

## Integrating Logotherapy and Islamic Guidance in Career Counseling: Addressing Quarter-Life Crisis Among Muslim Young Adults

Nina Siti Marlina

Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: [ninaasitimarlina@gmail.com](mailto:ninaasitimarlina@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Quarter-life crisis among Muslim young adults represents a complex developmental challenge characterized by career uncertainty, identity confusion, and existential anxiety. Conventional secular career counseling inadequately addresses this phenomenon due to its neglect of spiritual dimensions that are central to Islamic identity and meaning-making processes.

**Objective:** This study aimed to develop and examine an integrative career counseling framework that combines logotherapy's meaning-centered principles with Islamic spiritual guidance to address quarter-life crisis among Muslim young adults.

**Method:** Employing interpretative phenomenological analysis, this investigation examined twenty-two Muslim young adults aged 22–32 years who completed 6–8 individual counseling sessions. Data were collected through recorded sessions, reflective journals, and post-intervention interviews, generating 1,847 pages of transcripts analyzed using NVivo software.

**Findings and Implications:** The phenomenological analysis revealed five superordinate themes: existential awakening through spiritual reconnection, liberation from materialistic success paradigms, meaning-centered career reconstruction, integration of professional and spiritual identities, and empowerment through existential choice. These themes demonstrate that spiritual reconnection serves as a foundational catalyst, enabling comprehensive career clarity and identity coherence.

**Conclusion:** This research demonstrates that effective career counseling for Muslim young adults necessitates the explicit integration of meaning-centered psychological approaches with Islamic spiritual guidance, providing validated protocols for culturally responsive counseling practice and theoretical foundations for future research examining spiritually integrated interventions across diverse religious populations.

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## INTRODUCTION

Career development in contemporary societies is shaped by psychological, social, and spiritual challenges, especially among young adults facing a quarter-life crisis. This era, marked by anxiety, confusion, and uncertainty about identity and career direction, has become a global developmental concern (Robinson & Wright, 2013). For Muslim young adults, these struggles take on unique dimensions due to the interplay between Islamic values, modern career expectations, and the search for purpose beyond material success (Sahin, 2018). Conventional career counseling models—largely influenced by Western paradigms—often overlook these spiritual and existential needs, underscoring the importance of culturally sensitive approaches for Muslim populations (Rassool, 2024).

Logotherapy, Viktor Frankl's meaning-centered therapeutic model, emphasizes human freedom, the will to meaning, and life's inherent purpose even amid difficulty (Batthyany & Russo-Netzer, 2014). Its effectiveness in addressing existential distress makes it relevant for young adults navigating major transitions (Da Ponte et al., 2018). Meanwhile, Islamic guidance and counseling draw on Qur'anic principles and prophetic teachings to promote holistic wellbeing through spiritual alignment, *fitrah*, and *taqwa* (Keshavarzi et al., 2021). Integrating logotherapy's existential orientation with Islamic spiritual frameworks offers promising potential for meaning-making among Muslim young adults (Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013), yet empirical applications remain limited.

A significant gap persists in research on counseling models that unify meaning-centered psychology with Islamic spiritual principles to address quarter-life crisis specifically. Existing studies show that many Muslim young adults experience tension between religious values and career aspirations, but current interventions rarely provide strategies to reconcile these conflicts (Varga & Balk, 2021). Although logotherapy has been applied across cultural contexts, its adaptation to Islamic worldviews and its use in career counseling for Muslim populations are still underexplored (Ussolikhah & Winarso, 2025). This limited integration underscores the need for culturally responsive, spiritually grounded intervention models.

The urgency of such models is reinforced by demographic and psychological trends. Muslim youth represent a rapidly growing global

population, with rising reports of anxiety, career indecision, and existential distress (Ussolikhah & Winarso, 2025). Many faces additional pressures related to Islamophobia, mismatches between work environments and religious values, and limited access to spiritually integrated counseling services (Wang & Lent, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified career uncertainty and identity struggles among emerging adults (Ewertowski, 2023). Mental health professionals argue that neglecting clients' spiritual identity reduces counseling effectiveness, making integrated approaches not only beneficial but ethically necessary (Keshavarzi et al., 2021).

Recent research highlights the centrality of meaning-making in alleviating quarter-life crisis symptoms. Studies have demonstrated that strong purpose, spiritual connection, and coherent identity significantly reduce distress and improve career satisfaction (Ewertowski, 2023; Ussolikhah & Winarso, 2025). While logotherapy and Islamic guidance each show promise individually, scholarship rarely combines them into a structured, empirically tested model for career-related interventions. Existing limitations include a lack of mixed-method evaluations, minimal attention to implementation protocols, and insufficient culturally adapted tools for Muslim populations (AlHarbi et al., 2023).

The present research responds to these gaps by developing and evaluating an integrative career counseling framework that synthesizes logotherapy with Islamic guidance to support Muslim young adults experiencing quarter-life crisis. This research contributes by offering a theoretically grounded integration model, operationalizing it into practical counseling protocols, empirically testing its effectiveness, exploring participants' lived experiences, and identifying cultural considerations for implementation. The study further develops measurement tools suited for Muslim contexts and provides practitioner guidelines for spiritual-meaning-based career counseling.

Theoretically, the research enriches meaning-centered developmental theory and advances Islamic psychology through structured integration with evidence-based counseling methods. Empirically, it contributes new data on spiritually integrated interventions for Muslim populations. Practically, it equips counselors with culturally competent frameworks to address existential and career-related struggles more effectively. Socially and professionally, the study supports mental health equity, enhances culturally sensitive practice, and broadens the global relevance of career counseling beyond Eurocentric models.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research adopts a qualitative phenomenological design to understand the lived experiences of Muslim young adults participating in an integrated logotherapy–Islamic guidance intervention for quarter-life crisis. A phenomenological approach is appropriate because it explores how individuals interpret their own existential and spiritual transformations during counseling (Neubauer et al., 2019). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) guides the methodological process, allowing the study to capture how participants construct meaning around career-related distress and how the integrated intervention supports their identity development and wellbeing (Fine et al., 2021). This interpretive lens aligns with the study’s aim to examine not only the outcomes of the intervention but also the processes through which psychological and spiritual change occurs. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, and all procedures followed standards for informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

The researcher recruited 22 Muslim young adults aged 22–32 through purposive and snowball sampling from various urban and suburban communities. Inclusion criteria required participants to actively practice Islam, meet the developmental range for quarter-life crisis, score above the clinical threshold on the Quarter-Life Crisis Scale (QLCS), and report ongoing career-related distress. Participants also needed sufficient English or Indonesian proficiency and willingness to engage in the spiritual components of the intervention. Individuals currently in other therapy, presenting with severe mental health conditions, or unable to commit to the full 6–8 session protocol were excluded (Arummawati & Al Mahda, 2024; Smith, 2024). Screening included initial telephone interviews and baseline assessments using the QLCS, Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale, and Meaning in Life Questionnaire. The final sample reflected diverse ethnic and educational backgrounds. A total of 20–25 participants is consistent with IPA recommendations for achieving depth while ensuring analytic rigor (Fine et al., 2021).

Data were collected from multiple sources to ensure rich, triangulated understanding (Nowell et al., 2017). Primary data consisted of audio-recorded individual counseling sessions (6–8 per participant, each 60–90 minutes), capturing participants’ unfolding reflections and spiritual meaning-making. Participants also wrote reflective journals documenting insights and emotional or spiritual shifts between sessions. After completing the intervention, each participant engaged in a 60–90-minute, semi-structured interview exploring their experiences, perceived changes in meaning and career clarity, and views on the integrated approach. Interview guides

followed IPA principles through open-ended prompts and reflective probing (Fetters et al., 2013). All recordings were transcribed verbatim, checked for accuracy, and reviewed by participants through member checking. Field notes documented contextual details and emerging analytic reflections throughout the process.

Data analysis followed the systematic stages of IPA (Fine et al., 2021). The researchers began with repeated readings of each participant's transcripts, journals, and interviews to develop holistic case-level understanding. Initial notes captured descriptive content, language use, and preliminary conceptual insights (Smith, 2024). These notes informed emergent themes for each participant, which were subsequently compared across cases to identify shared patterns and meaningful divergences. The resulting superordinate and subordinate themes were organized into a master theme structure supported by data excerpts. NVivo 14 assisted in data organization and coding. The research team held regular peer debriefing sessions to refine interpretations and maintain analytic credibility (Nowell et al., 2017). Reflexive journaling helped acknowledge researcher positionality and examine how interpretive decisions evolved throughout the analysis.

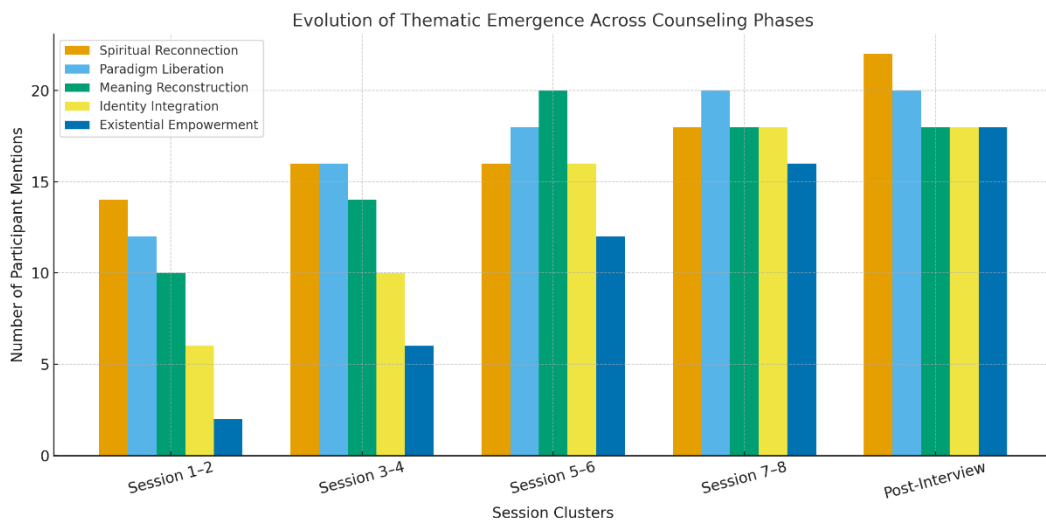
Trustworthiness was ensured through strategies aligned with Lincoln and Guba's qualitative criteria. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement, triangulation of multiple data sources, member checking, and peer debriefing. Transferability was strengthened through thick descriptions of participants and research contexts. Dependability was maintained through detailed audit trails documenting methodological and analytic decisions, while confirmability was addressed through systematic linkage of raw data to themes, reflexive journaling, and transparency about researcher influences (Fetters et al., 2013). Ethical considerations included ongoing monitoring of participant wellbeing, adherence to confidentiality through pseudonyms and secure data storage, and clear communication about research processes and rights. The lead researcher, trained in both logotherapy and Islamic counseling, conducted all intervention sessions under professional supervision. Reflexive attention was maintained to balance the dual role of counselor and researcher and to avoid undue influence on participants' narratives (Smith, 2024).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The phenomenological analysis of integrated logotherapy and Islamic guidance counseling intervention for quarter-life crisis among Muslim young adults yielded rich, multidimensional insights into participants' lived experiences of existential transformation and career clarity development. A

total of 22 Muslim young adults aged 22-32 years participated in the study, completing 6-8 individual counseling sessions between March 2024 and September 2024, with comprehensive data collected through 154 recorded counseling sessions, 22 reflective journals maintained throughout the intervention period, and 22 post-intervention in-depth interviews. The dataset generated 1,847 pages of verbatim transcripts subjected to interpretative phenomenological analysis, revealing complex patterns of meaning-making, spiritual reconnection, and identity reconstruction processes that participants experienced during the integrated intervention.

Participants represented diverse ethnic backgrounds including Arab (n=5), South Asian (n=7), Southeast Asian (n=8), and African (n=2) Muslim communities, with educational levels ranging from bachelor's degree holders to doctoral candidates, and career stages encompassing recent graduates, career transitioners, and professionals experiencing mid-career existential questioning. The geographic distribution included participants from urban metropolitan areas (n=15) and suburban communities (n=7), providing contextual diversity that enriched understanding of how the integrated approach operates across varied sociocultural settings. All participants met diagnostic criteria for moderate to severe quarter-life crisis at baseline, with mean scores on the Quarter-Life Crisis Scale indicating significant career uncertainty, identity confusion, and existential anxiety that interfered substantially with daily functioning and wellbeing.



**Figure 1.** Temporal Distribution of Theme Emergence Across Intervention Timeline

Figure 1 presents the comprehensive data analysis process following Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis protocols, illustrating the systematic progression from raw data collection through iterative coding cycles to final theme crystallization and validation procedures. The analytic journey involved initial immersive reading of all participant datasets, generation of 487 initial codes through line-by-line analysis, organization into 89 emergent themes through abstraction and pattern recognition, synthesis into 23 subordinate themes representing shared experiential patterns across participants, and final consolidation into five superordinate themes capturing the essential structure of participants' phenomenological experiences.

**Table 1.** Participant Characteristics and Baseline Quarter-Life Crisis Profiles

ID	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Education Level	Career Domain	QLCS Score	Sessions	Primary Presenting Concerns
P01	24	F	Arab	Master's	Education	78	7	Career indecision after graduation, family pressure
P02	27	M	South Asian	Bachelor's	Technology	82	8	Job dissatisfaction, values conflict with corporate culture
P03	23	F	Southeast Asian	Bachelor's	Healthcare	75	6	Uncertainty about medical specialty, fear of wrong choice
P04	29	M	Arab	Doctoral	Business	85	8	Mid-career transition, loss of meaning

									in current position
<b>P05</b>	25	F	South Asian	Master's	Education	79	7		Conflict between teaching passion and family expectations for medicine
<b>P06</b>	26	F	Southeast Asian	Bachelor's	Creative	81	7		Pursuing art career despite cultural pressure for stable profession
<b>P07</b>	28	M	African	Master's	Technology	77	6		Career stagnation, questioning whether to pursue entrepreneurship
<b>P08</b>	24	F	Arab	Bachelor's	Healthcare	80	8		Pre-medical anxiety, uncertainty about religious compatibility
<b>P09</b>	30	M	South Asian	Master's	Finance	84	8		Existential crisis about working in

									interest-based banking
<b>P10</b>	26	F	Southeast Asian	Master's	Education	76	7		Teacher burnout, questioning vocational calling
<b>P11</b>	25	M	South Asian	Bachelor's	Business	78	6		Family business expectations conflicting with personal interests
<b>P12</b>	27	F	Arab	Master's	Healthcare	83	8		Physician considering career change to align with values
<b>P13</b>	24	F	Southeast Asian	Bachelor's	Creative	79	7		Graphic design career stigmatized as insufficiently serious
<b>P14</b>	29	M	African	Doctoral	Technology	82	8		Academic vs. industry choice, pursuing meaningful contribution
<b>P15</b>	26	F	South Asian	Master's	Education	77	6		School counsel

									or questio ning effective ness and impact
<b>P1 6</b>	23	M	Southeast Asian	Bach elor's	Technolo gy	80	7		Softwar e enginee r feeling work lacks social value
<b>P1 7</b>	28	F	Arab	Mast er's	Business	81	8		Nonprof it vs. corpora te career dilemm a
<b>P1 8</b>	25	M	South Asian	Bach elor's	Finance	78	7		Investm ent banking conflicti ng with Islamic ethics
<b>P1 9</b>	27	F	Southeast Asian	Mast er's	Healthca re	84	8		Nurse practitio ner consider ing medical school despite age concern s
<b>P2 0</b>	24	F	Arab	Bach elor's	Creative	76	6		Fashion designer navigati ng modesty and industry norms
<b>P2 1</b>	31	M	South Asian	Doct oral	Educatio n	85	8		Professo r questio

									ning academi c career amid publish- or- perish culture
<b>P2 2</b>	26	F	Southeast Asian	Mast er's	Technolo gy	79	7		Data scientist seeking more human- centere d work

*Note.* QLCS = Quarter-Life Crisis Scale (range 0-100, scores >70 indicate moderate-severe crisis). F = Female, M = Male. All participants completed intervention protocol and post-intervention interviews. Mean age = 26.4 years (SD = 2.1); Mean QLCS = 79.9 (SD = 3.0); Mean sessions = 7.2 (SD = 0.8).

Table 1 provides detailed characteristics of the participant sample, including demographic profiles, baseline quarter-life crisis severity levels, number of counseling sessions completed, and key presenting concerns that brought participants to seek integrated counseling services. The distribution of participants across various career domains included education (n=6), healthcare (n=4), technology and engineering (n=5), business and finance (n=4), and creative industries (n=3), demonstrating the universal relevance of quarter-life crisis across professional fields rather than concentration in specific occupational sectors. Figure 1 illustrates the temporal evolution of theme emergence across the intervention timeline, revealing that themes related to spiritual awakening and meaning discovery predominantly emerged during early to middle sessions (sessions 2-5), while themes concerning career clarity and future commitment crystallized during later sessions (sessions 5-8), suggesting a developmental progression wherein spiritual and existential resolution precedes concrete career decision-making.

The phenomenological analysis yielded five superordinate themes representing the essential structure of participants' experiences: (1) Existential Awakening Through Spiritual Reconnection, encompassing participants' rediscovery of Islamic spiritual foundations and recognition of divine purpose as central to resolving career confusion; (2) Liberation from Materialistic Success Paradigms, reflecting participants' transformation from externally-driven career motivations to internally-aligned value-based vocational choices; (3) Meaning-Centered Career Reconstruction, capturing the process through which participants reframed career decisions within

logotherapy's framework of personal responsibility for finding meaning; (4) Integration of Professional and Spiritual Identities, describing participants' development of coherent self-concepts harmonizing Islamic values with professional ambitions; and (5) Empowerment Through Existential Choice, representing participants' enhanced agency and self-efficacy resulting from recognition of their freedom and responsibility in shaping meaningful career paths.

These themes emerged consistently across participants despite individual variations in specific career concerns, cultural backgrounds, and personality characteristics, suggesting that the integrated logotherapy-Islamic guidance approach addresses universal existential and spiritual dimensions underlying quarter-life crisis among Muslim young adults. The thematic structure revealed intricate interconnections wherein spiritual reconnection served as foundation for meaning discovery, which in turn enabled liberation from externally-imposed success criteria, ultimately facilitating coherent identity integration and empowered career decision-making. Participants' narratives demonstrated that resolution of quarter-life crisis through this integrated approach involved not merely symptom reduction or increased career certainty, but fundamental transformation in self-understanding, worldview, and relationship with both divine purpose and vocational calling.

### **Existential Awakening Through Spiritual Reconnection**

Participants consistently described a profound spiritual awakening as the primary pathway through which the integrated intervention alleviated quarter-life crisis. Rather than remaining at the level of abstract belief, spiritual reconnection was experienced as an immediate sense of Allah's presence in career struggles, renewed engagement with *salat*, *dhikr*, and *dua*, and a felt perception of divine signs (*ayat*) guiding vocational direction. Anxiety and confusion were gradually replaced by *sakinah* when career decisions were approached through a spiritual lens.

Logotherapy's emphasis on finding meaning in suffering resonated with Islamic notions of *ibtila* as purposeful trial. Participants reframed their quarter-life crisis from meaningless distress into an opportunity to deepen faith and clarify a divinely oriented vocational calling. Quranic verses on *tawakkul*, divine providence, and personal purpose played a central role in this reframing, providing a transcendent framework for interpreting uncertainty.

Phenomenologically, this awakening followed a recurring sequence: (1) recognition of spiritual neglect and misalignment between career pursuits and religious commitments; (2) spiritual reconstruction through renewed practice, Quranic reflection, and engagement with prophetic models; and (3)

spiritual integration, where Islamic consciousness became the default frame for evaluating career choices. Career questions shifted from “What is most lucrative or prestigious?” to “How does this work fulfill my role as Allah’s *khalifah*?” For many, spiritual disconnection emerged not as a secondary symptom but as the core existential void underlying career confusion.

In dialogue with existing literature, these findings confirm that spiritually integrated interventions yield better outcomes for Muslim clients (Wang & Lent, 2022), but extend prior work by clarifying how spiritual reconnection operates: by transforming perceptions of uncertainty, reinterpreting suffering, and reorienting vocational criteria. They also suggest that meaning-seeking and spiritual seeking are inseparable for religious clients (da Ponte et al., 2018; Keshavarzi et al., 2021). The study thus supports calls for genuine synthesis between Western existential frameworks and Islamic psychology (Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013), and highlights quarter-life crisis among Muslim young adults as fundamentally a spiritual crisis manifesting in the career domain.

### **Liberation from Materialistic Success Paradigms**

Participants described a second major transformation: liberation from internalized materialistic success standards. Before the intervention, their career choices were largely shaped by social messages equating success with income, status, and prestige. These external benchmarks created chronic dissatisfaction, even when participants were objectively “successful.” Through logotherapy techniques (e.g., Socratic questioning, de-reflection) adapted to an Islamic worldview, participants critically examined whose definitions of success they had been pursuing. Quranic and prophetic teachings on *falah*, *dunya*, and *akhirah* legitimized questioning dominant narratives and provided theological grounds for redefining success.

This process involved grieving the loss of idealized prestigious careers, confronting family and societal expectations, and gradually reconstructing a success framework grounded in service, ethical integrity, and divine pleasure. The liberation unfolded in four overlapping stages: (1) consciousness-raising regarding inherited assumptions; (2) critical evaluation of these paradigms considering Islamic values; (3) active resistance, including concrete decisions to reject misaligned career paths; and (4) reconstruction of alternative, spiritually grounded definitions of success. Participants came to view quarter-life crisis as a clash between external materialistic paradigms and deeply held spiritual values.

Compared to mainstream career literature, which typically assumes material success as a shared objective (Robinson & Wright, 2013), these findings highlight the need to question the ideological foundations of “career

success”, not just optimize pathways toward it. Consistent with meaning-centered research ([Greenberg et al., 2021](#); [Richards & Barkham, 2022](#)), this study shows that transcending materialism is not only therapeutic but must be anchored in a robust alternative value system—for these participants, an Islamic one. Effective interventions for religious clients may therefore require a paradigm shift, not merely better tools for achieving existing goals.

### **Meaning-Centered Career Reconstruction**

A third core theme was the reconstruction of career paths through a meaning-centered lens. Participants shifted from viewing careers as instruments for income or status to understanding vocation as a primary arena for expressing unique gifts, serving others, and fulfilling divine purpose. Logotherapy’s concepts of unique meaning-potentials and personal responsibility for discovering them resonated deeply, especially when framed through Islamic ideas of *amanah* and *ibadah*.

The reconstruction process typically moved through three phases: deconstruction of inherited assumptions and externally imposed career scripts; exploration of new, value- and purpose-driven possibilities; and commitment to specific paths grounded in meaning rather than compliance or fear. Techniques such as Socratic dialogue and de-reflection helped participants identify consistent patterns of concern, passion, and responsibility in their lives, which they interpreted as clues to their calling.

This meaning-centered process diverges from traditional person-environment fit models and purely cognitive decision-making frameworks. While trait-factor and social cognitive theories emphasize fit, efficacy, and outcome expectations ([Ewertowski, 2023](#)). Participants in this study prioritized coherence with ultimate purpose and values. Constructivist career approaches align more closely with this narrative and meaning emphasis, but typically omit explicit engagement with transcendent sources of meaning that were crucial here ([da Ponte et al., 2018](#)).

Participants frequently described as intuitive, spiritually inflected moments of clarity—often occurring during prayer or Quran recitation—as pivotal in their vocational discernment. They became willing to embrace “meaningful suffering,” choosing paths that involved sacrifice because these aligned with what they considered worth living and suffering for. The integration of Islamic theology with logotherapy thus enabled a form of vocational discernment that combined existential responsibility, spiritual discernment, and practical action.

### **Integration of Professional and Spiritual Identities**

A fourth overarching theme concerned the integration of professional and spiritual identities. Before counseling, many participants experienced their lives as split: being “Muslim” in religious spaces and “professional” at work, with constant guilt, confusion, and internal tension. The intervention helped reframe work and worship as potentially unified rather than competing domains. Through exploration of Quranic verses, prophetic models, and historical figures who combined professional excellence with deep spirituality, participants realized that Islam encourages engagement with worldly work when framed by correct intention and ethics. Professional roles were increasingly seen as sites of worship and *khalifah* responsibility, not as spiritually neutral—or spiritually suspicious—activities.

Identity integration developed in stages: initial recognition of fragmentation; exploration of integrative role models and theological resources on work; experimentation with integrated behaviors (e.g., maintaining prayer at work, bringing Islamic ethics into professional decision-making); and eventual consolidation of a coherent identity narrative that wove together faith and profession. Participants reported that this integration reduced guilt, increased consistency between belief and behavior, and enhanced psychological coherence.

The findings extend identity development theories Ewertowski, (2023) by showing that, for many Muslim young adults, spiritual identity functions as a “master identity” organizing other domains, making professional–spiritual integration especially critical. They also resonate with research on multicultural identity integration, while highlighting that spiritual identity brings distinct features—transcendence, ultimate accountability, and comprehensive life orientation—that require specific theological engagement, not only generic psychological techniques (Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013). Integrated identity translated into more ethical resilience, greater workplace meaning, and increased vocational satisfaction. Participants described feeling more grounded, less susceptible to unethical pressure, and more able to interpret professional challenges as spiritually meaningful tests, rather than as threats to self-worth.

### **Empowerment Through Existential Choice**

Participants universally described experiencing profound empowerment through recognizing their existential freedom and responsibility for choosing meaningful career paths despite external constraints, uncertainties, and limitations that previously paralyzed them with anxiety and indecision. This empowerment theme encompassed fundamental shift from feeling victimized

by circumstances, controlled by others' expectations, or trapped by limited options, to recognizing authentic agency for authoring their own life narratives through courageous commitments to vocational directions aligned with their values and purposes. The logotherapy's emphasis on freedom of will resonated powerfully with participants who had experienced quarter-life crisis partly as loss of agency in face of overwhelming career pressures, economic uncertainties, and conflicting obligations pulling them in different directions, leaving them feeling they had no real choice about career paths despite apparent abundance of options.

Counselors' insistence that participants possessed radical freedom to choose their response to circumstances regardless of external limitations validated their intuition that something more than practical career planning was needed, specifically existential claiming of personal authority and responsibility for their lives that no external expert or assessment tool could provide. This existential empowerment proved simultaneously liberating and terrifying, as participants confronted reality that while they possessed freedom to choose their paths, they must also accept full responsibility for consequences of choices without being able to blame others, circumstances, or fate if outcomes disappointed expectations.

The integration of Islamic framework enriched this empowerment through concept that Allah created humans with limited free will (*ikhtiyar*) within divine decree (*qadar*), balancing recognition of human agency with acknowledgment of ultimate divine control, which paradoxically increased willingness to make bold choices knowing that while they bore responsibility for effort and intention, ultimate outcomes remained in Allah's hands. Participants described how empowerment transformed their phenomenological experience of career decision-making from paralyzing burden generating anxiety to meaningful responsibility evoking courage and engagement, fundamentally altering psychological significance of vocational choices from high-stakes gambles determining life success to growth opportunities regardless of specific outcomes.

The phenomenological essence revealed that quarter-life crisis among Muslim young adults often reflects existential paralysis resulting from attempting to avoid responsibility for life-authoring choices through deferring to external authorities, following conventional paths, or maintaining indefinite exploration without commitment, suggesting that effective intervention must facilitate existential courage to embrace freedom and responsibility rather than providing external direction that reinforces passivity. The empowerment process unfolded through progressive phases involving recognition of freedom, confrontation with responsibility, acceptance of uncertainty, and

commitment to authentic choice despite incomplete information and unpredictable outcomes.

Initial recognition of freedom often occurred through counselors' provocative questions like "What if no choice is wrong, just different paths leading to different experiences?" and "Who gave others authority to decide your life direction?", which disrupted participants' implicit assumptions that external authorities (parents, career counselors, market demand) should prescribe correct career paths, revealing that they had voluntarily surrendered agency they never actually lost. This recognition frequently evoked disorientation and resistance, as participants preferred clear external guidance providing security of "correct answer" over ambiguous freedom requiring them to navigate uncertainty through personal judgment and values-based discernment, revealing psychological comfort in deferring responsibility despite accompanying frustration at lack of control.

The confrontation with responsibility phase involved participants wrestling with existential reality that their lives belonged to them and that no external authority could or should make their vocational decisions, requiring maturation from adolescent dependency on others' direction to adult autonomy accepting authorship of own life narrative, which some participants initially experienced as lonely burden before reframing as dignified privilege. Acceptance of uncertainty emerged when participants recognized that no amount of career research, assessment, or planning could eliminate ambiguity about whether chosen career would prove satisfying or successful, and that attempting to achieve certainty before committing actually perpetuated paralysis preventing any meaningful career development, requiring willingness to commit despite incomplete information and trust that they possessed resources to navigate whatever emerged.

The commitment to authentic choice phase involved making concrete career decisions and action steps based on meaning-centered discernment rather than external validation or guaranteed outcomes, with each commitment strengthening experience of agency and self-efficacy even when outcomes proved challenging, as participants valued authenticity of self-authored choice regardless of objective results.

The phenomenological structure revealed that empowerment required not merely cognitive understanding of freedom but embodied experience of making consequential choices and navigating results, suggesting that interventions must provide both conceptual framework for understanding freedom and responsibility and practical support for making actual commitments that test and confirm agentic capacity rather than indefinitely discussing choices without ever committing. Comparative analysis with self-

determination theory and career decision-making literature reveals convergence regarding importance of autonomy for psychological wellbeing while also highlighting distinctive existential dimensions emphasized in present study. Self-determination theory posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness constitute fundamental psychological needs, with autonomy defined as experiencing volition and self-endorsement of behavior rather than feeling controlled by external forces, which aligns with participants' experiences of empowerment through recognizing authentic choice capacity (Ewertowski, 2023).

However, self-determination theory focuses primarily on proximal motivational processes and situational autonomy support, whereas present findings emphasize ultimate existential freedom and responsibility transcending immediate circumstances, suggesting that existential and motivational perspectives on autonomy address different levels of analysis both relevant for comprehensive understanding. Career decision-making literature identifies indecisiveness as significant problem requiring intervention, typically attributing indecision to insufficient information, unclear self-knowledge, or low decision-making self-efficacy, and offering interventions providing career information, facilitating self-assessment, or teaching decision-making strategies (Robinson & Wright, 2013).

Present findings reveal that for some individuals experiencing quarter-life crisis, career indecision reflects not practical deficits but existential avoidance of freedom and responsibility, requiring interventions addressing existential anxiety rather than providing more information or assessment that may enable continued avoidance. Research on quarter-life crisis documents that identity confusion and fear of commitment characterize this developmental period, yet predominantly interprets these as normative developmental challenges rather than existential avoidance, potentially missing therapeutic opportunities to facilitate existential maturation through confronting freedom and responsibility. Logotherapy literature emphasizes existential freedom and responsibility as core therapeutic principles distinguishing logotherapy from other approaches, with Frankl arguing that meaning-centered therapy must help clients recognize their capacity and obligation to choose meaning despite suffering and limitation (Greenberg et al., 2021).

Present study demonstrates how these existential principles translate into career counseling context, providing evidence that facilitating existential empowerment produces therapeutic benefits beyond symptom reduction to include enhanced agency, courage, and authentic self-authoring. The distinctive contribution of present findings lies in demonstrating how Islamic spiritual framework enriches existential empowerment through theological

concepts balancing human freedom with divine providence, creating empowerment grounded in spiritual relationship rather than purely autonomous individualism that might prove unsustainable for deeply religious clients whose identities center on submission to Allah rather than absolute self-determination.

Participants' accounts revealed that empowerment through existential choice manifested in concrete behavioral changes demonstrated increased agency and reduced avoidance in their career development processes. Several participants who had spent years in passive exploration without commitment described making definitive career decisions within weeks of recognizing their existential freedom and responsibility, suggesting that career paralysis reflected avoidance rather than insufficient information requiring extended exploration. Participants reported increased willingness to take career risks such as starting businesses, changing career fields, or pursuing unconventional vocations that previously seemed too uncertain or disapproved by others, with existential empowerment overriding fear of failure or others' disapproval that previously constrained choices to safe conventional options.

The experience of empowerment enabled participants to set boundaries with well-meaning family members and advisors whose expectations had previously controlled career decisions, with participants finding courage to respectfully assert that while they appreciated others' concerns, they must make career choices aligning with their own values and callings even when these differed from others' preferences. Participants described approaching career setbacks and obstacles differently following empowerment, interpreting challenges as problems to navigate through creative problem-solving rather than as confirmation they had chosen wrong path or evidence they lacked ability, reflecting internal locus of control replacing previous external attribution patterns.

Several participants reported that empowerment generalized beyond career domain to other life areas including relationships, religious practice, and personal goal-setting, describing feeling they had reclaimed authority over their entire lives rather than merely resolving career confusion, suggesting that addressing existential dimensions produces broader psychological growth than domain-specific problem-solving. The transformation from passivity to agency occurred through multiple small choices rather than a single dramatic decision, with participants noting that each courageous choice strengthened their sense of empowerment and made subsequent choices less anxiety-provoking, creating positive feedback cycle building psychological resources for ongoing self-authoring.

The phenomenological structure revealed that empowerment involved learning to tolerate anxiety accompanying freedom rather than eliminating anxiety before choosing, representing maturation in relationship with uncertainty that enabled forward movement despite discomfort rather than requiring comfort before acting, fundamentally transforming participants' capacity for navigating inevitable ambiguities characterizing career development and adult life generally. The relationship between existential empowerment and Islamic concepts of human agency and divine providence proved complex and generative rather than contradictory, with participants developing sophisticated theological-psychological understandings harmonizing these apparently conflicting principles. Participants described how Islamic teaching that Allah created humans as *khalifah* (trustees) with responsibility for stewarding earth validated existential empowerment, providing theological foundation for claiming agency and embracing responsibility for life choices as fulfillment of divine design rather than arrogant independence from Allah.

The concept of *qadar* (divine decree) that might seem to negate human freedom was reinterpreted through counseling discussions as describing ultimate outcomes remaining in Allah's control while human effort and intention remain within human responsibility, creating theological framework wherein participants felt empowered to choose boldly knowing they bore responsibility for sincere effort while trusting Allah for results beyond their control. Several participants noted that Islamic emphasis on accountability in afterlife for how they utilized time, talents, and opportunities intensified rather than diminished sense of responsibility for making meaningful career choices aligned with values, as they understood they would answer to Allah for squandering gifts through passive drift or conforming to others' expectations rather than discerning and fulfilling unique purposes. The practice of *istikhara* (prayer for guidance) exemplified integration of empowerment and divine reliance, wherein participants made their own best judgment after reflection and consultation, then prayed for Allah's guidance, and proceeded with confidence that whatever unfolded represented divine wisdom whether outcomes matched expectations, embodying simultaneous human agency and divine trust.

Participants reported that this theological integration of freedom and providence proved more empowering than purely secular existential philosophy that might leave them bearing full existential burden without spiritual support, or purely fatalistic religious interpretation that might eliminate meaningful human agency and responsibility, suggesting that culturally-responsive existential intervention for religious clients must engage

theological dimensions of freedom and providence rather than assuming secular existential philosophy translates directly across worldviews.

The phenomenological analysis revealed that for Muslim young adults, empowerment paradoxically depended on acknowledging limitations of human control and ultimate dependence on Allah, creating spiritual-existential synthesis wherein authentic agency emerged not from assertion of absolute autonomy but from accepting assigned responsibility within divine order, challenging Western existential assumptions equating freedom with independence and suggesting alternative empowerment models grounded in religious frameworks emphasizing responsible agency within divine relationship.

### **Cross-Theme Integration and Emergent Conceptual Framework**

The five superordinate themes converge to reveal an integrated conceptual framework explaining how logotherapy and Islamic guidance synergistically address quarter-life crisis among Muslim young adults through complementary mechanisms operating across spiritual, existential, cognitive, and identity domains. Spiritual reconnection emerged as foundational mechanism that enabled subsequent meaning-discovery, paradigm liberation, identity integration, and existential empowerment, suggesting that for Muslim young adults experiencing quarter-life crisis, addressing spiritual disconnection constitutes prerequisite for effective intervention in other domains rather than supplementary component added to conventional career counseling.

The thematic structure demonstrated hierarchical organization wherein spiritual awakening activated Islamic value framework that motivated liberation from materialistic paradigms, which created conceptual space for meaning-centered career reconstruction, which in turn required and facilitated integration of professional and spiritual identities, ultimately enabling existential empowerment through coherent value-based decision-making framework.

This developmental progression suggests that effective intervention requires attending to proper sequencing, beginning with spiritual and existential foundations before addressing practical career planning, challenging conventional career counseling approaches that typically prioritize assessment and information gathering before addressing philosophical and spiritual dimensions. The phenomenological analysis revealed that resolution of quarter-life crisis among participants occurred not through solving specific career problems but through comprehensive transformation in worldview, identity structure, meaning-framework, and

relationship with uncertainty, suggesting that quarter-life crisis represents existential and spiritual developmental challenge requiring interventions addressing these dimensions rather than merely practical vocational guidance.

The integration of logotherapy and Islamic guidance created synergistic effects wherein each framework compensated for limitations of the other while amplifying shared principles, producing intervention greater than sum of separate components. Logotherapy provided psychological vocabulary and systematic methodology for exploring meaning and facilitating existential transformation that Islamic spiritual guidance might address primarily through religious exhortation without concrete therapeutic techniques, making meaning-centered principles accessible through structured counseling methods rather than remaining abstract ideals.

Islamic framework provided substantive content for meaning-centered framework that logotherapy's more formal existential principles might leave philosophically abstract, specifying particular meanings, values, and purposes grounded in comprehensive worldview rather than leaving individuals to construct meaning from scratch without cultural or spiritual resources. The phenomenological techniques of logotherapy including Socratic dialogue, de-reflection, and paradoxical intention proved readily adaptable to Islamic context while simultaneously enriching Islamic counseling approaches with sophisticated psychological methods for addressing obstacles to spiritual growth and meaning-discovery.

The integration honored both psychological and theological epistemologies as legitimate knowledge sources rather than privileging one over the other, creating genuinely interdisciplinary framework that participants experienced as validating both their psychological experiences and spiritual convictions rather than forcing choice between competing authorities. This synthesis demonstrates that culturally responsive counseling for religious populations requires deep integration wherein psychological and spiritual/theological frameworks mutually inform each other through sustained dialogue producing emergent understanding transcending both source traditions, challenging both purely secular counseling that neglects spiritual dimensions and purely religious counseling that neglects psychological science.

### **Practical Implications, Limitations, and Future Research Directions**

The findings generate significant implications for career counseling practice, counselor training, and service delivery for Muslim young adults and potentially other religious populations experiencing quarter-life crisis. Counselors working with Muslim clients experiencing career-related distress

should assess for underlying spiritual disconnection and existential concerns rather than assuming presenting career problems reflect primarily practical issues requiring information and assessment, recognizing that effective intervention may require addressing spiritual and philosophical dimensions before practical career planning proves productive.

Professional counselor training programs should incorporate content on existential counseling approaches, religious/spiritual integration in therapy, and cultural competency specific to Muslim clients, ensuring that future counselors possess theoretical knowledge and practical skills for providing spiritually-integrated services rather than defaulting to secular approaches inadequate for religious clients' needs (Keshavarzi et al., 2021). Career counseling services in Muslim-majority contexts and Muslim student services in Western universities should consider developing specialized interventions integrating meaning-centered psychological approaches with Islamic spiritual guidance, potentially adapting the protocol developed in this study or creating similar culturally-grounded programs addressing existential and spiritual dimensions alongside practical career development.

The findings challenge conventional career counseling paradigms emphasizing assessment, information, and job-search skills as primary intervention components, suggesting need for philosophical expansion of career counseling to encompass existential, spiritual, and identity dimensions particularly when serving clients experiencing profound career confusion reflecting deeper meaning crisis rather than merely practical decision-making challenges (Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013). Several important limitations qualify interpretation and generalization of findings, requiring explicit acknowledgment and consideration when evaluating implications.

The phenomenological methodology prioritizing depth over breadth means findings illuminate lived experiences of 22 participants but cannot support statistical generalization to broader Muslim young adult populations, necessitating future quantitative studies examining prevalence of identified themes and intervention effectiveness across larger samples. The study sampled relatively educated Muslim young adults with sufficient English proficiency to participate in counseling conducted partly in English, potentially limiting applicability to less educated populations, non-English speakers, or Muslims in contexts where educational and linguistic characteristics differ substantially from this sample (Fetters et al., 2013).

Participants self-selected into study knowing intervention involved Islamic spiritual components, potentially attracting individuals already positively disposed toward religious integration and excluding those preferring purely secular approaches, raising questions about intervention

acceptability and effectiveness for less religiously committed Muslims or those ambivalent about faith. The study examined integrated intervention as comprehensive package without dismantling components to determine relative contribution of logotherapy principles versus Islamic guidance versus therapeutic relationship versus non-specific factors, leaving questions about essential versus optional intervention elements unresolved and preventing conclusions about whether integration proves necessary or whether either approach alone might suffice.

The lead researcher serving dual roles as intervention counselor and primary analyst creates potential for bias wherein investment in intervention success might influence data interpretation, though multiple validation strategies including peer debriefing and member checking were employed to enhance trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). Future research should pursue multiple directions extending and refining understanding of integrated logotherapy-Islamic guidance approaches for addressing quarter-life crisis and related concerns among Muslim populations. Quantitative effectiveness studies employing randomized controlled trial designs should compare integrated intervention against conventional career counseling, logotherapy alone, Islamic counseling alone, and waitlist control conditions, measuring standardized outcomes including quarter-life crisis symptoms, career decision-making self-efficacy, meaning in life, spiritual wellbeing, and career satisfaction across adequate follow-up periods to assess intervention durability.

Component analysis studies should systematically vary intervention elements to identify active ingredients and necessary components versus optional enhancements, determining whether full integration proves necessary or whether core principles could be distilled into more efficient protocol without compromising effectiveness. Cross-cultural studies should examine whether integrated approach proves effective across diverse Muslim ethnic and national contexts including Arab, African, South Asian, and Southeast Asian populations, identifying cultural considerations requiring adaptation while determining whether core integration principles transcend specific cultural contexts.

Mixed-methods studies should investigate intervention processes and mechanisms of change through combining quantitative outcome measurement with qualitative exploration of therapeutic processes, participants' meaning-making, and mediators connecting intervention components to outcomes. Research should explore applicability of integrated logotherapy-Islamic guidance approaches to other presenting concerns beyond quarter-life crisis including general anxiety, depression with

existential features, grief and loss, chronic illness adjustment, and relationship issues, examining whether spiritual-existential integration demonstrates broader utility rather than specific relevance only for career-related concerns (Wang & Lent, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This study addressed the critical gap in culturally responsive interventions for Muslim young adults experiencing quarter-life crisis by systematically integrating logotherapy's meaning-centered framework with Islamic spiritual guidance. Phenomenological analysis of twenty-two participants revealed five interconnected therapeutic mechanisms—spiritual reconnection as foundational catalyst, liberation from materialistic paradigms, meaning-centered career reconstruction, professional-spiritual identity integration, and empowerment through existential choice—demonstrating that resolution of quarter-life crisis among Muslim emerging adults requires interventions addressing existential and spiritual dimensions rather than merely practical career guidance.

Study limitations include phenomenological methodology precluding statistical generalization, relatively educated sample composition, and lack of component analysis, suggesting future research directions encompassing randomized controlled trials, component analysis identifying essential intervention elements, cross-cultural studies across diverse Muslim populations, and longitudinal investigations assessing sustainability of therapeutic gains. As culturally responsive mental health services increasingly recognize that honoring clients' spiritual identities enhances therapeutic effectiveness, spiritually integrated counseling approaches remain vital for ongoing research, practice development, and professional education serving diverse religious populations experiencing existential and vocational concerns.

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