

# The influence of social comparison on quarter life crisis mediated by psychological well-being in emerging adults

## Pengaruh perbandingan sosial terhadap krisis seperempat abad dengan dimediasi variabel kesejahteraan psikologis pada dewasa awal

Fifit Wahyuni, Siska Adinda Prabowo Putri, I Rheny Arum Permitasari

Universitas AKI Semarang  
Jalan Imam Bonjol No.15 - 17, Kota Semarang, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

In early adulthood, individuals experience significant life transitions, which can lead to difficulties in self-adjustment due to societal expectations, commonly manifested in the phenomenon known as the quarter-life crisis. This condition is often triggered by social comparison. One potential factor that may help mitigate the emergence of a quarter-life crisis in early adulthood is psychological well-being. This study aims to examine and analyze the role of psychological well-being as a mediator between social comparison and the quarter-life crisis in early adulthood. The sampling technique used was non-probability sampling, with criteria including individuals aged 18–40 years and residing in the city of Semarang, resulting in a total of 384 respondents. Data analysis was conducted using path analysis with the assistance of SPSS. The results showed a Sobel test value of 6.39 and a significance level of 0.000, indicating that psychological well-being serves as a mediator between social comparison and the quarter-life crisis in early adulthood. The implication of these findings is that enhancing psychological well-being can reduce the negative impact of social comparison on the level of quarter-life crisis. Therefore, interventions focusing on improving psychological well-being can serve as an effective strategy in addressing this crisis.

### ABSTRACT

Pada tahap dewasa awal manusia mengalami transisi yang signifikan dalam kehidupannya, sehingga mengakibatkan beberapa manusia mengalami kesulitan dalam penyesuaian diri karena adanya ekspektasi sosial dari masyarakat yang dinyatakan dengan fenomena krisis seperempat abad, hal ini disebabkan oleh perbandingan sosial. Faktor yang mungkin dapat mengatasi timbulnya krisis seperempat abad pada dewasa awal ialah faktor kesejahteraan psikologis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui dan menganalisis peran kesejahteraan psikologis sebagai mediator antara perbandingan sosial dengan krisis seperempat abad pada dewasa awal. Teknik sampel menggunakan *non-probability sampling* dengan kriteria yang berusia 18-40 tahun dan berdomisili di kota Semarang, berjumlah 384 responden. Metode analisis data dengan jalur variabel (*path variable*) menggunakan bantuan SPSS. Hasil penelitian didapatkan nilai sobel 6,39 dan signifikansi 0,000 dapat disimpulkan terdapat peran kesejahteraan psikologis sebagai mediator antara perbandingan sosial dengan krisis seperempat abad pada dewasa awal. Implikasi hasil penelitian bahwa meningkatkan kesejahteraan psikologis dapat mengurangi dampak negatif perbandingan sosial terhadap tingkat krisis seperempat abad, sehingga intervensi yang fokus pada peningkatan kesejahteraan psikologis dapat menjadi strategi efektif dalam mengatasi krisis ini.

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✉ Corresponding Author: **Fifit Wahyuni** | E-mail: [521210006@unaki.ac.id](mailto:521210006@unaki.ac.id)

## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, discussions on social inequality and psychological well-being have increasingly shaped the discourse on early adult development, especially in urban settings such as Semarang. Data from the Semarang City Statistics Agency (BPS) report a Gini index of 0.395, a figure edging closer to the critical threshold of inequality, which signals an uneven distribution of welfare and carries the potential to intensify social disparities. This imbalance is further compounded by an open unemployment rate of 10.53%, disproportionately affecting individuals in early adulthood and heightening their tendency to engage in social comparison that may culminate in psychological distress. Early adulthood itself is a precarious transitional stage in which individuals strive to construct their identities while simultaneously contending with economic instability and social uncertainty (BPS Semarang, 2023). Papilaya et al. (2024) found that nearly 29.4% of individuals in this phase exhibit diminished psychological well-being, manifesting in symptoms such as chronic stress, heightened anxiety, helplessness, and dissatisfaction with personal achievements, particularly when confronted with academic pressures and an uncertain future. Such patterns echo Robbins and Wilner's (2001) notion of the quarter-century crisis, in which individuals grapple with anticipatory anxiety about their life trajectory, feel constrained by external demands, experience decision-making paralysis, internalize negative self-evaluations, and struggle with hopelessness alongside interpersonal worries.

Empirical evidence from interviews conducted in March 2025 with five young adults, identified by the initials WF (21), TRP (22), ADI (23), CM (25), and MM (25), reveals that the psychological distress associated with the quarter-life crisis is deeply intertwined with patterns of social comparison. Most participants acknowledged that observing the achievements of others often intensified feelings of dissatisfaction, anxiety, and uncertainty regarding their own life trajectories. WF, for instance, described himself as feeling "useless" due to his relatively low income when compared with peers who could already afford various material possessions, while TRP articulated a sense of stagnation, likening his life to "treading water," as he perceived himself lagging behind academically and professionally. ADI conveyed confusion about his future while peers had already secured stable employment, CM admitted to discouragement upon witnessing others' successes, and MM reported persistent feelings of inferiority when comparing himself to peers in more advanced career positions. Collectively, these narratives highlight how social comparison functions not merely as background noise in early adulthood but as a central mechanism generating emotional distress and shaping subjective experiences of the quarter-life crisis.

Unresolved psychological well-being problems in early adulthood pose serious risks, as they may manifest in anxiety, depression, identity disturbances, and a decline in overall life quality. Data from the Indonesian Psychiatric Association (PDSKJI, 2023) indicate that 31% of individuals aged 18–25 report experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety (Ministry of Health, 2023), while a study by the Center for Public Mental Health (CPMH) Gadjah Mada

University (2022) found that 14 out of 17 final-year university students in Yogyakarta aged 20–23 displayed signs of a quarter-life crisis (Grehenson, 2022). These findings highlight that the transition into adulthood constitutes a period of heightened vulnerability to psychological disturbances when not supported by sufficient emotional regulation. Lee (2022) further emphasizes that an unmanaged quarter-life crisis has the potential to exacerbate mental health problems, obstruct personal growth, and weaken adaptive capacity in facing life's demands. Consequently, prioritizing psychological well-being becomes not only a preventive measure but also a crucial intervention strategy for mitigating crises encountered in early adulthood.

Psychological well-being serves as a central lens for understanding an individual's mental and emotional condition, shaped by the interplay of multiple dimensions. Ryff conceptualizes psychological well-being as comprising self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Pedhu, 2022). Previous studies demonstrate that contextual factors such as family dynamics, economic security, the quality of social connections, as well as cognitive orientations and stress-regulation strategies, play a crucial role in influencing psychological well-being (Rahimah et al., 2022). In contemporary settings, however, social comparison has emerged as a particularly prominent determinant, especially when amplified by the ubiquity of social media, where constant exposure to curated portrayals of others' achievements tends to foster negative self-evaluations and emotional strain (Loi et al., 2020). Individuals who engage excessively in such comparisons are more vulnerable to chronic dissatisfaction, diminished self-esteem, and depressive symptoms (Casingcasing et al., 2023), making it imperative to further investigate the extent to which social comparison contributes to the dynamics of psychological well-being during early adulthood.

Social comparison was selected as the independent variable in this study because it is recognized as a central factor contributing to disruptions in psychological well-being during early adulthood, especially within the context of an increasingly competitive digital environment. From a theoretical standpoint, Festinger conceptualizes social comparison as the process through which individuals evaluate themselves by referencing the achievements, lifestyles, or abilities of others (Haq et al., 2022), and this upward evaluative tendency frequently generates feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction, and heightened anxiety (Tenggara & Idulfilastri, 2024). The prevalence of social media further amplifies these dynamics by displaying curated and edited portrayals of others' lives that often diverge from reality, intensifying the gap between self-perception and perceived social standards. Empirical evidence supports this association, as studies by Hanna et al. (2017) and Lee (2022) consistently demonstrate that elevated levels of social comparison are inversely related to psychological well-being. On this basis, positioning social comparison as the independent variable in this study is theoretically grounded and empirically justified.

Various study has explored the interconnections between social comparison, psychological well-being, and the quarter-life crisis, though with diverse methodological lenses and contextual emphases. Casingcasing et al. (2023) identified social comparison

as a significant driver of depressive symptoms among young adults, while Argasiam and Adinda Prabowo Putri (2023) reported that negative forms of social comparison are strongly associated with heightened vulnerability to experiencing a quarter-life crisis. Complementing these findings, Rofiqah et al. (2023) demonstrated that the tendency to evaluate oneself against others can intensify perceptions of future uncertainty, which is a central hallmark of this crisis stage. In relation to psychological well-being, Ratih and Winta (2024) together with Rahimah et al. (2022) argued that individuals with stronger psychological well-being are more capable of managing psychosocial stress, and Lee (2022) highlighted its mediating role in linking self-management to overall life quality. Collectively, these findings provide not only empirical validation but also a robust theoretical grounding for the present study.

Although many studies have investigated the links between social comparison and psychological well-being, as well as between psychological well-being and the quarter-life crisis, research explicitly addressing the mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between social comparison and the quarter-life crisis during early adulthood remains scarce. The majority of prior studies have tended to analyze these variables in isolation, without constructing a comprehensive structural model that captures their interconnectedness. Moreover, the Indonesian context, particularly among young adults navigating the post-pandemic era with its layered socioeconomic uncertainties, has received limited scholarly attention. This study therefore positions itself as a novel contribution by empirically testing a structural relationship model that incorporates both direct and indirect pathways between these variables. By focusing on the early adult population in Indonesia and employing a rigorous quantitative approach, the research is expected to generate theoretical insights as well as practical implications, especially in designing psychological interventions that are contextually grounded and strategically targeted.

The present study seeks to investigate the effect of social comparison on the emergence of the quarter-life crisis, with psychological well-being positioned as a mediating variable in early adulthood. More specifically, the study addresses three central questions, namely whether social comparison exerts a negative influence on psychological well-being, whether social comparison contributes positively to the likelihood of experiencing a quarter-life crisis, and whether psychological well-being functions as a protective factor capable of reducing the probability of such a crisis. Drawing on existing theoretical frameworks and empirical findings, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a negative influence of social comparison on psychological well-being in early adulthood.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a positive influence of social comparison on the quarter century crisis in early adulthood.
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a negative influence of psychological well-being on the quarter-century crisis in early adulthood.
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between social comparison and quarter-century crisis in early adulthood.

With the formulation of these objectives and hypothesis, this research will then be explained in more detail through the research design and procedures outlined in the methods chapter.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This research adopted a cross-sectional design, which involves gathering data at a single point in time to evaluate the relationships among variables concurrently (Mertens, 2019). Such a design is appropriate for capturing associations in natural settings without experimental manipulation, making it particularly relevant for investigating ongoing psychological processes. The study specifically examined the relationship between social comparison (X), psychological well-being (Z), and the quarter-life crisis (Y) among individuals in early adulthood, with all variables measured simultaneously to enable an assessment of relational patterns within the same temporal frame.

This design was deemed suitable because the study did not seek to trace psychological changes over time but rather to capture existing patterns of association (Leavy, 2024). Data were collected using instruments designed to assess individual perceptions of the variables under investigation, and the analysis focused on identifying the strength and direction of the observed relationships. In addition, the approach provided practical efficiency in accessing participants while maintaining strong relevance for examining psychological issues characteristic of the early adulthood transition (Cyr & Goodman, 2024; DeMarrais et al., 2024).

### **Participant**

The target population of this study consisted of residents of Semarang City aged 18–40 years, although the exact population size could not be determined. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed, resulting in 384 respondents who met the inclusion criteria, namely being in early adulthood (18–40 years) and residing in Semarang City. Data collection was carried out between March 28 and April 11, 2025, with participants recruited through an online Google Form link distributed via social media platforms, discussion groups, direct messages, and flyers.

### **Instrument**

Data collection in this study employed a Likert scale with both favorable and unfavorable scoring formats. The instruments consisted of a quarter-life crisis scale adapted from Robbins and Wilner (2001), a social comparison scale based on Festinger's framework, and a psychological well-being scale developed from Ryff et al. (1995). Item validity was assessed through a discriminant power test using SPSS, with items considered valid when the  $r$  count exceeded the  $r$  table, while reliability was examined using an internal consistency approach

with Cronbach's Alpha. The questionnaire was independently developed, with each construct grounded in established theoretical models that have been empirically validated. The quarter-life crisis variable was conceptualized according to Robbins and Wilner (2001), which comprises seven indicators, namely indecision in making choices, feelings of hopelessness, negative self-evaluation, a sense of being trapped in difficult circumstances, anxiety, psychological strain, and worries in interpersonal relationships. The social comparison construct was structured following Festinger's theory, divided into two key dimensions: ability and opinion (Haq et al., 2022). Meanwhile, psychological well-being was operationalized using Ryff's (1995) model, which consists of six dimensions, namely self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal growth.

To ensure the accuracy of measurement, a content validity test was carried out through item-total correlation analysis using SPSS. The results indicated that all items across the three instruments, the quarter-life crisis scale, the social comparison scale, and the psychological well-being scale, met the validity criteria. The item-total correlation coefficients ranged from 0.408 to 0.711 for the quarter-life crisis scale, 0.466 to 0.661 for the social comparison scale, and 0.368 to 0.627 for the psychological well-being scale. Reliability was further examined using Cronbach's Alpha, and the findings demonstrated that all three scales achieved satisfactory levels of internal consistency, confirming that the items within each instrument consistently measured their respective constructs.

## **Data Analysis**

This study employed the Sobel test to assess the mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between social comparison and the quarter-life crisis. The Sobel test evaluates the significance of the indirect effect by combining the coefficients and standard errors from the regression pathway of social comparison to psychological well-being and from psychological well-being to the quarter-life crisis. Through this procedure, it can be determined whether the observed relationships operate directly or are transmitted indirectly through a mediating pathway, with the analysis conducted using SPSS version 25. This method is consistent with the framework of mediation analysis outlined by Mertens (2024), who underscores the importance of identifying indirect effects in psychological models as a means of uncovering the mechanisms that underlie associations among variables. In this way, the analysis provides insight into the latent contributions of mediator variables that may not be apparent in direct pathways but nonetheless play a critical role in shaping broader psychosocial dynamics.

## **RESULTS**

### **Characteristics of Research Respondents**

This study recruited 384 participants with a relatively balanced gender distribution, consisting of 53.9% women and 46.1% men. Nearly half of the respondents were in the 18–22

age group (49.2%), with the remaining participants distributed across the 23–40 age range. In terms of educational background, most participants were high school graduates (65.6%), followed by those holding a bachelor’s degree (34.1%), while only a small proportion had completed junior high school (0.3%). Regarding occupational status, the majority were employed as company staff or workers (60.9%), while others identified as students (23.2%), entrepreneurs (7.3%), educators (4.7%), and housewives (3.9%). These demographic patterns reflect the heterogeneity of the sample, with detailed descriptive statistics on respondent characteristics presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Respondent Characteristics Data

Characteristics	Categories	Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	177	46,1%
	Female	207	53,9%
Age	18-22 years	189	49,2%
	23-27 years	106	27,6%
	28-32 years	67	17,4%
	33-40 years	22	5,7%
	Bachelor	131	34,1%
Education	Senior High School	252	65,6%
	Junior High School	1	0,3%
	Housewife	15	3,9%
Job	Employee	234	60,9%
	Student	89	23,2%
	Educator	18	4,7%
	Entrepreneur	28	7,3%

### Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 indicates that both the quarter-century crisis and psychological well-being variables fall within the moderate range, whereas social comparison is categorized as high. Specifically, 50.3% of participants reported experiencing a moderate level of quarter-century crisis, 70.6% demonstrated a high tendency for social comparison, and 55.2% were situated at a moderate level of psychological well-being. This distribution portrays the nuanced psychological and social landscape of the respondents, suggesting that while many are not at the extreme ends of crisis or well-being, the elevated prevalence of social comparison may represent a distinctive feature of this population.

**Table 2.** Variable Categorization

Variable	Empirical Data				Hypothetical Data				Information
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	
Quarter-Century Crisis	44	112	82,92	13,3	28	112	70	14	Medium
Social Comparison	24	64	47,76	8,69	40	64	40	4	High
Psychological Well-Being	24	96	50,93	12,7	24	96	60	12	Medium

This study revealed that most respondents were situated in a relatively complex psychosocial condition. The high prevalence of social comparison suggests that many individuals actively measure themselves against others in terms of abilities, achievements, and social standing. At the same time, psychological well-being fell within the moderate range, indicating that although respondents possess coping resources, these are not fully optimal. The moderate level of the quarter-century crisis further reflects the uncertainty, emotional strain, and indecision that characterize the life direction of many young adults. Taken together, these findings suggest that a strong inclination to engage in social comparison is not sufficiently counterbalanced by robust psychological well-being, thereby heightening vulnerability to a quarter-century crisis. This illustrates a misalignment between external social pressures and the individual's internal capacity for self-regulation and meaning-making, particularly in early adulthood, a developmental stage marked by heightened challenges and social expectations.

### **Assumption Test Results**

The normality test results showed that the quarter-century crisis variable had a K-SZ value of 0.055 with a significance level of 0.190, indicating a normal distribution. Similarly, the social comparison variable (K-SZ = 0.064;  $p = 0.083$ ) and the psychological well-being variable (K-SZ = 0.050;  $p = 0.281$ ) were also normally distributed. The multicollinearity test further demonstrated that no multicollinearity was present, as reflected by a VIF value of 1.344 ( $<10$ ) and a tolerance value of 0.744 ( $>0.1$ ). In addition, the heteroscedasticity test results confirmed that both the social comparison and psychological well-being variables did not exhibit heteroscedasticity, thereby meeting the required assumptions for further analysis.

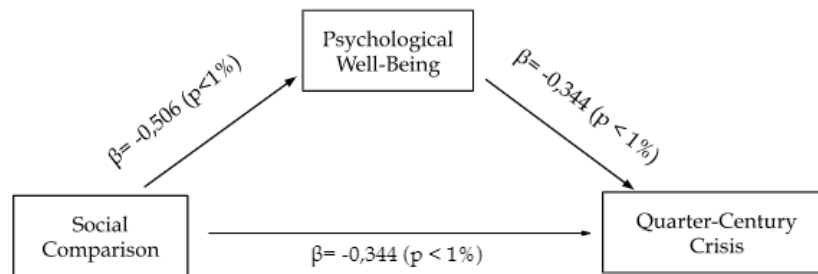
### **Hypothesis Test Results**

The hypothesis testing results indicated that social comparison had a highly significant negative effect on psychological well-being ( $b = -0.737$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that higher levels of social comparison were associated with lower psychological well-being. Thus,  $H_1$  was supported. In addition, social comparison showed a highly significant positive direct effect on the quarter-century crisis ( $b = 0.642$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that a stronger tendency to compare oneself with others increased the likelihood of experiencing a quarter-century crisis. Accordingly,  $H_2$  was supported. Furthermore, psychological well-being demonstrated a highly significant negative direct effect on the quarter-century crisis ( $b = -0.361$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), meaning that higher psychological well-being reduced the severity of the quarter-century crisis. Thus,  $H_3$  was supported. Finally, the Sobel test yielded a value of 6.39 ( $p < 0.001$ ), confirming the mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between social comparison and the quarter-century crisis. This result indicates that social comparison influenced the quarter-century crisis both directly and indirectly through psychological well-being. Thus,  $H_4$  was supported.

**Table 3.** Hypothesis Testing

	Hypothesis	Coeff	SE	$\beta$	T	Sobel-test	Sig	Information
H <sub>1</sub>	PS -> KP	-0.737	0.064	-0.506	-11.457	-	0.000	<b>H<sub>1</sub> accepted</b>
H <sub>2</sub>	PS -> KSA	0.642	0.068	0.419	9.442	-	0.000	<b>H<sub>2</sub> accepted</b>
H <sub>3</sub>	KP -> KSA	-0.361	0.047	-0.344	-7.748	-	0.000	<b>H<sub>3</sub> accepted</b>
H <sub>4</sub>	PS -> KP ->KSA	-	-	-	-	6.39	0.000	<b>H<sub>4</sub> accepted</b>

Note: N = 384; PS = Social Comparison; KP = Psychological Well-Being; KSA = Quarter-Century Crisis.



**Figure 1.** Research Model

## DISCUSSION

This study aims to examine the influence of social comparison, psychological well-being, and the quarter-century crisis among individuals in early adulthood, a transitional stage often marked by social pressure, identity exploration, and uncertainty about life's direction. Specifically, the research investigates the mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between social comparison and the quarter-century crisis. The findings demonstrate that all proposed hypothesis were supported. First, social comparison was found to have a negative effect on psychological well-being, indicating that individuals who frequently compare themselves to others tend to experience lower levels of mental well-being.

Second, social comparison was shown to positively contribute to the emergence of the quarter-life crisis, suggesting that using others' achievements as a benchmark may trigger instability in self-identity. Third, psychological well-being demonstrated a negative effect on the quarter-life crisis, indicating that individuals with stronger psychological resources are better equipped to confront life's challenges without falling into existential crises. Fourth, the mediation analysis confirmed the significant role of psychological well-being as a link between social comparison and the quarter-life crisis. This finding underscores that maintaining a healthy psychological condition is crucial in mitigating the adverse effects of excessive social comparison on the emergence of crises during early adulthood.

All hypothesis accepted in this study are consistent with the theoretical foundations of developmental psychology and models of psychological well-being in explaining the transition to adulthood. Festinger's concept of social comparison highlights that individuals

tend to evaluate themselves by juxtaposing their lives with those of others (Haq et al., 2022). When this tendency becomes persistent and excessive, it can foster unrealistic life standards, diminish self-satisfaction, generate doubts regarding personal achievements, and ultimately disrupt emotional stability (Hanna et al., 2017; Tenggara & Idulfilastri, 2024). The direct relationship between social comparison and the quarter-life crisis can further be understood through Erikson's psychosocial development theory, which posits that early adulthood is marked by identity exploration under conditions of heightened pressure and social expectations (Erikson, 1968).

When expectations generated through social comparison are not fulfilled, individuals are more prone to experiencing an identity crisis, often manifested in uncertainty regarding their roles and life direction (Argasiam & Putri, 2023). Within this context, the quarter-life crisis becomes increasingly likely as a response to unmet external social standards (Uly et al., 2023). Furthermore, the finding that psychological well-being exerts a negative influence on the quarter-life crisis is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that individuals with stable psychological conditions are more capable of managing stress, sustaining a clear sense of purpose, and preserving emotional resilience when confronting developmental challenges in early adulthood (Afriansyah & Kusumaningrum, 2020; Fauzia et al., 2023; Herdiana et al., 2022). This relationship also supports the mechanism of indirect effects, whereby psychological well-being functions as a mediator that channels the influence of social comparison into the emergence of existential crises during this life stage (Lee, 2022).

Based on the participant characteristics, it can be concluded that this study was dominated by individuals in early adulthood with relatively high levels of digital engagement. This aspect is particularly important in the analysis, as the intensity of social media exposure has been shown to increase the likelihood of engaging in social comparison. Frequent comparisons of personal achievements, physical appearance, or lifestyle with those displayed on digital platforms can exacerbate psychological vulnerability and reinforce the direct effect of social comparison on psychological decline. Moreover, such tendencies may contribute to the emergence of identity crises, as individuals struggle to reconcile external portrayals of success with their own developmental progress. This contextual finding is relevant, as it reflects the daily realities of the participants, which are closely intertwined with the core issues examined in this study.

Furthermore, the participants' age range of 20 to 30 years represents a critical developmental phase that the literature consistently identifies as particularly vulnerable to the quarter-life crisis. During this period, individuals often encounter substantial pressures related to life direction, career attainment, and personal stability, which collectively heighten the potential for identity conflicts. The predominance of female participants in this study further contextualizes the findings, as prior research indicates that women are generally more susceptible to the influence of social expectations, gender-related role demands, and the tendency to evaluate themselves against external standards, all of which are closely aligned with the constructs examined in this research.

The results of this study demonstrate strong consistency with a range of previous findings, both in terms of the direction of relationships between variables and their psychological implications. Yuniar (2023) found that a strong tendency toward social comparison correlates with heightened identity confusion and emotional distress in early adulthood, while Afriana and Virgonita (2024) reported that higher levels of social comparison are inversely associated with psychological well-being. Similarly, Lubis and Indrawati (2023) highlighted that frequent engagement in social comparison diminishes self-confidence, fosters helplessness, and exacerbates psychological stress. The direct effect of social comparison on the quarter-life crisis is further supported by Alkatiri and Aprianty (2024) as well as Uly et al. (2023), who both identified social comparison as a significant predictor of identity uncertainty. Meanwhile, the negative influence of psychological well-being on the quarter-life crisis is consistent with findings from Fauzia et al. (2023) and Herdian and Wijaya (2022), who underscored the role of mental health in navigating a developmental stage marked by identity conflicts. The strength of this study lies in its integrative approach, positioning psychological well-being as a mediating variable. This highlights an indirect pathway through which social comparison contributes to the quarter-life crisis, thereby offering a more comprehensive explanation of the mechanism underlying this association. Such evidence resonates with Lee's (2022) findings, which also identified psychological well-being as a mediator in the relationship between internal stressors and adaptive psychological functioning.

Although this study makes a valuable contribution to the advancement of developmental psychology theory, several limitations must be acknowledged to ensure accurate interpretation of the findings. First, the use of non-probability sampling through online distribution constrained participant representation, as the sample was not drawn randomly or from formal institutions. This may have reduced the diversity of participants' social, educational, and economic backgrounds, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results. Second, the predominance of digitally active participants introduces potential bias, since individuals with limited technology access were less likely to participate. Third, reliance on self-report measures raises concerns regarding validity, as responses may have been influenced by social desirability, especially given the sensitivity of psychological topics. To enhance the robustness of future research, several improvements are recommended. A mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative data would provide greater depth and triangulation of findings. Employing more representative sampling techniques, such as stratified random sampling, could ensure broader demographic coverage. Additionally, incorporating offline distribution of instruments would allow participation from individuals with limited digital access, resulting in findings that more accurately reflect diverse social realities.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that social comparison significantly influences the quarter-century crisis in young adults, both directly and indirectly through psychological well-being

as a mediating factor. Individuals who frequently compare themselves to others tend to experience lower psychological well-being, which in turn increases the risk of encountering a quarter-century crisis. Conversely, those with stronger psychological well-being show greater resilience in navigating identity pressures during this transitional stage. These findings highlight the central role of psychological well-being as a mechanism that mitigates the negative impact of social comparison on identity development in early adulthood. Practically, the results suggest that fostering psychological well-being, through interventions aimed at strengthening self-esteem, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, can serve as an effective strategy for young adults to cope with identity-related challenges amid the demands of a competitive social environment.

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**The influence of social comparison on quarter life crisis mediated by psychological well-being in emerging adults**

*Fifit Wahyuni, Siska Adinda Prabowo Putri, I Rheny Arum Permitasari*

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