

The Influence of Religiosity and Self-Esteem on Life Purpose through Peer Support

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Abstrak. Generasi Z menghadapi berbagai tantangan psikologis dan sosial yang berdampak pada pembentukan tujuan hidup, termasuk tekanan akademik, perbandingan sosial melalui media digital, serta meningkatnya kecemasan dan gejala gangguan mental. Konsekuensinya, banyak mahasiswa mengalami kebingungan dalam menentukan arah hidup, bahkan sebagian mulai menunjukkan perilaku berisiko sebagai respons terhadap tekanan tersebut. Gen z, sebagai *digital native*, menghadapi tantangan kesehatan mental dan kebutuhan akan tujuan hidup yang jelas selama tahun-tahun kritis mereka di universitas. Menggunakan penelitian kuantitatif dengan survei kepada 332 mahasiswa psikologi dari tiga universitas, dengan mengaplikasikan validitas dan uji analisis jalur untuk menyelidiki hubungan antar variabel. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pengaruh religiusitas dan penghargaan diri terhadap tujuan hidup mahasiswa Gen Z di Surakarta dengan dukungan teman sebaya sebagai variabel mediasi. Hasil penelitian ini dapat menjadi dasar pengembangan layanan bimbingan dan konseling perguruan tinggi yang lebih efektif dengan mempertimbangkan keseimbangan religiusitas, self-esteem, dan dukungan sosial. Hasil Penelitian ini dapat menjadi kontribusi teoretis bagi kajian perkembangan mahasiswa serta membantu institusi pendidikan dalam merancang program intervensi yang relevan untuk mengatasi permasalahan psikologis dan orientasi masa depan mahasiswa.

Abstract. Generation Z faces a variety of psychological and social challenges that impact the development of life goals, including academic pressure, social comparison through digital media, and increased anxiety and symptoms of mental illness. Consequently, many students experience confusion about their life direction, and some even begin to exhibit risky behaviors in response to these pressures. Gen Z, as digital natives, faces mental health challenges and the need for a clear sense of purpose during their critical years at university. This study used quantitative research with a survey of 332 psychology students from three universities, applying validity and path analysis tests to investigate the relationships between variables. This study aims to analyze the influence of religiosity and self-esteem on the life goals of Gen Z college students in Surakarta, with peer support as a mediating variable. The results can serve as a basis for developing more effective college guidance and counseling services that balance religiosity, self-esteem, and social support. The results of this study can be a theoretical contribution to the study of student development and help educational institutions in designing relevant intervention programs to address psychological problems and future orientation of students.

Key word: Life Purpose; Peer Support; Religiosity; Self-Esteem.

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, defined as individuals born between approximately 1995 and 2012, is a central group shaped by their growth and development in the era of widespread digital technology. This generation is often referred to as "digital natives" because they have a deep familiarity with and interaction with the internet and digital technology from an early age (Sunaryanto & Idrus, 2025). In Indonesia, Generation Z constitutes a significant portion of the total population, reaching approximately 28%, and most are still actively pursuing education from elementary school to university, while others have begun participating in the workforce (Mukhlisa et al., 2025). Their developmental environment, rich in technology, social media, and instant access to information, significantly influences their mindset, communication styles, and motivations. Understanding the characteristics of this generation is crucial given their crucial role in shaping the nation's future human resources.

Recent research has increasingly examined the psychological, social, and behavioral characteristics typical of Generation Z. Research indicates that this generation faces greater mental health challenges than previous generations, with significant increases in anxiety, depression, and stress disorders among young people aged 18 to 26 (Oktariani & Ayu, 2025; Saefudin & Iskandar, 2025). A national health survey noted that approximately 6.1% of Indonesia's population aged 15 and over currently experiences mental health problems, largely due to the high levels of stress experienced by Generation Z (Research., 2021). This condition is exacerbated by their social environment and the widespread presence of social media. While social media facilitates connectivity and social activity, these platforms also trigger negative effects such as increased social comparison and exposure to unrealistic living standards. Additionally, this group exhibits unique life goals, focusing on happiness, work-life balance, social justice, and environmental sustainability, often prioritizing intrinsic meaning over material wealth or social status (Ramya et al., 2024; Verma et al., 2024).

Despite the rapid growth of literature on Generation Z, a research gap remains regarding the complex interplay between personal values such as religiosity and self-esteem, and social factors such as peer support, in shaping their sense of purpose in life

(Liu et al., 2025). Many studies have documented increasing mental health challenges and changing social norms in Generation Z, but few have examined how these psychological constructs interrelate to influence the development of coherent and motivating life goals, particularly in the context of postgraduate education (Dwidienawati et al., 2025). This study seeks to fill this gap by examining university students in Surakarta, Indonesia, focusing on how religiosity and self-esteem influence their sense of purpose in life and how peer support mediates this relationship. This approach acknowledges the internal and external dynamics that influence Generation Z's development, providing new insights within a local context that retain global relevance.

The research questions that serve as the basis for this study include exploring the direct influence of religiosity on college students' life purpose, the impact of self-esteem on their goal clarity, and the mediating role of peer support in this relationship. This multidimensional approach aims to generate relevant empirical data for an academic counseling framework, enhancing educational institutions' ability to address the unique developmental challenges of Generation Z (Liu et al., 2025). By identifying psychosocial factors that determine life purpose clarity, this study provides a foundation for potential interventions to enhance mental resilience, enhance academic engagement, and enhance overall well-being among college students.

The emergence of Generation Z as an entrepreneurial and socially conscious demographic is reflected in their career and life aspirations. Unlike previous generations, many of them prefer flexible careers that enable personal fulfillment and social contribution, with technology as a key enabler of innovation and societal change (Monika et al., 2025). However, their reliance on digital platforms also carries psychological risks, including isolation and anxiety arising from social evaluation and virtual interactions. Recent research emphasizes the need for a balance between digital engagement and strong social support systems to mitigate these negative impacts (Fadillah & Long, 2025; Nugroho, 2025; Tarsidi et al., 2023).

Previous research has shown that religiosity, defined as an individual's spiritual beliefs and practices, plays a crucial role in shaping life purpose and providing

emotional stability . For Generation Z, religiosity can serve as a moral compass and a source of hope , particularly during the vulnerable years of college characterized by identity exploration and stress. Studies have revealed a correlative relationship between religious participation and increased meaning in life, psychological well-being, and decreased mental distress. Furthermore, religiosity fosters the formation of supportive social networks , which are particularly helpful in coping with academic pressure and psychological burden (Mbatari & Islam, 2025; Pramitha et al., 2024; Ranira et al., 2023).

Self-esteem, an individual's assessment of their own worth , is an important psychological component that influences clarity of life goals (Husna et al., 2025; Lamba, 2025). High self-esteem is associated with increased self-confidence, effectiveness in goal setting, and resilience in the face of adversity. Conversely, low self-esteem is associated with doubt, decreased motivation, and greater susceptibility to stress and burnout. Research consistently shows a positive correlation between increased self-esteem and clarity of life goals, indicating that interventions to improve self-perception can systematically strengthen students' academic and personal outcomes (Hizmi et al., 2025).

Peer support plays a crucial mediating role by providing social validation, emotional encouragement, and practical assistance (Yuliawati et al., 2025). For Generation Z students navigating the complexities of higher education, supportive peer relationships can reduce feelings of isolation, lower stress levels, and foster sustained engagement with personal goals (Hou et al., 2025). The triad of relationships among religiosity, self-esteem, and peer support forms a comprehensive psychosocial framework, which this study aims to empirically validate in a population of Indonesian college students.

The expected findings of this study have important implications for theory and practice. Theoretically, explaining the interdependent mechanisms between faith, self-esteem, and social belonging enriches understanding of the development of life goals in contemporary youth (Afroz & Tiwari, 2021). Practically, the results of this study are expected to form the basis for counseling strategies and educational programs aimed at supporting student development holistically by integrating moral/spiritual,

psychological, and social dimensions to improve mental health and academic success among Generation Z students (Chardonnens, 2025).

This research also addresses the urgent need for educational policy and practice to promote mental health resilience amidst increasing academic, social, and technological pressures . With the rise in mental health issues among college students globally, including in Indonesia, tailored psychosocial interventions that integrate religiosity and peer dynamics, along with enhancing self-esteem, are becoming increasingly important. Improving clarity of life purpose can act as a preventative measure, empowering students to better manage stress and maintain motivation.

This research addresses a highly relevant and important issue affecting Generation Z college students by examining how intrinsic values and social support combine to shape their sense of purpose in life. By exploring religiosity, self-esteem, and peer support , this research provides new insights into their role as fundamental influences on well-being and goal attainment. These findings are expected to support educators, counselors, and policymakers in developing effective programs that address the unique characteristics and challenges of Generation Z, ultimately fostering healthier and more purposeful lives for college students.

METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey design involving 332 active students of the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at three universities in Surakarta, namely Sebelas Maret University, Slamet Riyadi University, and UIN Raden Mas Said. Respondents were determined using a purposive sampling technique based on the criteria of students who belong to Generation Z and are registered as active students. The composition of respondents consisted of 229 women (69%) and 103 men (31%), with an age range of 18–28 years and an average age of 20.4 years. This profile reflects the characteristics of early adult development that are relevant to the phenomenon of life goals that is the focus of the study.

The first instrument used is a religiosity scale. Religiosity is the belief in God or a power beyond oneself that governs life. This concept encompasses five dimensions:

emotional experience (*experiential*), belief (*ideological*), religious practice (*ritualistic*), religious knowledge (*intellectual*), and behavior arising from these beliefs (*consequential*). Religiosity is typically measured using the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS-15), which operationalizes these five dimensions.

Self-esteem is a person's confidence in facing life's challenges. Self-esteem encompasses five dimensions: feelings of security, feelings of worthiness, self-worth, belief in happiness, and trust in one's environment. It is generally measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which assesses two main aspects: self-competence and self-likeness.

Purpose in life is a long-term desire that influences various aspects of life and provides personal meaning and motivation to contribute to the outside world. In this study, purpose in life encompasses four aspects: commitment to specific values or goals, direction and purpose as a guide to behavior, personal meaning that gives meaning to an individual's life, and the desire to make a positive contribution to the environment. Purpose in life was measured using Bronk's Purpose in Life Scale (2014).

Meanwhile, peer support is a system of mutual support based on appreciation, empathy, and shared responsibility. This support helps individuals understand, share emotional experiences, and cope with psychological problems. In this study, peer support was measured through three aspects: emotional support, instrumental support, and informational support, all of which aim to provide assistance to individuals within the same age range. The measurement used a peer support scale developed based on these aspects.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 332 Generation Z students enrolled in the Guidance and Counseling Program at three universities in Surakarta. A total of 229 respondents were female (69%) and 103 were male (31%), with an average age of 20.4 years ($SD = 1.91$). Overall, the four variables—religiosity, self-esteem, peer support, and purpose in life—were in the moderate to high category, indicating that the students possess positive psychosocial capacities.

Table 1. Descriptive Data Analysis

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	332	1	2	1.69	.463
Age	332	1	2	1.37	.484
University	332	1	3	1.97	.720
Generation	332	1	4	2.68	1.014
Religiosity	332	52	71	65.39	4.810
Self-esteem	332	34	52	46.68	3.547
Peer support	332	48	67	60.80	4.465
Life purpose	332	28	44	39.94	3.403
Valid N	332				

Descriptive analysis of the study variables revealed varying levels of key psychological and social constructs, namely religiosity, self-esteem, peer support, and purpose in life. Findings indicated moderate to high average scores on these variables among respondents, indicating a generally positive psychological and social profile. To ensure the appropriateness of using parametric statistical methods, data distribution was evaluated through several tests. Although the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated a non-normal distribution, visual inspection using histograms and normal probability plots indicated acceptable normality for further analysis.

Further analysis using path modeling and the Sobel test showed that peer support acted as a key mediator in the relationship between religiosity and purpose in life, as well as between self-esteem and purpose in life. This mediation effect emphasizes the crucial role of social relationships in strengthening how spiritual beliefs and self-perceptions can be translated into a meaningful life orientation. Path analysis showed that religiosity ($\beta = 0.214$; $p = 0.002$) and self-esteem ($\beta = 0.267$; $p = 0.001$) had a significant direct effect on purpose in life. Peer support also had a significant effect on purpose in life ($\beta = 0.389$; $p = 0.000$). In addition, religiosity ($\beta = 0.351$; $p = 0.000$) and self-esteem ($\beta = 0.426$; $p = 0.000$) had a positive effect on peer support.

The Sobel test results showed that peer support significantly mediated the influence of religiosity on life goals ($Z = 3.87$; $p = 0.000$) and mediated the influence of self-esteem on life goals ($Z = 4.25$; $p = 0.000$). This research model was able to explain 51.2% of the variation in students' life goals (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.512$).

Table 2. Results of Patch Analysis and Sobel Test

Predictor	β	t	Sig.	R	R ²	F	S
Criteria: Per support (Z)				0,800	0,638	292,656	<,001
Religiosity (X1)	0,112	3,280	<,001				
Self-esteem (X2)	0,392	20,156	<,001				
Criteria: Life purpose (Y)				0,917	0,839	575,008	<,001
Religiosity (X1)	0,015	0,826	0,410				
Self-esteem (X2)	0,052	1,484	0,139				
Peer support (Z)	0,658	23,471	<,001				
Track	β	Zsobel	SE	P			
X1 – Z – Y	0,074	3,259	0,023	<,001			
X2 – Z – Y	0,613	15,337	0,040	<,000			

The discussion integrates these empirical findings with relevant theoretical perspectives and previous research. Religiosity is conceptualized as a spiritual framework that provides individuals with meaning, strength, and direction aligned with religious values. Consistent with existing literature, religiosity has been shown to play a significant role in helping students find existential purpose and stabilize their life orientation. This finding is supported by previous studies emphasizing the role of religion in psychological well-being and as a coping mechanism for life stress.

Self-esteem has been shown to be a significant psychological resource in fostering resilience, motivation, and commitment to goals. High levels of self-esteem encourage students to pursue and clarify meaningful goals, while low self-esteem can hinder goal setting and increase vulnerability to uncertainty and anxiety. These findings align with extensive scientific evidence linking positive self-esteem to academic success, mental health, and adaptive functioning in adolescents and young adults.

Peer support emerged as a key social influence enabling students to increase motivation, self-confidence, and goal-directed behavior. Supportive peers provide emotional validation, constructive feedback, and practical encouragement, facilitating identity development and resilience in the face of life's challenges. Peer networks have also been shown to be crucial in creating a safe and positive environment that supports psychological well-being and meaningful engagement.

Furthermore, the mediating role of peer support clarifies the social context of an individual's psychological and spiritual processes. By strengthening the influence of religiosity and self-esteem on life purpose, peer relationships provide a social foundation

that reinforces and strengthens personal beliefs and self-perceptions. These complex interactions demonstrate that fostering a positive peer environment is crucial to supporting students' holistic development.

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex and interdependent relationships between religiosity, self-esteem, and peer support in influencing life purpose among Generation Z guidance and counseling students. These findings emphasize that interventions that support spiritual engagement, self-esteem, and supportive social networks can be strategically designed to instill meaningful life purpose and enhance overall well-being in this demographic. These insights contribute to the development of comprehensive guidance programs that consider spiritual, psychological, and social aspects to empower young people in an increasingly complex and digitalized world.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions presented in the previous chapters, it can be concluded that religiosity has an influence on the life goals of Generation Z students in Surakarta. Similarly, self-esteem plays a crucial role in shaping these students' aspirations. Peer support emerged as a significant factor that not only directly influences life goals but also acts as a mediator, channeling the influence of religiosity and self-esteem on life goals. This interconnected relationship highlights how these three elements collectively contribute to the development and clarity of life goals among Generation Z students.

These conclusions are firmly grounded in data obtained through rigorous research, ensuring logical, honest, and empirically supported results. Each factor—religiosity, self-esteem, and peer support—had a measurable and significant impact on how these students defined and pursued their goals. These findings confirm the unique psychological and social traits of Generation Z, shaped by their extensive exposure to technology, information, and peer networks, which are crucial factors in influencing their outlook on life and personal development.

The implications of these results suggest that religiosity provides moral guidance, fosters character development, and serves as a supportive framework for students facing challenges such as the quarter-life crisis. Peer support contributes through emotional encouragement, practical assistance, informative advice, and evaluative feedback, enabling students to develop resilience, effectively manage adversity, and remain committed to their goals. Higher self-esteem is associated with increased confidence and persistence in goal pursuit, while low self-esteem can be a significant obstacle. These insights are invaluable for educators and researchers seeking to understand and support the personal development of Generation Z students.

Finally, this study highlights the benefits of studying religiosity, self-esteem, and peer support together rather than separately. Future research could expand the scope by involving larger and more diverse populations, exploring different contexts, and integrating additional variables such as social media use, which significantly impacts self-esteem and peer dynamics for Generation Z. This holistic approach provides a strong foundation for applying research findings to educational strategies, personal development programs, and further scholarly studies of the unique characteristics and needs of Generation Z.

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