life crisis  
Intrapersonal capacity  
Psychological resilience  
Self-regulation  
Self-reflection

This study examines the Quarter-Life Crisis (QLC) as a psychological phenomenon experienced during the transition to early adulthood, highlighting the significance of intrapersonal capacity as a key factor in transforming vulnerability into growth. Employing a literature review method, the research analyzes recent studies on internal factors such as self-regulation, self-reflection, inner dialogue, and meaningful goal-setting. The findings indicate that intrapersonal capacity functions both as a mediator and a moderator, enabling individuals not only to reduce the negative effects of QLC but also to build psychological resilience and a clearer sense of life direction. This study expands the theoretical perspective of QLC by positioning intrapersonal capacity as a central mechanism, while also offering practical implications for counseling, education, and self-development interventions for young adults.

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## Introduction

In early adulthood typically between the ages of 20 and 30 many individuals face a complex transitional period where they must navigate choices related to careers, relationships, self-identity, and social responsibilities. The phenomenon of the Quarter-Life Crisis (QLC) emerges as a manifestation of existential uncertainty, anxiety, and pressure from both internal and external sources (Hasyim et al., 2024). Individuals experiencing QLC often perceive a gap between youthful expectations and the realities they encounter, leading to internal conflicts and feelings of being stuck in decision-making (Kurniawati et al., 2024). Theoretical studies suggest that those undergoing QLC often report lower levels of authenticity and heightened intrapersonal curiosity as a response to existential confusion (Robinson, 2015). Moreover, internal aspects such as personality orientation including neuroticism, perfectionism, and future orientation have been shown to predict the intensity of QLC (Itsnaini & Riyono, 2024).

Quarter-Life Crisis is a psychological phenomenon experienced by individuals in early adulthood, typically between the ages of 20–30, characterized by feelings of uncertainty, restlessness, and anxiety regarding life direction such as career, relationships, self-identity, and social achievements (Afandi et al., 2023; Herawati & Hidayat, 2020; Praptiningsih et al., 2025). At this stage, many young adults face pressure from family and societal expectations, comparisons with peers (especially amplified by social media), and the fear of making wrong choices (Agustiarini, 2023; Cotterell, 2013). Although not a formal medical diagnosis, quarter-life crisis represents a transitional phase where individuals begin to question their values, the meaning of life, and long-term goals (Azza et al., 2025).

The impact of Quarter-Life Crisis can be significant on mental health (Herdian & Wijaya, 2023). Research in Parepare revealed that this phenomenon strongly affects young adults' mental health, especially in the post-COVID-19 context, with higher levels of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty (Nasir

et al., 2024). A study in Pekanbaru also found that approximately 43.22% of young adults (aged 20-30) experience a high degree of quarter-life crisis and report feelings of being overwhelmed. Protective factors identified in recent studies include self-esteem, hope, social support, and adaptive coping strategies such as professional counseling and engaging in meaningful activities (Qonitah et al., 2025).

In the Indonesian context, some early studies have begun to highlight the dynamics of QLC. For example, research has examined the relationship between intrapersonal communication and social support among students (Beta et al., 2023), as well as the role of emotional maturity and social support in predicting QLC (Suprayogi & Santoso, 2024). However, most studies have focused on external factors or correlational analysis without deeply investigating the intrapersonal capacities that may enable individuals to transform vulnerability into growth. In contrast, literature on developmental psychology and resilience emphasizes that adaptation is not merely the mitigation of external stressors but also involves strengthening internal capacities such as self-regulation, inner reflection, and meaningful goals (Primasari et al., 2022; Shek & Lin, 2015).

The concept of intrapersonal capacity includes an individual's ability to manage thoughts, emotions, inner conflicts, and maintain a healthy internal dialogue. In the context of leadership, intrapersonal competencies have been shown to support stress management, adaptability to change, and preservation of self-integrity (Shek & Lin, 2015). Applying this concept to QLC provides an avenue for individuals not only to survive external challenges but also to cultivate a stronger personal foundation. Consequently, the transition from vulnerability to growth is not merely a rhetorical notion but a developmental model rooted in intrapersonal strength.

To bridge the gap in both local and global literature, this study argues that strengthening intrapersonal capacity may serve as a transformative path that allows individuals to move from vulnerability to resilience and growth in the face of QLC. This perspective is increasingly relevant given the dynamic nature of careers, the intensifying influence of social media, and the blurred boundaries between life domains. Therefore, an empirical investigation is needed to explore how intrapersonal factors mediate or moderate the QLC experience while fostering psychological growth.

The urgency of this study lies in both theoretical and practical needs: theoretically, it enriches QLC literature by focusing on intrapersonal capacity as a central construct of growth rather than a mere supporting factor. Practically, the findings can inform psychological interventions such as self-development programs or counseling that not only reduce the negative effects of QLC but also enhance long-term adaptive capacity among young adults. In Indonesia's diverse cultural and social contexts, such studies may serve as a foundation for preventive and promotive strategies in higher education, youth communities, and counseling services.

Prior studies demonstrate that psychological interventions such as Solution-Focused Therapy (SFT) can effectively reduce QLC symptoms in young women by emphasizing future-oriented and solution-based approaches (Fettiani et al., 2024). However, such studies tend to be experimental with limited samples and do not sufficiently highlight internal transformative processes. On the other hand, quantitative research in global contexts has identified commitment to goals, spirituality, and internal anxiety as significant internal factors in the QLC experience (Hasyim et al., 2024). Nevertheless, these studies have not systematically explored how intrapersonal capacity as a developmental construct can be leveraged to facilitate growth during this crisis stage. This study seeks to address that gap.

Based on the above background, this research aims to (1) examine the relationship between intrapersonal factors such as self-regulation, self-reflection, inner dialogue, and meaningful goals and the intensity of Quarter-Life Crisis, (2) test whether intrapersonal capacity serves as a mediator or moderator in the transition from vulnerability to psychological growth, and (3) propose an empirical model that can form the basis for self-strengthening interventions among young adults. Through this, the study seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically to help individuals navigate the Quarter-Life Crisis toward sustainable growth.

## Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach with the type of literature study (library research). The main objective was to review and analyze theoretical concepts and previous research findings related to the phenomenon of the Quarter-Life Crisis (QLC) and intrapersonal capacity. A literature study was chosen to integrate academic findings critically and systematically, producing new insights into how individual vulnerabilities during the QLC stage can be transformed into psychological growth. As an exploratory inquiry, this research focused on the interpretation of meaning, relationships between concepts, and synthesis of theoretical perspectives rather than numerical measurement (Snyder, 2019; Zed, 2018).

### Data Sources

The data in this study were derived from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and research reports relevant to QLC, intrapersonal capacity, resilience, and young adult development. The literature was limited to publications from the last ten years (2015–2025) to ensure the novelty and relevance of the findings to current contexts (Snyder, 2019). The databases used included Google Scholar, Scopus, ProQuest, and national journal repositories.

### Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique applied was documentation, which involved identifying, selecting, reading, and recording relevant literature. The literature search was conducted using keywords such as Quarter-Life Crisis, intrapersonal capacity, resilience, and young adulthood. The selection process applied inclusion criteria, namely that the literature must explicitly discuss the relationship between QLC and intrapersonal psychological factors or relevant intervention strategies (Ridley, 2012).

### Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using content analysis with a thematic approach. The analysis consisted of three stages: (1) data reduction by selecting only literature aligned with the research focus, (2) data presentation through categorization of themes such as intrapersonal factors, psychological vulnerability, growth mechanisms, and intervention strategies, and (3) drawing conclusions through critical synthesis of findings, resulting in new perspectives on the role of intrapersonal capacity in overcoming QLC. Data validity was ensured through cross-checking across sources and theoretical triangulation. With this approach, the study is expected to provide both conceptual depth and practical relevance for the development of theory, counseling practice, and self-development among young adults.

## Results and Discussion

### Intrapersonal Factors and the Intensity of Quarter-Life Crisis

The intrapersonal dimension plays a crucial role in shaping how young adults experience the Quarter-Life Crisis (QLC). Research indicates that when individuals lack self-regulation, they are more prone to emotional instability, impulsive decision-making, and heightened anxiety during this transitional stage of life (Robinson, 2015). In contrast, those who cultivate the ability to regulate emotions and behaviors demonstrate a stronger capacity to manage uncertainty and adapt to changing circumstances. Self-reflection also emerges as a vital protective mechanism, as it allows young adults to engage in a deeper evaluation of their values, choices, and long-term goals. Through reflective practices, individuals can transform feelings of confusion into opportunities for self-discovery and personal growth (Albien & Naidoo, 2017). Similarly, engaging in constructive inner dialogue supports the process of meaning-making, as it encourages individuals to reconcile internal conflicts and reframe challenges as developmental stepping stones.

The diagram illustrates how intrapersonal factors significantly influence the outcomes of the Quarter-Life Crisis (QLC). Individuals with low self-regulation and limited self-reflection often experience heightened anxiety, impulsivity, and disengagement, leading to prolonged distress. In contrast, those who cultivate strong self-regulation, engage in reflective practices, and pursue

meaningful goals demonstrate greater adaptability, resilience, and psychological well-being. This suggests that intrapersonal capacities are not fixed traits but dynamic skills that can be developed, ultimately transforming the challenges of QLC into opportunities for growth and purpose.

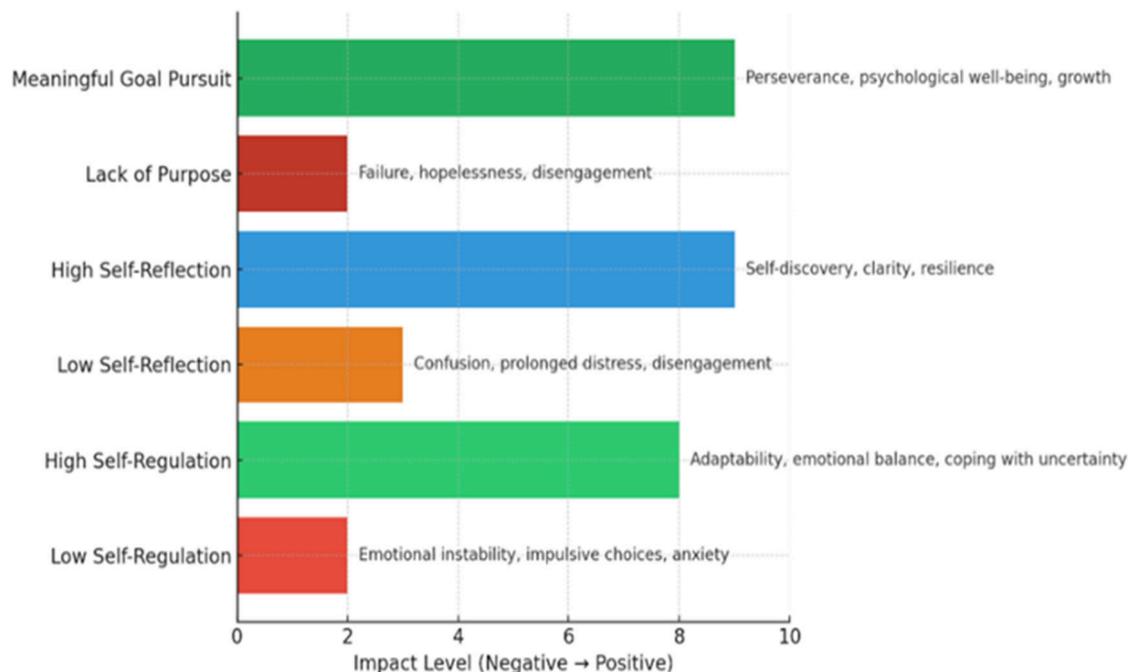


Figure 1 Intrapersonal Factors and Outcomes in QLC

A real-life example can be observed among recent university graduates facing the uncertainty of entering competitive job markets. Many experience feelings of failure and existential doubt when initial career attempts do not meet their expectations. For those with limited self-reflection and poor self-regulation, this stage often leads to heightened distress, prolonged unemployment, or even disengagement from career development. However, graduates who actively practice reflective journaling or mindfulness report greater clarity in redefining their goals and resilience in pursuing alternative career paths (Praskova et al., 2015). Moreover, the pursuit of meaningful goals significantly buffers the negative consequences of QLC, as individuals with a sense of purpose tend to persevere despite setbacks. Schippers & Ziegler, (2019), emphasize that goal-setting interventions, such as structured life crafting, not only enhance psychological well-being but also help individuals align their daily actions with their long-term aspirations. This evidence highlights that intrapersonal factors are not merely internal traits but dynamic capacities that can be developed through intentional practices, ultimately transforming vulnerability during the QLC into an opportunity for sustainable growth.

### Intrapersonal Capacity as Mediator or Moderator

Intrapersonal capacity plays a complex role in the trajectory from vulnerability to psychological growth during the Quarter-Life Crisis (QLC). On the one hand, it serves as a mediator that enables individuals to reinterpret their experiences of doubt, uncertainty, and instability as potential sources of learning rather than as threats to their identity. Through processes of self-reflection and inner dialogue, individuals are able to reconstruct the meaning of failure, shifting from a perception of inadequacy toward an understanding that challenges are integral steps in personal development. For instance, Praskova, Creed, and Hood (2015) demonstrated how reflective engagement with career setbacks allows young adults to build a stronger sense of identity and agency, ultimately mediating the negative emotional impact of early career difficulties. On the other hand, intrapersonal capacity functions as a moderator by buffering the intensity of psychological distress when facing adversity. Individuals who exhibit strong self-regulation and goal-directed behavior are less likely to experience crises as overwhelming or paralyzing. Instead, they demonstrate resilience and adaptability, thereby moderating the relationship between vulnerability and psychological outcomes (Dias & Cadime, 2017; Vincent et al., 2024).

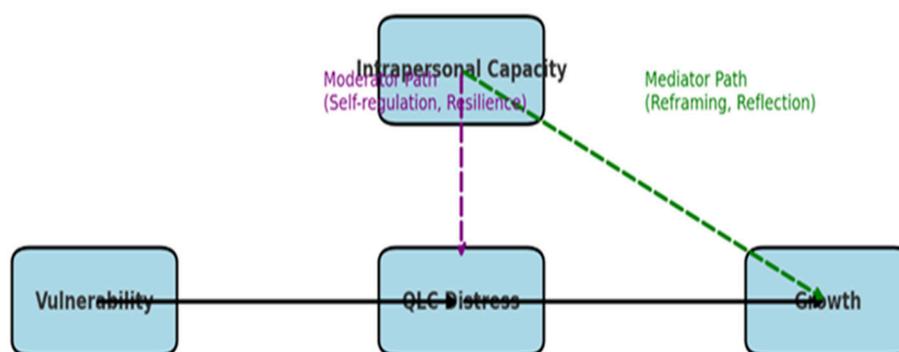


Figure 2 The Role of Intrapersonal Capacity as Mediator and Moderator in Q

The diagram shows that intrapersonal capacity mediates QLC by turning setbacks into growth opportunities through reflection, while also moderating distress by buffering negative emotions with self-regulation and resilience.

A real-world illustration of this dual function can be seen in young professionals entering competitive industries such as technology or creative fields, where early career instability is common. Some individuals facing repeated rejections internalize these experiences as personal failures, which intensify the severity of their QLC and prolong feelings of helplessness. However, others who engage in reflective practices, such as narrative journaling or mindfulness, reinterpret rejection as feedback that guides skill development and career redirection. This process mediates the emotional toll of the crisis, transforming vulnerability into an opportunity for growth. At the same time, those with higher self-regulation such as maintaining structured routines, setting achievable goals, and monitoring progress demonstrate stronger psychological stability, which moderates the negative impact of uncertainty (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014). This evidence underscores that intrapersonal skills do not merely reduce the symptoms of crisis but actively shape the trajectory from vulnerability toward growth, highlighting their importance in both preventive and developmental interventions.

### Toward an Empirical Model for Intervention

An empirical model to address the dynamics of the Quarter-Life Crisis (QLC) emphasizes the transition from vulnerability toward psychological growth by positioning intrapersonal capacity as a central mechanism of change. The model recognizes that vulnerabilities such as career uncertainty, unstable relationships, and identity confusion often serve as triggers for emotional distress in young adulthood. However, when intrapersonal resources such as self-regulation, reflective thinking, inner dialogue, and purposeful goal-setting are activated, these vulnerabilities can be transformed into catalysts for growth. In this sense, intrapersonal factors either mediate the meaning-making process helping individuals reinterpret failure as constructive or moderate the psychological burden of stressors by buffering their intensity. The endpoint of this process is not merely the resolution of crisis but the development of resilience, value clarity, and a deeper sense of well-being, aligning closely with the principles of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi et al., 2018).

A concrete example can be found in young adults who experience repeated job rejections after graduation. For many, this scenario initially represents a source of vulnerability that reinforces feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty. Yet, individuals who engage in structured self-reflection and narrative practices often reframe these experiences as opportunities to refine skills, reconsider career paths, or realign goals with personal values. Research on narrative interventions demonstrates that crafting one's life story and integrating challenges into a coherent narrative significantly enhances psychological resilience and well-being (Adler et al., 2016). Furthermore, goal-setting strategies such as life crafting, where individuals design purposeful plans for their future, have been shown to increase motivation, improve psychological health, and foster a sense of direction (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). Such evidence suggests that interventions grounded in the empirical model combining reflection, dialogue, and goal orientation can be effectively implemented in educational or workplace settings to support young adults navigating QLC. This not only validates the theoretical model but also highlights its practical relevance for guiding preventive counseling, coaching programs, and self-development workshops that transform vulnerability into growth.

## Discussion

The findings highlight that intrapersonal capacity (self-regulation, self-reflection, inner dialogue, and meaningful goal orientation) plays a crucial role in transforming the *Quarter-Life Crisis* (QLC) from vulnerability into psychological growth. This supports Robinson (2015), who noted that poor emotional regulation heightens anxiety, while strong regulation fosters adaptability. Thus, intrapersonal capacity functions not only as a protective factor but also as a transformative mechanism.

Self-reflection further strengthens identity development by enabling individuals to reframe confusion into opportunities for growth (Albien & Naidoo, 2017). Beyond mediation, intrapersonal capacity also moderates distress, as self-regulation is directly linked to resilience (Dias & Cadime, 2017; Vincent et al., 2024). Therefore, QLC should be viewed not only as a crisis but also as a developmental stage for building new psychological skills.

In the Indonesian context, social expectations and media pressures intensify QLC (Agustiarini, 2023; Nasir et al., 2024). Yet, internal strategies such as life crafting (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019) provide effective pathways for direction and well-being. Strengthening intrapersonal capacity can thus serve as the foundation for counseling and educational interventions that help young adults navigate life transitions.

The practical implications of this study include the development of intervention programs focusing on narrative reflection, mindfulness, and life goal planning. This aligns with Adler et al. (2016), who emphasized the crucial role of narrative identity in enhancing psychological well-being. Interventions based on intrapersonal capacity also have the potential to sustainably reduce the negative effects of QLC, while equipping individuals with resilience skills relevant to facing increasingly complex global challenges.

Theoretically, this study expands the literature on QLC by positioning intrapersonal capacity as a central construct rather than merely a supporting factor. This supports Tedeschi et al. (2018)'s argument on post-traumatic growth, which suggests that crises can serve as gateways to more mature development when managed effectively. Thus, the findings not only affirm the importance of intrapersonal capacity in mitigating the impact of QLC but also highlight its transformative potential in guiding individuals toward sustainable growth.

## Conclusion

This study affirms that the Quarter-Life Crisis should not only be understood as a period of crisis but also as an opportunity for development. Intrapersonal capacity serves as a crucial foundation for transforming vulnerability into strength through the ability to regulate emotions, reflect on experiences, and pursue meaningful life goals. Therefore, interventions that emphasize strengthening intrapersonal aspects can help individuals navigate life transitions in healthier and more productive ways. Beyond enriching the literature on QLC, this research also provides practical foundations for counseling programs, training, and educational initiatives aimed at fostering resilient and empowered young generations.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that narrative reflection, mindfulness practices, and structured life-goal planning can be applied as effective strategies in counseling, educational settings, and community programs. These approaches not only mitigate the negative effects of QLC but also equip young adults with adaptive skills to face increasing global challenges.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. Since it is based on a literature review, the analysis is restricted to existing theoretical and empirical works, which may not fully capture the diverse experiences of QLC across cultural or socioeconomic contexts. Moreover, the absence of primary data limits the ability to generalize findings into specific intervention outcomes.

For future research, empirical studies with larger and more diverse samples are needed to validate the proposed conceptual model. Longitudinal research could also explore how intrapersonal capacity evolves over time and influences life trajectories. Additionally, experimental and intervention-based

studies may provide more concrete evidence regarding the effectiveness of practices such as life crafting, reflective journaling, and mindfulness in reducing the intensity of QLC. By addressing these gaps, future work can deepen both the theoretical framework and practical applications of intrapersonal capacity in transforming Quarter-Life Crisis into sustainable personal growth.

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