

## The Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Quarter-Life Crisis Mediated by Loneliness Among University Students in Sidoarjo

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### Abstract

Quarter-life crisis is a period of uncertainty and fear characterized by negative emotions such as alienation, fear of failure, anxiety, and helplessness. This study aims to determine the relationship between self-esteem and quarter-life crisis, mediated by loneliness, among 342 college students in Sidoarjo aged 18–25 years. The researchers proposed two hypotheses: first, there is a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and quarter-life crisis. Second, loneliness mediates the relationship between self-esteem and quarter-life crisis in college students in Sidoarjo. This study used a non-experimental quantitative research design with a correlation method. The instruments used in this study were the quarter life crisis scale ( $\alpha = .769$ ), the loneliness scale ( $\alpha = .837$ ), and the self-esteem scale ( $\alpha = .880$ ). The results showed that self-esteem had a negative effect on loneliness ( $\beta = -0.283, p < .001$ ) and loneliness had a positive effect on quarter-life crisis ( $\beta = 0.313, p < .001$ ). Self-esteem also has a direct effect on reducing quarter-life crisis ( $\beta = 0.082, p = .035$ ). In addition, loneliness was found to mediate the effect of self-esteem on quarter-life crisis ( $\beta = -0.089, p < .001$ ). These findings indicate that the higher the self-esteem of students, the lower the level of loneliness and quarter-life crisis they experience.

### Abstrak

Krisis seperempat abad adalah periode ketidakpastian dan ketakutan yang ditandai dengan emosi negatif seperti keterasingan, takut gagal, kecemasan, dan ketidakberdayaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan hubungan antara harga diri dan krisis seperempat abad yang dimediasi oleh kesepian, di antara 342 mahasiswa di Sidoarjo berusia 18–25 tahun. Peneliti mengajukan dua hipotesis: pertama, terdapat hubungan negatif yang signifikan antara harga diri dan krisis seperempat abad. Kedua, kesepian memediasi hubungan antara harga diri dan krisis seperempat abad pada mahasiswa di Sidoarjo. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kuantitatif non-eksperimental dengan metode korelasi. Instrumen yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah skala krisis seperempat abad ( $\alpha = 0,769$ ), skala kesepian ( $\alpha = 0,837$ ), dan skala harga diri ( $\alpha = 0,880$ ). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa harga diri memiliki pengaruh negatif terhadap kesepian ( $\beta = -0,283, p < 0,001$ ) dan kesepian memiliki pengaruh positif terhadap krisis seperempat abad ( $\beta = 0,313, p < 0,001$ ). Harga diri juga memiliki pengaruh langsung dalam mengurangi krisis seperempat abad ( $\beta = 0,082, p = 0,035$ ). Selain itu, kesepian ditemukan memediasi pengaruh harga diri terhadap krisis seperempat abad ( $\beta = -0,089, p < 0,001$ ). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa semakin tinggi harga diri siswa, semakin rendah tingkat kesepian dan krisis seperempat abad yang mereka alami.



## INTRODUCTION

Students are often seen as “agents of change,” but they face a series of challenges and demands of their own. These challenges can include academic difficulties, personal and social issues, confusion in decision-making, and concerns about future career paths. Some students may find it difficult to cope with these obstacles, which can lead to anxiety, stress, depression, and other psychological problems (Setiawan & Milati, 2022). Persistent anxiety can have a detrimental effect on mental health, affecting motivation, concentration, and academic achievement. As students approach the final stages of their education, they experience changes in developmental tasks, which lead to a greater burden of responsibility. As they enter young adulthood, their attention shifts to more significant responsibilities, such as building a career and developing deeper relationships. This developmental transition can often cause anxiety and depression, triggered by uncertainty, and is commonly known as a quarter-life crisis (Sandraini et al., 2024)

The term quarter-life crisis was first introduced to describe a period of uncertainty that usually occurs between the end of adolescence and mid-30s, with the most intense experiences occurring in your 20s. Quarter-life crisis is characterized by feelings of insecurity about life goals and achievements, difficulty finding employment, relationship problems, pressure to be independent, feelings of being left behind, and loss of friendships. A quarter-life crisis is a period of fear and confusion about the direction of one’s life, concerns about career, identity, relationships, and social life (Arsita et al., 2024). A quarter-life crisis is a period of uncertainty and fear experienced by individuals, often accompanied by negative emotions such as feelings of isolation, fear of failure, frequent anxiety, and helplessness (Mufidah et al., 2024). Individuals in early adulthood who are struggling to overcome a quarter-life crisis may experience negative effects, including depression, mild anxiety, stress, and panic attacks (Ermita et al., 2022). If not addressed quickly, the quarter-life crisis experienced by individuals can lead to depression, which may result in thoughts of ending one’s life. However, if successfully overcome, individuals have the opportunity to live better lives because they can make peace with themselves and manage their emotional crises (Sallata & Huwae, 2023). A quarter-life crisis encompasses several aspects, including indecision, despair, negative self-assessment, feeling stuck in a difficult situation, depression, anxiety, and worry about interpersonal relationships (Mujianto, 2021). The characteristics of a quarter-life crisis include indecision, despair, negative self-reflection, and a sense of being stuck in a challenging situation. In addition, individuals may experience anxiety, stress, and concerns about building meaningful relationships (Zuraida, 2024).

Research conducted in 2022 among students showed that, based on descriptive data on the quarter-life crisis, most respondents were in the adequate category, at 33.75%. Meanwhile, the high category accounted for 30.0%, followed by the low category at 30.0%, and the very high category at 6.25%. In these descriptive results, the researchers found no data in the very low category (Masluchah et al., 2022). Meanwhile, based on research by Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo, of 368 active students, 75.5% were in the moderate quarter-life crisis category, and 13.3% were in the high category, indicating that the quarter-life crisis phenomenon also occurs among the majority of students in Sidoarjo. Sidoarjo itself also has several large campuses with a large student population and diverse backgrounds, making it an ideal place to study psychological dynamics such as the quarter-life crisis (Abrori & Maryam, 2024).

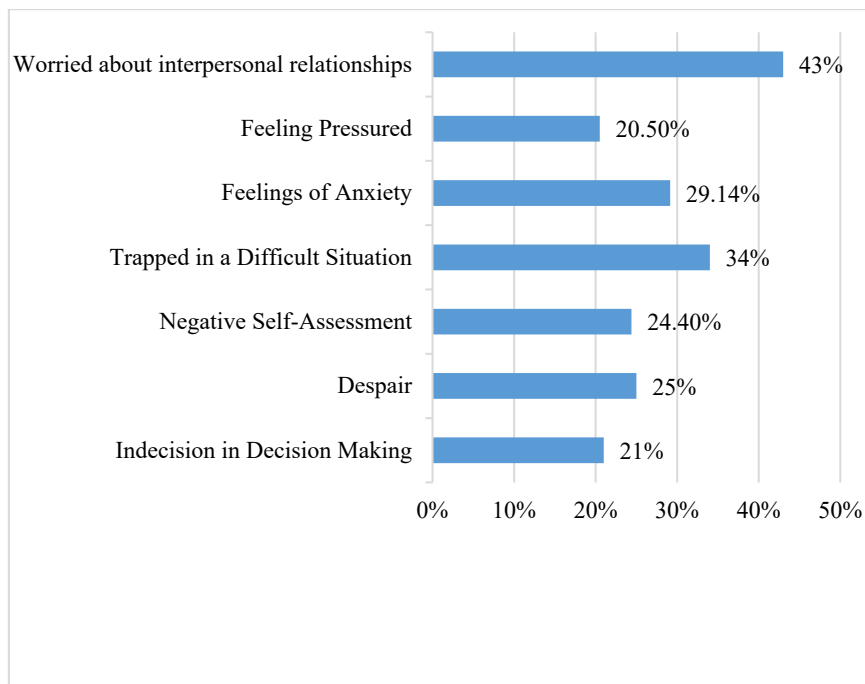


Figure 1.  
QLC Aspect Diagram

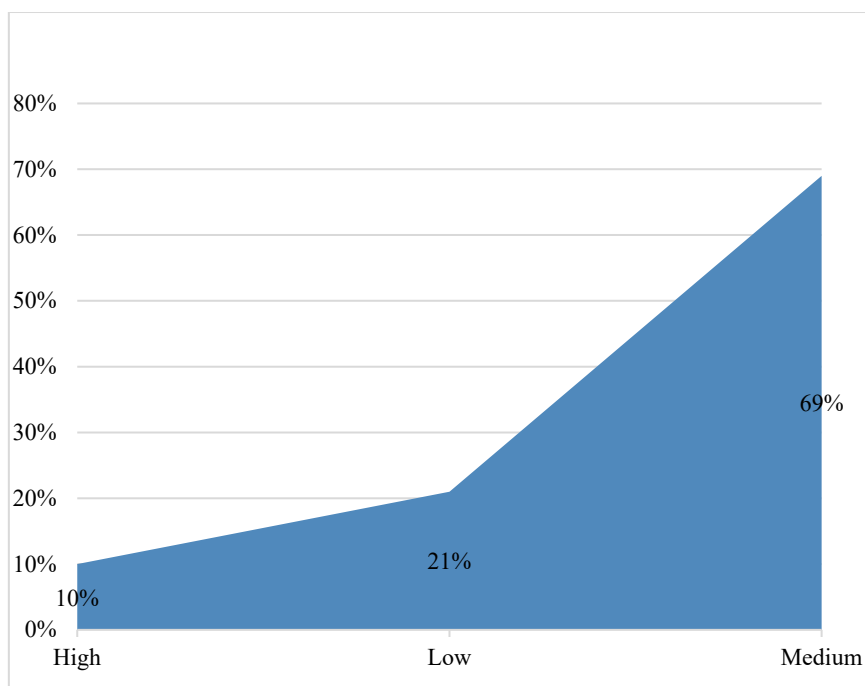


Figure 2.  
QLC Diagram

The initial survey for this study was conducted with 62 respondents, active final-semester students in Sidoarjo aged 18–25 years, using a quarter-life crisis scale questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. From the initial survey, it was found that the majority of students in Sidoarjo experienced a high level of quarter-life crisis, with 10% (6 students) reporting this. The low category accounted for 21% (13 students). The moderate category accounted for 69% (43 students). Meanwhile, based on these results, the highest-scoring aspect of the quarter-life crisis among respondents was concern about interpersonal relationships.

The researchers also interviewed five students and found that two of the five students experienced indecision, one of the five students experienced despair, three of the five students experienced negative self-assessment, five of the five students felt trapped in difficult situations, and two of the five students experienced concerns about interpersonal relationships. These results reinforce previous surveys that this phenomenon is indeed found among students.

The factors that cause a quarter-life crisis can be classified into two categories: internal and external. Internal factors include low emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and belief in one's own abilities (self-efficacy; Gendolang & Ambarwati, 2023). On the other hand, external factors originate from conditions in the individual's surroundings, such as relationships, educational challenges, work life, and the environment. The place of residence, friends, and family are also external factors that influence, where dissatisfaction with building relationships with friends can result in loneliness (Zuraida, 2024).

The instability experienced by individuals can make them more vulnerable to mental health problems. Those who are trapped in a phase of withdrawing from their surroundings, or in other words, experiencing isolation, are more likely to feel lonely. Loneliness is a sad state that occurs when a person is unable to fulfill their social relationship expectations (Artiningsih & Savira, 2021). Loneliness is an unpleasant experience that arises when a person feels that their social relationships are not going well, both in quantity and quality. A person who feels lonely tends to judge themselves as lacking adequate social skills because they feel a significant distance from the people around them. Loneliness has two aspects: social loneliness and emotional loneliness (Putri, 2024).

Self-esteem is a concept that encompasses attitudes, including cognitive, emotional, evaluative, and behavioral aspects, which reflect positive or negative appreciation of oneself (Pratiwi, 2024). Self-esteem is an assessment that a person makes of themselves, which is then demonstrated in their attitude towards themselves in everyday life. This assessment includes both positive and negative attitudes, as well as the extent to which individuals feel capable, meaningful, successful, and valuable according to their personal views and assessments (Syawalli, 2023). In the mediation model, self-esteem negatively affects feelings of loneliness. This is consistent with previous studies that show a negative relationship between self-esteem and loneliness among college students. These studies show that self-esteem can act as a buffer against loneliness arising from discomfort, obstacles, and self-doubt. The higher a person's self-esteem, the more capable they tend to be in dealing with problems and having a better outlook on the situation at hand. Meanwhile, low self-esteem can cause a person to feel inferior, pessimistic about the future, and have prolonged negative feelings. Loneliness due to low self-esteem may affect a person's interactions with others (Nathania & Sudagijono, 2024). Self-esteem has four aspects: power, significance, virtue, and competence (Syawalli, 2023).

According to a study by Zuraida (2024), there is a significant positive relationship between loneliness and quarter-life crisis in the sample. This means that as loneliness increases, the level of quarter-life crisis also increases. Conversely, if loneliness decreases, the level of quarter-life crisis in this research sample will also decrease. Another study by Maharani (2025) shows a significant relationship between self-esteem and quarter-life crisis among respondents. In other words, the higher a person's self-esteem, the more positive their quarter-life crisis will be. People who experience loneliness and have low self-esteem are more likely to experience a quarter-life crisis, while those who feel lonely and have high self-esteem are less likely to do so. A study by Pratiwi and Nasution (2024) found a negative relationship between quarter-life crisis and self-esteem.

In this study, the researcher aims to explore the relationship between self-esteem and quarter-life crisis, mediated by loneliness, among college students in Sidoarjo, because, at the time of writing this

proposal, no similar study has been found that combines the variables of loneliness and self-esteem in the context of quarter-life crisis among students in Sidoarjo. This survey was conducted on April 1, 2025. The purpose of this study is to determine whether there is a relationship between self-esteem and the quarter-life crisis, mediated by loneliness, among college students in Sidoarjo. These findings are expected to provide valuable insights into the relationship between these factors and provide theoretical and practical guidance for students. The researchers wrote two hypotheses: (1) a significant positive relationship between loneliness and quarter-life crisis; and (2) loneliness mediates the relationship between self-esteem and quarter-life crisis among university students in Sidoarjo.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a non-experimental quantitative research design with a correlation method. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between loneliness, self-esteem, and the quarter-life crisis. The correlational method is a research approach used to test and describe the relationship between two or more factors or characteristics of the object under study. This study aims to compare these factors based on a specific conceptual framework (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023). The independent variable ( $X$ ) in this study is self-esteem, the dependent variable ( $Y$ ) is quarter-life crisis, and the additional mediating variable is loneliness. The population in this study is active final-semester students in Sidoarjo. According to data from the Statistics of East Java Province in 2022, there were 23,039 students studying in Sidoarjo (*Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Jawa Timur*, 2021).

The research sample consisted of 342 students based on Isaac & Michael's table with a 5% margin of error. The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling, with the criteria being active students and students studying in Sidoarjo. This method was used to obtain a selective or subjective assessment sample and describes a set of sampling techniques that depend on the researcher's assessment in selecting the units to be studied, such as individuals, cases, organizations, events, or data fragments (Firmansyah & Dede, 2022). The data collection technique used a psychological scale. The scale used was the quarter-life crisis scale adopted based on Robbins and Wilner's theory (as cited in Mujianto, 2021), with a reliability of .822, with the following aspects: (1) indecisiveness; (2) despair; (3) negative self-assessment; (4) being stuck in a difficult situation; (5) feeling depressed; (6) anxiety; and (7) worry about interpersonal relationships. The loneliness scale adopted from Russell et al.'s Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (as cited in Putri, 2024), with a reliability of .94, with the following aspects: (1) social loneliness; and (2) emotional loneliness. The self-esteem scale was adopted based on Coopersmith's theory (as cited in Syawalli, 2023), with a reliability of .897, with the following aspects: (1) power; (2) significance; (3) virtue; and (4) competence. To analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire, the researcher used assumption-testing techniques, namely normality testing, descriptive statistics, and mediation testing, using JASP to test the previously formulated hypotheses.

## **RESULTS**

The majority of respondents in this study were categorized by gender: 23% men and 77% women. More detailed demographic data can be seen in the following table:

Table 1.  
Respondent Characteristics

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Men	78	23%
Women	264	77%
<b>Total</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2.  
Respondent Characteristics Based On Gender

Category	Gender	Frequency	Percent
Low	Men	12	37.500
	Women	20	62.500
	Missing	0	0.000
	Total	32	100.000
Medium	Men	45	21.739
	Women	162	78.261
	Missing	0	0.000
	Total	207	100.000
High	Men	21	20.388
	Women	82	79.612
	Missing	0	0.000
	Total	103	100.000

Table 3 shows the results of the categorization of the quarter life crisis variable from 342 respondents, which shows that most respondents are in the moderate category, with a percentage of 61% with 207 respondents, the high category, with 30% with 103 respondents, and the low category, with 9% with 31 respondents. Table 4 shows the categorization results of the loneliness variable from 342 respondents, which shows that most respondents are in the moderate category, with a percentage of 61%, with 208 respondents, the high category, with 8%, with 26 respondents, and the low category, with 32%, with 108 respondents. Table 5 presents the categorization results for the self-esteem variable among 342 respondents, showing that most are in the high category (61%, 208 respondents) and the medium category (39%, 134 respondents).

Table 3.  
Respondent Categorization for the Quarter-Life Crisis Variable

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	32	9.357	9%	9.357
Medium	207	60.526	61%	69.883
High	103	30.117	30%	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
<b>Total</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>100.000</b>		

Table 4.  
Respondent Categorization for the Loneliness Variable

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	108	31.579	32%	31.579
Medium	208	60.819	61%	92.398
High	26	7.602	8%	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
<b>Total</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>100.000</b>		

Table 5.  
Respondent Categorization for the Self-Esteem Variable

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Medium	134	39.181	39%	39.181
High	208	60.819	61%	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
<b>Total</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>100.000</b>		

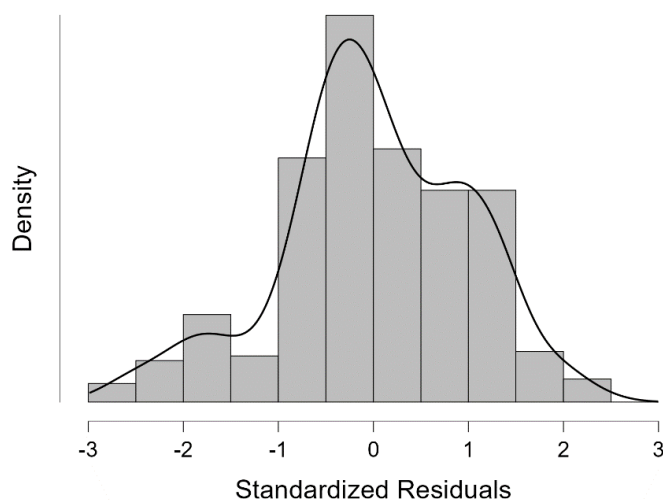


Figure 3.  
Normality Test

Based on the analysis of data normality using histograms, the histograms are bell-shaped, with the peak centered and both sides symmetrical, indicating that the data in this study are normally distributed (Khakim, 2022).

Table 7.  
Mediation Effect Test

Paths	Estimate	SE	z	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
SEE → QLC (direct effects)	0.082	0.039	2.110	.035	0.006	0.157
SEE → LON → QLC (indirect effects)	-0.089	0.020	-4.514	< .001	-0.127	-0.050
SEE → QLC (total effects)	-0.007	0.036	-0.196	.845	-0.078	0.064

Note. SEE = Self-Esteem; QLC = Quarter-Life Crisis; LON = Loneliness.

The results of the analysis show that self-esteem has a direct and significant impact on reducing quarter-life crisis, with a coefficient of 0.082 and a *p*-value of .035. This means that the higher a person’s self-esteem, the less likely they are to experience a quarter-life crisis. In addition, there is a significant indirect effect through loneliness, with a coefficient of –0.089 and a *p*-value of .001, indicating that low self-esteem can increase feelings of loneliness, which in turn increases the likelihood of a quarter-life crisis. However, the total effect is not significant, which confirms that the effect of self-esteem on quarter-life crisis is only clearly seen when loneliness is used as a mediator.

Table 8.  
Path Coefficients

	Estimate	SE	z	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
LON → QLC	0.313	0.060	5.204	< .001	0.195	0.431
SEE → QLC	0.082	0.039	2.110	.035	0.006	0.157
SEE → LON	–0.283	0.031	–9.075	< .001	–0.345	–0.222

The results indicate that loneliness has a significant positive effect on quarter-life crisis, with a coefficient of 0.313 and a *p*-value < .001. This shows that as loneliness increases, the level of quarter-life crisis experienced by individuals also increases. In addition, self-esteem has a significant effect on the quarter-life crisis, with a coefficient of 0.082 and a *p*-value of .035. This means that the higher the self-esteem, the lower the tendency to experience a quarter-life crisis. Furthermore, self-esteem has a significant negative effect on loneliness, with a coefficient of –0.283 and a *p*-value < .001. This shows that the higher the self-esteem, the less loneliness is felt.

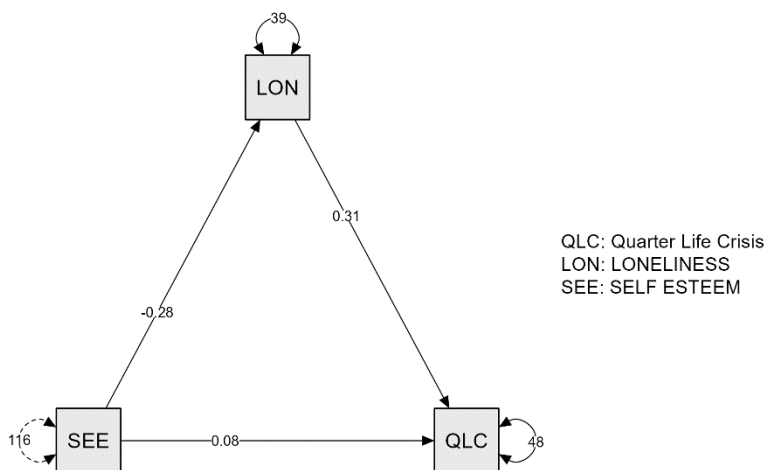


Figure 4.  
Mediation Test

The analysis results show that self-esteem has a negative effect on loneliness, with a path coefficient of –0.28, indicating that higher self-esteem is associated with lower loneliness. The loneliness variable has a positive effect on the quarter-life crisis, with a coefficient of 0.31, indicating that higher loneliness is associated with higher quarter-life crisis scores. Meanwhile, the direct effect of self-esteem on quarter-life crisis is relatively small and negative (–0.08), indicating a weak relationship. The numbers above each variable box (0.39 for LON, 0.48 for QLC, and 0.116 for SEE) represent the

unexplained variance (error/residual) not accounted for by the model. Thus, this model explains that high self-esteem tends to reduce loneliness, high loneliness increases quarter-life crisis, and the direct effect of self-esteem on quarter-life crisis is relatively small.

## DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of emotional crisis that occurs during emerging adulthood is often known as a quarter-life crisis. A quarter-life crisis is defined as an identity crisis arising from uncertainty during the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Artiningsih & Savira, 2021). The quarter-life crisis can also be defined as a response to peak instability, constant change, too many choices, and feelings of panic and helplessness. Its onset is marked when individuals are completing their studies, with emotional characteristics such as frustration, panic, worry, and a sense of directionlessness (Putri et al., 2023). This quarter-life crisis can peak when a person or student is about to complete their studies, due to pressure from their surroundings, family, and themselves to finish their thesis and education immediately. They also have to face the realities of the real world, marked by workplace competition and the demands of responsibility as they enter early adulthood (Mujianto, 2021).

Based on the categorization results in Table 3, in line with research by Gendolang and Ambarwati (2023), students from outside Java Island tend to experience a moderate level of quarter-life crisis. Table 2 is also consistent with the theory that the quarter-life crisis is more commonly experienced by women than by men, as women face more demands that extend beyond marriage and family care. Women are also required to work, pursue careers, and maintain good financial conditions. Women are even required to have a good social life (Setiawan & Milati, 2022).

The quarter-life crisis that occurs during the transition from adolescence to early adulthood is often caused by several factors, one of which is self-esteem and loneliness. This is because low self-esteem can lead to self-doubt, feelings of worthlessness, and difficulty in overcoming challenges, while high self-esteem serves as a motivator, maintains emotional balance, and increases flexibility in dealing with change (Pratiwi & Nasution, 2024). In terms of loneliness, an individual's environment, such as social relationships, can trigger feelings of emptiness or loneliness due to psycho-emotional imbalance and a lack of connection with others. In addition, educational challenges, work life, and home, friends, and family environments are external factors that play a role; dissatisfaction in establishing relationships with friends can cause loneliness (Zuraida, 2024). The above description forms the basis of this study, which demonstrates that loneliness affects the quarter-life crisis. Table 4 shows that the level of anxiety experienced by university students in Sidoarjo falls into the moderate category.

Table 5 shows that the self-esteem level of university students in Sidoarjo is in the high category. The analysis shows that self-esteem has a direct and significant effect on the quarter-life crisis. This finding indicates that students with positive self-assessments are better able to cope with the pressures, failures, and uncertainties that arise during the developmental phase towards adulthood. High self-esteem provides a strong psychological foundation for navigating decision-making, academic challenges, and future concerns. Students with high self-esteem are less likely to be trapped in negative self-reflection, thereby reducing the intensity of the quarter-life crisis. In addition, self-esteem has also been proven to have a negative and significant effect on loneliness. This means that the higher an individual's self-esteem, the lower their level of loneliness. Students who have self-confidence tend to find it easier to establish interpersonal relationships, express their emotions effectively, and perceive social interactions positively. Conversely, students with low self-esteem tend to feel unworthy, judge themselves as having no strengths, and are therefore more prone to withdrawing and experiencing loneliness.

Loneliness itself has been shown to have a positive and significant effect on the quarter-life crisis, meaning that the higher the level of loneliness students feel, the greater their tendency to experience it. Loneliness makes individuals feel that they lack emotional support, friends to share with, or relationships that can provide a sense of security and acceptance. In this condition, students tend to feel isolated in facing life's demands, leading to identity crises, confusion about the direction of life, anxiety, and emotional pressure more likely to arise. The most important finding in this study is that loneliness mediates the relationship between self-esteem and quarter-life crisis. The mediation test results show a significant indirect effect, meaning that to understand how self-esteem affects quarter-life crises, we cannot look only at the direct effect, because most of the influence is mediated by self-esteem's reduction of loneliness, which in turn exacerbates the severity of quarter-life crises. In psychology, this type of mediation is often encountered: psychological variables such as self-esteem do not always work directly on outcomes (for example, stress, quality of life, or psychological crisis), but rather through intermediary variables such as feelings of isolation, social support, loneliness, or coping. For example, research on students' psychological well-being shows that loneliness is strongly and negatively correlated with well-being, and its effects can be amplified by low levels of social interaction or social support (Nuraini & Laksmiwati, 2024). Based on the mediation analysis, loneliness is an important mediator between self-esteem and quarter-life crisis. Although self-esteem also has a direct effect on the quarter-life crisis, its overall influence is more likely to occur through reducing loneliness. Therefore, prevention and intervention efforts aimed at increasing self-esteem and reducing loneliness are likely to lower the prevalence of the quarter-life crisis among university students in Sidoarjo.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the explanations and findings presented in this article, it can be concluded that self-esteem, loneliness, and quarter-life crisis are interrelated. Loneliness has a positive effect on quarter-life crisis, which means that the higher the sense of loneliness, the greater the likelihood of students experiencing identity confusion, anxiety, and life pressures. Most importantly, loneliness has been shown to mediate the effect of self-esteem on the quarter-life crisis, meaning that emotional state and social relationships are key factors in determining the extent to which self-esteem can prevent it. Therefore, efforts to prevent the quarter-life crisis among students should focus on enhancing self-esteem and strengthening social support and healthy interpersonal relationships. Some suggestions for future researchers, referring to the limitations of this study, particularly because it focuses only on students in Sidoarjo and the application of correlational quantitative methods, future researchers are advised to expand the focus of their research by involving respondents from various regions to produce more representative data. In addition, future researchers are advised to include other variables that may be related to the quarter-life crisis, such as social support, emotion regulation, or level of religiosity, to gain a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing the quarter-life crisis among students.

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