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# The Effect of Expressive Writing Therapy Combined with Self-Efficacy on Quarter Life Crisis Score of Undergraduate Applied Nursing Program Students Poltekkes Kemenkes Tasikmalaya

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#### Abstract

Based on Riskesdas 2018, the prevalence of depression in Indonesia among individuals aged 15 and above reached 6.1%. with 2% originating from the Gen Z group (ages 15-24). This indicates the potential for psychological crises, such as the quarter-life Crisis (QLC). QLC commonly occurs between the ages of 18 and 30, especially among university students. Anxiety about the future, academic pressure, career uncertainty, and high social expectations contribute to the stress that leads to QLC. One intervention that can be provided is expressive writing therapy combined with self-efficacy or self-belief. This study aims to determine the effect of expressive writing therapy combined with self-efficacy on QLC scores. The theoretical concepts underpinning this research include QLC, expressive writing therapy, and selfefficacy. The method used is a quantitative pre-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest approach, involving 48 university students selected through simple random sampling. The intervention was conducted over four consecutive days within one week. Data were analyzed using a dependent t-test. The Ouarter-Life Crisis Instrument was used in this study. The results showed a significant decrease in QLC scores from 4.4385 to 3.4427, with a reduction difference of 0.99583. The p-value was 0.000 ( $\rho$  < 0.05), indicating that the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is accepted and the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected. This research demonstrates that expressive writing therapy, combined with selfefficacy, is effective in reducing quarter-life crisis scores among university students.

## INTRODUCTION

Humans are living beings who are constantly in a state of transition, facing challenges that evolve as their lives unfold. The transition from late adolescence to early adulthood is one of the essential transitional phases in psychology, known as emerging adulthood. The stages of adulthood are typically divided into three parts: early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood. Early adulthood encompasses individuals aged between 20 and 30 years, often associated with the phenomenon of quarter-life crisis (Santrock, 2012, as cited in Muttaqien & Hidayati, 2020), which is an identity crisis that arises in conjunction with the increasing demands of life and the search for future directions.

Quarter life crisis is a psychological phenomenon seen in confusion, anxiety, uncertainty, and emotional distress in terms of various aspects of life such as career, social relationships, and expectations for the future (Habibie et al., 2019). The World Health Organization (WHO) states that mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety are major contributors to the global health burden, with more than 300 million people in the world experiencing anxiety (WHO, 2023). In Southeast Asia, the incidence of depression reaches 27% of the total population, while in Indonesia, the prevalence of depression among those aged 15 years and over reaches 6.1% (Riskesdas, 2018). West Java Province recorded the highest rate of 3.3% in 2023, mainly in the late adolescent to early adult age group.

College students are a group that is prone to a quarter-life crisis. They are in an age transition phase, where they are required to start being independent, determine career direction, and establish self-identity. Academic pressure, parental expectations, and future uncertainty often trigger psychological crises (Kartika et al., 2018). Research by Cahyani (2022) and Ilmiah (2022) showed the high prevalence of quarter-life crisis in students from various universities, indicating that this phenomenon is widespread and deep-rooted.

The impact of a quarter-life crisis can lead to severe stress, anxiety, and even depression (Musslifah et al., 2023). To overcome this condition, various psychological approaches are needed. One method that has been proven effective is expressive writing therapy, which involves writing openly about personal feelings and experiences. This therapy has been shown to reduce levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Danarti et al., 2018; Amalia & Meiyuntariningsih, 2020). Expressive writing therapy offers individuals the freedom to explore their thoughts and feelings. Through expressive writing therapy, individuals find an effective way to channel their emotions and cope with unpleasant experiences (Salmiyati et al., 2020). Additionally, internal factors such as self-efficacy significantly contribute to the process of dealing with this crisis. Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy tend to be more able to adapt and rise from pressure (Arnett, 2001 in Simanjuntak et al., 2019). Self-efficacy is a person's subjective belief in their ability to face various challenges and solve problems successfully. Because self-efficacy greatly influences decisions, goals, problem solving, and efforts made to achieve these goals (Dewi, 2017 in Bella et al., 2022). People with high levels of self-efficacy are typically more persistent in their efforts and more likely to achieve the goals they desire. Conversely, if a person's level of self-efficacy is low, they tend to be less motivated and their performance can be affected (Scientific, 2022).

The results of interviews with students in the Bachelor of Applied Nursing Program at Poltekkes Kemenkes Tasikmalaya indicate that most of them feel anxious and insecure about their future. They expressed concerns about their careers, lack of independence, and feeling left behind compared to their peers. The methods used to overcome these conditions also vary, ranging from telling the closest person to suppressing feelings privately. Recognizing this phenomenon and the importance of psychological support for students, an intervention is needed that can help them navigate the quarter-life crisis phase. The combination of expressive writing therapy and self-efficacy strengthening is believed to have a positive impact on reducing psychological distress. Based on this review, the researcher aims to demonstrate the effect of expressive writing therapy combined with self-efficacy on the quarter-life crisis score of Undergraduate Students in the Applied Nursing Program at Poltekkes Kemenkes Tasikmalaya.

#### **METHOD**

This study employs a quantitative method with a pre-experimental design, specifically a one-group pre-test-post-test. In this design, there is no control group for comparison, so all respondents receive the treatment administered by the researcher. Students took a pre-test before receiving therapy and then underwent a post-test after completing therapy by filling out a quarter-life crisis questionnaire. This study involved a population of 3rd-year students from the Bachelor of Applied Nursing Study Program, Batch 2022, at Poltekkes Kemenkes Tasikmalaya, comprising 48 individuals, who were selected using the probability sampling method with the Simple Random Sampling technique. This technique was chosen because all respondents have uniform characteristics, ensuring that each individual has an equal opportunity to be selected, without favoring certain groups or strata. In selecting respondents, researchers first distributed questionnaires, which were then selected by spin wheels until the desired number of 48 people was reached, comprising 24 Class A respondents and 24 Class B respondents.

In this study, data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Data on respondent characteristics such as gender and place of residence are presented in the form of frequency tables. For quarter life crisis scores, a normality test was first conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Since the data were normally distributed and measured by mean and standard deviation, the following analysis used a parametric test, namely the dependent t-test, to examine the difference in mean scores before and after the intervention.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4. 1 Distribution of respondent characteristics based on gender students of the Applied Nursing undergraduate program

	 		1 0	
Gender	Frequency		Percentage	
Genuel	<b>(f)</b>		(%)	
Male	13		27.1	
Female	35 72.9		72.9	
Total	48		100.0	

Based on Table 4.1, it was found that the number of male respondents was 13 (27.1%), and the number of women was 35 (72.1%).

Table 4. 2 Distribution of respondent characteristics based on place of residence students of the Bachelor of Applied Nursing Study Program

Place of Residence	Frequency	Percentage	
Place of Residence	(f)	(%)	
Home	14	29.2	
Boarding	34	70.8	
Total	48	100.0	

Based on Table 4.2, the results show that 14 people (29.2%) live at home, while the majority, 34 people (70.8%), live in boarding houses.

Table 4.3 Distribution of mean quarter life crisis scores before intervention

Variabel	Mean	SD	Min-Max	
Quarter life				
crisis				
Pretest	4,4385	0,26261	4-5	

Based on Table 4.3, the mean score for quarter-life crisis in the intervention group before receiving expressive writing therapy combined with self-efficacy is 4.4385 (SD = 0.26261).

Table 4. 4 Distribution of mean quarter life crisis scores after the intervention

Variabel	Mean	SD	Min-Max
Quarter life			
crisis			
Posttest	3,4427	0,26154	3-4

Based on Table 4.4, the mean score for quarter-life crisis in the intervention group after receiving expressive writing therapy combined with self-efficacy is 3.4427 (SD = 0.26154).

**Table 4. 5 Data Normality Test** 

Variables	Treatment	P-value	Conclusion	
Quarter life crisis (N = 48)	Pretest	0,190	Normal	
	Posttest	0,265	Normal	

<sup>\*</sup>Shapiro-Wilk

Based on Table 4.5, the results of the normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk method show that the p-values for the quarter life crisis score on the pretest and posttest are 0.190 and 0.265, respectively, both of which are greater than  $\alpha$  = 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data in this study are normally distributed.

Table 4. 6 Distribution of differences in mean quarter life crisis scores scores before and after the intervention

Variabel	Mean	SD	Selisih Mean	P. Value	N
Quarter life crisis					
Pre test	4,4385	0,26261	0.00502	0,000	48
Post test	3,4427	0,26154	0,99583		48

<sup>\*</sup>Dependent T-Test

Based on Table 4.6, there is a difference of 0.99583 in the average quarter-life crisis score between the intervention group before and after receiving expressive writing therapy combined with self-efficacy. The statistical test results show a p-value of 0.000 (p < 0.05), indicating that the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) is accepted and the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of quarter-life crisis before and after the intervention in the group.

The results of this study showed that the majority of respondents were female, accounting for 72.9%, while men comprised 27.1% of the total 48 respondents. This proportion imbalance can reflect the characteristics of the student population in the Nursing Department, where women generally dominate the nursing profession. This is in line with the results of the studies of Salsabila (2022) and Fadhilah et al. (2022), which show that the level of quarter life crisis tends to be higher in women, which is influenced by differences in personality and gender roles.

Women tend to face more complex social pressures in their 20s, such as demands to get married, have a career, and fulfill social expectations, which can exacerbate symptoms of quarter life crisis (Muliandari, 2022; Dickerson in Salsabila, 2022). In addition, psychologically, women are known to be more expressive in expressing emotions but also more vulnerable to anxiety and emotional distress than men (WHO, 2023; Asante et al., 2022). Contextually, the dominance of female respondents in this study is also supported by data on the 2022 student population in the Bachelor of Applied Nursing Study Program, where 60 out of 78 students are women. This also strengthens the validity of the findings, as it reflects the real distribution of the study population.

Most of the respondents (70.8%) lived in boarding houses, indicating that they were migrant students who lived away from their nuclear families. This is in line with the studies of Maulida et al. (2022) and Sari & Aziz (2022), which state that migrant students face greater adaptation challenges emotionally and socially. The inability to adapt to a new environment can trigger stress, loneliness, and identity crisis, which are part of the symptoms of quarter-life crisis. Living away from family demands independence in emotional, financial, and social aspects. Migrant students tend to be more vulnerable to experiencing a quarter-life crisis due to limited social support, academic pressure, and the need to manage life independently. Intan & Sari's research (2021) supports this finding, where students who live away from their families tend to relieve psychological pressure through writing therapy. Therefore, the researcher's assumption that the living environment, especially boarding houses, is a risk factor for quarter-life crisis is scientifically acceptable.

Sebelum intervensi diberikan, rerata skor quarter life crisis pada responden adalah 4,4385, tergolong dalam kategori tinggi. Hal ini mencerminkan bahwa mahasiswa mengalami ketidakstabilan emosional, kebingungan identitas, serta tekanan akademik dan sosial yang signifikan. Temuan ini konsisten dengan hasil penelitian Sumartha (2020), yang menunjukkan sebagian besar mahasiswa mengalami krisis dalam tingkat sedang hingga tinggi. Penyebab umum dari kondisi ini adalah ketidakpastian masa depan, tekanan untuk mencapai ekspektasi sosial dan pribadi, serta dilema antara idealisme dan realita dunia kerja (Robbins & Wilner dalam Salsabila, 2022). Ketika krisis ini tidak ditangani secara adaptif, maka berpotensi berkembang menjadi gangguan psikologis serius, seperti depresi dan gangguan kecemasan (Atwood & Scholtz dalam Sumartha, 2020).

However, after receiving an intervention in the form of expressive writing therapy combined with a self-efficacy approach, the mean score for quarter-life crisis decreased to 3.4427, which is classified as moderate. These results indicate that the intervention is effective in helping students manage emotional distress, strengthen their self-efficacy, and increase their understanding of life's realities. This significant decrease in scores is in line with previous studies, such as Azarini (2024), Ghoniy et al. (2022), and Danarti et al. (2018), which showed that expressive writing therapy is effective in reducing stress, anxiety, and emotional distress. Writing activities help individuals express and understand emotions in a more honest and structured manner (Pennebaker & Evans in Salsabila et al., 2020). Combining this technique with a self-efficacy approach strengthens the results, because it increases the individual's perception of his ability to face life's challenges (Sari & Aziz, 2022). In addition, the respondents' daily journals revealed that they tended to experience pressure in making future decisions, dealing with family demands, and experiencing psychological exhaustion. The intervention was conducted systematically over four consecutive days, with a hybrid method, allowing participants to undergo a process of in-depth self-reflection.

Bivariate analysis using a paired t-test showed that the mean score decreased by 0.99583, with a p-value of 0.000 (p < 0.05). This indicates a significant difference between the conditions before and after the intervention, suggesting that the intervention is effective in reducing the quarter-life crisis score in respondents. These results reinforce the effectiveness of expressive writing therapy and enhance self-efficacy as a non-pharmacological approach that can be effectively implemented in a higher education environment, notably to support the mental health of nursing students. This study also makes a scientific contribution to the development of a psychologically based intervention model that focuses on internal strengthening of individuals, rather than just emotional release. According to Erikson's developmental theory, the quarter-life crisis is part of the early adult developmental phase, which is characterized by psychosocial conflicts. Appropriate interventions enable individuals to transform crises into growth opportunities (Sumartha, 2020). In this context, expressive writing therapy helps individuals recognize, channel, and interpret their emotional experiences, while self-efficacy helps strengthen positive perceptions of their ability to overcome challenges.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This shows that the majority of respondents are women who live in boarding houses, and the expressive writing therapy intervention combined with self-efficacy succeeded in significantly reducing quarter-life crisis scores. The average quarter-life crisis score before the intervention was 4.4385, which decreased to 3.4427 after the intervention, with a mean decrease of 0.996 and a p-value of 0.000 (p < 0.05). This suggests that the intervention is effective in reducing quarter-life crises among students in the Bachelor of Applied Nursing program at Poltekkes Kemenkes Tasikmalaya. The results of this study indicate that the intervention provided has a positive impact, suggesting it as a way to help students overcome quarter-life crisis.

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