

Quarter-Life Crisis Levels among Sixth-Semester Students in the Guidance and Counseling Study Program

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Abstract

Sixth-semester students face degree-completion demands, career preparation, independence, and adult-role formation, making them vulnerable to a quarter-life crisis. Previous studies have largely examined final-year students or associations with specific psychological variables, leaving limited evidence on crisis levels and dominant aspects among sixth-semester Guidance and Counseling students. This study examined the students' quarter-life crisis level and most dominant aspect, aiming to describe its categories and identify their primary concern. A descriptive quantitative survey used total sampling of all 16 accessible students, an initial 40-item Likert questionnaire, item-validity testing, Cronbach's alpha, descriptive statistics, hypothetical-score categorization, and aspect-mean comparisons. Results showed 31 valid and 9 invalid items, reliability of 0.809, and a mean score of 83.81; 81.25% of respondents were moderate, 18.75% were low, none were high, and uncertainty and hopelessness about the future were dominant with a mean of 3.48 or 69.69% of the ideal score. The students therefore experienced a moderate quarter-life crisis centered on an unclear future, indicating that guidance and counseling services should prioritize career planning, self-efficacy, decision-making, and anxiety management.

Keywords

Emerging Adulthood; Guidance And Counseling; Quarter-Life Crisis; Sixth-Semester Students



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INTRODUCTION

The transition from adolescence to early adulthood is a period in which individuals begin making consequential decisions about education, employment, relationships, independence, and life direction. For university students, this process

coincides with increasingly complex academic demands. When future expectations are not matched by clear goals, psychological readiness, and adequate resources, students may experience indecision, anxiety, emotional pressure, and negative self-evaluation. These experiences are commonly described as a quarter-life crisis, a developmental crisis in early adulthood that emerges when individuals feel unable to meet changing life demands with sufficient certainty (Herawati & Hidayat, 2020).

Sixth-semester students occupy a distinctive position because they have completed a substantial portion of their studies but have not fully entered the final stage. At this point, discussions of field practice, final projects, graduation, employment, and independence become more concrete. Academic success is no longer evaluated solely through course grades; students also begin questioning the relevance of their competencies, career prospects, ability to meet family expectations, and readiness for adult roles. This creates tension between achievements already obtained and a future that remains uncertain. This vulnerability is particularly relevant to students in Guidance and Counseling. They are being prepared as professionals who assist others in self-understanding, decision-making, and developmental problem solving. Nevertheless, academic knowledge of counseling does not automatically remove personal doubt. Students may still experience anxiety, identity confusion, and career pressure when the issue directly concerns their own lives.

A humane interpretation is therefore needed so that their support needs are not obscured by the assumption that prospective counselors should always solve their problems independently. Empirical evidence indicates that quarter-life crisis is widespread among Indonesian university students. A study of 649 students in Makassar found that 70.4% were in the moderate category and that crisis levels differed by semester. This suggests that students' academic position is associated with developmental pressure, particularly as graduation and entry into the labor market become more immediate (Fadhilah et al., 2022).

Research on early adults in Pekanbaru likewise found that quarter-life crisis is associated with employment, financial concerns, relationships, and unclear goals. It does not always appear as severe dysfunction; it may be expressed as prolonged confusion, feeling left behind, dissatisfaction with achievements, and fear that current decisions will not produce the expected life (Herawati & Hidayat, 2020). Studies of self-efficacy explain that confidence in personal capabilities is an important resource under pressure. Students with stronger self-efficacy tend to

interpret demands as manageable challenges, whereas weak self-efficacy may intensify stress and helplessness during a quarter-life crisis (Afnan et al., 2020).

A similar pattern was reported among psychology students, where self-efficacy was negatively associated with quarter-life crisis. Belief in one's capacity to act, solve problems, and attain goals can reduce indecision and anxiety about the future (Hidayati & Muttaqien, 2020). Emotion management is also central to adjustment. Research among final-year students found that emotional intelligence significantly contributed to quarter-life crisis, particularly through self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. Emotional regulation allows students to interpret pressure more proportionately and prevents anxiety from developing into hopelessness (Fatchurrahmi & Urbayatun, 2022). A descriptive study in Mataram showed that employment uncertainty and economic instability strengthened quarter-life crisis among emerging adults. Negative self-evaluation was especially salient when individuals believed that their lives had not met expected standards (Agustina et al., 2022). Qualitative research with final-year students described a broader pattern involving decision-making confusion, hopelessness, negative self-assessment, feeling trapped, anxiety, pressure, and concerns about interpersonal relationships.

The contributing areas included academic demands, career, identity, relationships, dreams, and expectations (Putri et al., 2023). Demographic research on early adulthood indicates that quarter-life crisis appears across groups at different intensities. Age, gender, employment status, and relationship conditions provide context for how life challenges are appraised, but they do not replace the need to examine each population specifically (Kusumaningrum & Jannah, 2023). A study of university students in Kendari found crisis levels ranging from very low to very high. Such variation demonstrates that quarter-life crisis is not uniform and must be interpreted in relation to population characteristics, measurement instruments, and social context (Safitri et al., 2024). Internationally, social-media language analysis found that discussions of quarter-life crisis frequently involve work, relationships, pressure, feeling trapped, and the desire for change. This supports the view that early-adult crisis is a genuine psychosocial phenomenon reflected in how people narrate their lives (Agarwal et al., 2020). Advances in measurement further show that developmental crisis in early adulthood can be mapped through disconnection and distress, lack of clarity and control, and transition or turning-point experiences.

This framework positions crisis as a multidimensional process involving affect, cognition, and changes in life direction rather than momentary anxiety alone (Petrov et al., 2022). From a career perspective, adaptability and future time perspective are

related to students' anxiety. Students who can envision the future and adjust to career changes tend to report less career anxiety than those who perceive the future as unpredictable and uncontrollable (Boo et al., 2021). Cognitive emotion regulation is also associated with career adaptability and career decision-making self-efficacy. Adaptive strategies help students appraise barriers realistically, generate alternatives, and maintain confidence before outcomes are visible (Lee & Jung, 2022). Uncertainty is a major mechanism underlying psychological pressure among young people. Ambiguity in education, employment, the economy, health, and relationships can intensify anxiety when individuals have low tolerance for unpredictable situations (Schweizer et al., 2023). Research with emerging adults found that intolerance of uncertainty can co-occur with negative affect and anxiety symptoms.

This pattern explains why students may experience considerable distress during academic and career transitions even before an actual failure occurs (Iannattone et al., 2024). Family environments also shape anxiety responses. Overprotective parenting or limited opportunities for autonomy have been associated with worry and anxiety among emerging-adult students, indicating that readiness for adult roles is not determined solely by individual ability (Carollo et al., 2024). The literature reveals three research gaps. First, many studies focus on final-year students or early adults in general. Second, numerous studies test associations between quarter-life crisis and other variables, whereas descriptive mapping of its level, categories, and dominant aspects among sixth-semester students remains limited. Third, Guidance and Counseling students have rarely been treated as a specific population, although personal and career readiness are central to prospective counselors' professional development. The novelty of this study lies in descriptive mapping before students fully enter their final academic stage.

It does not stop at assigning categories but compares aspect means to identify the most salient concern. The results may inform targeted services in career planning, self-efficacy, decision-making, and anxiety management. The study is urgent because academic programs require empirical data to design student support. Preventive intervention before pressure becomes severe can help students set realistic goals, identify strengths, and approach change gradually. Accordingly, the study asked two questions: what is the level of quarter-life crisis among sixth-semester Guidance and Counseling students, and which aspect is most dominant? Its objectives were to describe the level and category distribution and to identify the most prominent aspect. Accordingly, this study focuses on mapping the crisis level and identifying

the most dominant aspect within this student group. The resulting profile is expected to provide a more focused basis for academic and psychological support within the study program.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach, a descriptive research type, and a cross-sectional survey design. The quantitative approach was selected because quarter-life crisis was represented through numerical scores, while the descriptive design portrayed the respondents' condition without treatment or causal testing. Data were collected once to obtain a profile of crisis level, category distribution, and dominant aspects. The accessible population comprised all 16 sixth-semester students in the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at the research site. Because the population was small and fully reachable, total sampling was applied and every student was invited as a respondent. Eligibility required active enrollment in the sixth semester, willingness to participate, and complete questionnaire responses. The study involved a single variable, quarter-life crisis. Operationally, it referred to developmental pressure reflected in identity and life-direction confusion, difficulty adapting to change, self-evaluation and self-acceptance, readiness for adult roles, future decision-making, confidence in personal ability, hope for the future, and future anxiety.

Multiple aspects allowed both a total score and an aspect profile to be examined. The initial instrument contained 40 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale from strongly inappropriate to strongly appropriate. Scores ranged from 1 to 5. Positive statements were scored from 5 to 1 after reverse coding, whereas negative statements were scored from 1 to 5, ensuring that higher total scores consistently represented a stronger quarter-life crisis. Item validity was tested using Pearson correlations between each item and the total score. With 16 respondents, the degrees of freedom were 14 and the critical correlation at the 5% significance level was 0.497. Items were retained when the calculated correlation exceeded the critical value. Reliability was estimated with Cronbach's alpha and considered adequate at 0.70 or higher.

Instrument-quality testing was required so that scores were constructed from sufficiently related and internally consistent items (Petrov et al., 2022). Data collection involved distributing the questionnaire with an explanation of the research purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to stop responding. Returned questionnaires were checked for missing data. Responses were coded, positive items were reverse scored, and item scores were summed for each

respondent. Data analysis proceeded in four stages. First, minimum, maximum, mean, median, and standard deviation were calculated. Second, total scores were classified as low, moderate, or high using hypothetical means and standard deviations. Third, the frequency and percentage in each category were determined.

Fourth, item means and percentages of ideal scores were compared across aspects because the number of valid items differed by aspect. The aspect with the highest mean was identified as dominant. The hypothetical mean was calculated as the midpoint between the minimum and maximum possible scores, whereas the hypothetical standard deviation was the score range divided by six. After item selection produced 31 valid items, possible scores ranged from 31 to 155, with a hypothetical mean of 93 and a hypothetical standard deviation of 20.67. Scores of 31–72 were classified as low, 73–113 as moderate, and 114–155 as high. The research framework presents the sequence from population identification and questionnaire administration to instrument testing, final-item selection, and descriptive analysis. This sequence maintained consistency among the research questions, data collection, and interpretation. This sequence ensured that every analytical step remained aligned with the two research questions.

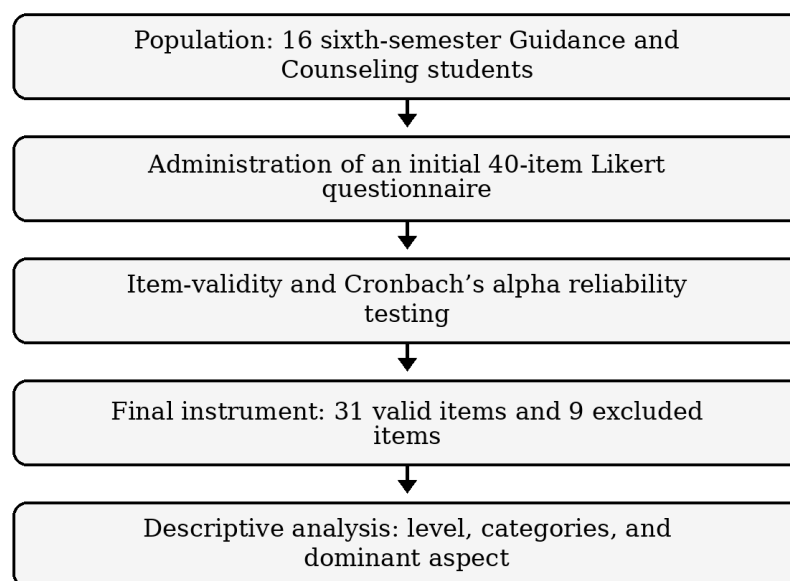


Figure 1. Research process framework

Source: Developed by the researchers, 2026

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Data Description

The initial 40-item questionnaire was administered to 16 students, and all responses were usable because the forms were complete. The data were then tested to determine each item's capacity to represent quarter-life crisis and the overall internal consistency of the instrument. Instrument testing preceded final scoring so that the descriptive analysis relied on items meeting psychometric criteria. Item validity was evaluated against a critical correlation of 0.497. Thirty-one items were valid and nine were invalid. The invalid items were numbers 4, 6, 7, 13, 14, 18, 19, 32, and 36. Thus, 77.50% of the initial items were retained and 22.50% were excluded. Removing weakly correlated items is necessary to prevent the final score from being influenced by statements with inadequate discriminatory capacity (Qonita & Puspitadewi, 2022).

Table 1. Item selection results for the quarter-life crisis instrument

Item status	Number	Percentage
Valid	31	77,50%
Invalid	9	22,50%
Total	40	100,00%

Source: Research data, 2026

Invalidity may reflect ambiguous wording, inconsistent item direction, limited response variance, or the small sample size. Consequently, nine invalid items do not mean that the construct was not measured; rather, they indicate the need for item selection and future refinement. Research on self-efficacy and quarter-life crisis similarly emphasizes retesting instruments across samples with different characteristics (Wulandari et al., 2024). After the nine items were removed, reliability was calculated for the 31 valid items. Cronbach's alpha was 0.809, indicating good internal consistency. The items therefore showed adequate coherence in representing the same construct and were suitable for descriptive scoring. The same decision rule was applied consistently when retaining or removing each statement. This procedure produced a final instrument that focused more directly on indicators associated with the research construct.

Table 2. Summary of instrument testing

Component	Result
Respondents	16
Initial items	40
Valid items	31
Invalid items	9
Critical r	0,497
Cronbach's alpha	0,809
Interpretation	Reliable/good

Source: Research data, 2026

The reliability estimate should nevertheless be interpreted in relation to the small sample. With only 16 respondents, changes in a few answers can affect item correlations. The instrument is adequate for the present group, but further validation with a larger independent sample remains necessary. This limitation was documented so that the coefficient would be interpreted within the characteristics of the available data.

Quarter-Life Crisis Level among Sixth-Semester Guidance and Counseling Students

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of quarter-life crisis scores

Statistic	Value
Respondents	16
Theoretical minimum	31
Theoretical maximum	155
Empirical minimum	62
Empirical maximum	109
Empirical mean	83,81
Median	81,50
Standard deviation	12,64
Hypothetical mean	93,00
Hypothetical SD	20,67

Source: Research data, 2026

Total scores were calculated from the 31 valid items. The empirical minimum was 62 and the maximum was 109. The mean score was 83.81, the median was 81.50, and the standard deviation was 12.64. The mean fell within the moderate range and was 9.19 points below the hypothetical mean of 93. A moderate level indicates that respondents had experienced indecision, uncertainty, or pressure concerning their future, but the overall intensity had not reached the high category. They remained able to perform academic and daily responsibilities, although certain situations may have triggered doubt about their competence, life direction, and prospects after graduation. This finding is consistent with research in Makassar, where the moderate category predominated. The similarity suggests that quarter-life crisis among students commonly appears as persistent pressure without necessarily producing severe functional impairment (Fadhilah et al., 2022).

Sixth-semester status provides a plausible explanation. Students are beginning to anticipate final projects and employment but still have time to improve competencies and revise plans. This creates an intermediate position between readiness and uncertainty. A case study among education students likewise showed that academic demands and the anticipated labor market can produce confusion, pressure, and changes in self-evaluation (Karpika & Segel, 2021). The standard deviation of 12.64 indicates variation across students. Differences may arise from family support, finances, academic experiences, relationships, self-efficacy, and career clarity. A study in Mataram found that employment status and economic instability shaped how emerging adults experienced quarter-life crisis (Agustina et al., 2022). The moderate mean should be treated as preventive information.

As students approach the final stage, pressure may increase and shift crisis intensity. Academic programs should provide support before distress develops into academic delay, decision avoidance, or reduced well-being. A negative association between quarter-life crisis and subjective well-being indicates that stronger crisis is accompanied by lower life satisfaction (Yanuar & Vrisaba, 2025). The moderate result therefore requires continuous monitoring and preventive support as students approach the final stage of study.

Distribution of Quarter-Life Crisis Categories

Table 4. Quarter-life crisis categorization criteria

Score range	Category
31–72	Low
73–113	Moderate
114–155	High

Source: Researchers' hypothetical calculation, 2026

Table 5. Distribution of respondents' quarter-life crisis levels

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low	3	18,75%
Moderate	13	81,25%
High	0	0,00%
Total	16	100,00%

Source: Research data, 2026

Categorization showed that 13 respondents, or 81.25%, were in the moderate category and 3 respondents, or 18.75%, were in the low category. None were classified as high. The distribution confirms that crisis-related experiences affected most respondents but had not reached severe intensity in the group. Respondents in the low category may possess relatively stronger psychological resources, including confidence, social support, and clearer future plans. Self-efficacy is associated with reduced stress during quarter-life crisis because it enables individuals to view problems as manageable (Afnan et al., 2020). Religious values and self-understanding may also provide meaning. Research among university students indicates that value-based confidence contributes to how individuals interpret crisis and evaluate their future (Huwaina & Khoironi, 2021). The predominance of the moderate category indicates that academic and social support is still necessary.

Social support allows students to communicate concerns, obtain information, and avoid confronting transition alone. Research among fresh graduates found a negative association between social support and quarter-life crisis (Oktaviani & Soetjningsih, 2023). Support is more effective when accompanied by self-efficacy. Students need environmental acceptance as well as confidence that they can undertake concrete action. Both factors were negatively related to quarter-life crisis among university students in adulthood (Sandaputri & Mariyati, 2024). The absence of a high category is encouraging but does not eliminate the need for intervention. Several scores approached the upper boundary of the moderate category and may

increase following academic failure, family conflict, financial difficulty, or employment uncertainty. A larger study in Kendari found variation extending to the very high category; therefore, the present findings should be limited to the respondents studied (Safitri et al., 2024).

The sample of 16 also limits generalization. One respondent represents 6.25%, meaning that a small change in the number of individuals materially alters the distribution. The results remain useful as an initial diagnostic profile for the study program but cannot represent all Guidance and Counseling students at other institutions. This distribution provides an initial basis for designing support that corresponds to the needs of most respondents.

Most Dominant Quarter-Life Crisis Aspect

Table 6. Means and percentages of quarter-life crisis aspects

Rank	Aspect	Valid items	Mean	Ideal-score %
1	Hope for the future	4	3,48	69,69%
2	Adaptation to change	3	2,94	58,75%
3	Identity and life direction	4	2,61	52,19%
4	Future decision-making	5	2,60	52,00%
5	Confidence in personal ability	5	2,56	51,25%
6	Future anxiety	4	2,55	50,94%
7	Readiness for adult roles	3	2,48	49,58%
8	Self-evaluation and acceptance	3	2,40	47,92%

Source: Research data, 2026

Aspects were compared using item means and percentages of ideal scores because the number of valid items differed across aspects. Hope for the future obtained the highest mean, 3.48, or 69.69% of the ideal score. After reverse scoring positive statements, a high value represented stronger uncertainty and hopelessness about the future. The dominance of future-related concerns indicates that students were not fully confident about their life plans, employment opportunities, and ability to meet post-graduation demands.

This is consistent with qualitative accounts of final-year students who experienced hopelessness, anxiety, feeling trapped, and unclear decisions while anticipating life after university (Putri et al., 2023). Adaptation to change ranked second with a mean of 2.94. Students may understand that change is part of adulthood but may not always be able to revise plans quickly. Difficulties can arise

when academic responsibilities increase, career plans change, or family expectations conflict with personal goals.

Identity and life direction ranked third at 2.61, while future decision-making scored 2.60. These aspects demonstrate the connection between self-clarity and willingness to choose. When students have not clarified their values, interests, and competencies, each alternative may be experienced as a high-risk decision determining their entire future. Confidence in personal ability scored 2.56 and future anxiety scored 2.55. The similarity suggests that competence doubts and fear of failure may operate together. The ability to identify and manage emotions is essential so that concern does not inhibit adaptive action (Fatchurrahmi & Urbayatun, 2022). Future time perspective and career adaptability provide additional explanation. Students with stronger future orientation and flexibility in responding to career change tend to report less career anxiety (Boo et al., 2021).

Uncertainty can intensify pressure when outcomes and future probabilities are perceived as uncontrollable. Students may repeatedly anticipate negative possibilities despite the absence of an actual failure. Ambiguity in education, work, the economy, and relationships has been identified as an important driver of psychological pressure among young people (Schweizer et al., 2023). Intolerance of uncertainty may co-occur with negative affect. Emerging adults who struggle to accept incomplete information tend to experience more anxiety and distress, suggesting that services should cultivate tolerance for process and uncertainty (Iannattone et al., 2024). Readiness for adult roles scored 2.48, while self-evaluation and acceptance had the lowest mean, 2.40. The lowest position does not imply the absence of difficulty; it indicates that respondents were relatively more able to accept their present selves than to establish certainty about their future. Parenting experiences and opportunities for autonomy may shape adult-role readiness and anxiety among emerging adults (Carollo et al., 2024).

Overall, the aspect profile shows that the main pressure concerned the future rather than rejection of the present self. Students were reasonably able to evaluate their current condition, yet remained uncertain about the steps, outcomes, and stability of life after university. Intervention should therefore prioritize the strengthening of hope, career planning, and tolerance of uncertainty. These priorities must still be adjusted to the individual needs and circumstances of each student.

Interpretation Based on Quarter-Life Crisis Theory

Theoretically, quarter-life crisis is a developmental crisis emerging when early adults confront changes in identity, employment, relationships, and independence. It

need not follow a linear course; it may involve distress and disconnection, diminished clarity and control, and a transition or turning point that redirects life. These dimensions received psychometric support in the Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (Petrov et al., 2022). The moderate category indicates that respondents were negotiating developmental demands with available resources. They recognized the need to choose and assume responsibility but were not fully confident in their choices or outcomes. Within quarter-life crisis theory, this reflects a period in which individuals question existing life structures and search for more suitable alternatives. The dominance of uncertainty and hopelessness about the future can be interpreted as a combination of low clarity, reduced perceived control, and transitional pressure. Students aspire to succeed but lack sufficient information or experience to guarantee outcomes.

This tension may produce decision delay, rumination, and anxiety. Social-media representations of quarter-life crisis also connect the phenomenon with work, relationships, pressure, and the need for change. The respondents' experiences are therefore part of a broader social phenomenon, although their intensity and context remain personal (Agarwal et al., 2020). Emotion regulation and career adaptability can serve as protective mechanisms. Adaptive cognitive strategies help students view barriers as modifiable and strengthen career decision-making self-efficacy (Lee & Jung, 2022). Meaning in life and hope are also important for career readiness. Students who understand the reasons and values underlying their choices can establish priorities and persist when plans require revision. Meaning in life has been found to influence career adaptability through positive coping and hope (Lin, 2024).

Religiosity may provide a meaning framework when students confront uncertainty. Spiritual values can place failure, effort, and life goals within a broader perspective, although their contribution interacts with other psychological and social factors (Ashari et al., 2022). The results imply three levels of Guidance and Counseling services. At the informational level, students need psychoeducation to recognize quarter-life crisis responses. At the developmental level, they require assistance in mapping strengths, interests, values, and career options. At the intervention level, individual or group counseling should be available to students experiencing intense anxiety, impaired functioning, or persistent decision difficulty. Because future-related uncertainty was dominant, services should convert abstract concerns into measurable steps. Students can formulate short-, medium-, and long-term goals, identify competencies requiring development, and prepare several career alternatives.

A gradual approach reduces the belief that the entire future must be determined through a single decision. The findings support the view that quarter-life crisis is produced by the interaction between developmental demands and psychological resources. The same demands may result in different experiences depending on self-efficacy, social support, emotion regulation, meaning in life, and tolerance of uncertainty. Academic responses should therefore be preventive, individualized, and data based.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of 16 respondents, sixth-semester Guidance and Counseling students experienced a moderate quarter-life crisis. The empirical mean was 83.81, with scores ranging from 62 to 109. Thirteen students, or 81.25%, were in the moderate category and three, or 18.75%, were in the low category, while none were in the high category. Most students therefore experienced developmental indecision, anxiety, and pressure but remained able to perform academic and everyday responsibilities. The most dominant aspect was uncertainty and hopelessness about the future, with a mean of 3.48 or 69.69% of the ideal score. Students' primary concerns involved unclear career direction, fear about future success, and doubt about meeting demands after graduation. The remaining aspects concerned adaptation, identity and life direction, decision-making, confidence, anxiety, adult-role readiness, and self-acceptance. The research questions were therefore answered by showing that crisis intensity was moderate and centered mainly on future orientation.

The study was limited by the sample of 16 respondents, reliance on self-report data, and one-time data collection. Item validity was also tested in a small group, so coefficient stability requires further examination. Future research should recruit larger samples across institutions, separate the instrument pilot sample from the main sample, use interviews to deepen interpretation, and test the roles of self-efficacy, social support, emotion regulation, career adaptability, religiosity, and psychological well-being. The study program should provide regular career planning, group counseling, decision-making training, and anxiety-management services.

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