

The Role of Self-Acceptance in Early Adulthood During Life Transitions: A Systematic Review

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1017PSY0039>

Received: 03 June 2026; Accepted: 09 June 2026; Published: 25 June 2026

ABSTRACT

Self-acceptance is an important psychological aspect that supports mental health and psychological well-being, particularly during early adulthood, a period marked by various life transitions. During this phase, individuals face developmental demands such as identity exploration, the transition from education to the workforce, and the formation of interpersonal relationships, which often trigger stress and uncertainty. This study aims to examine the role of self-acceptance in early adulthood during life transitions using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. Literature searches were conducted across several academic databases, covering publications from 2018 to 2025, and article selection followed the PRISMA guidelines. fourteen empirical studies were analyzed using thematic synthesis. The findings indicate that self-acceptance is positively associated with psychological well-being, emotion regulation, resilience, life satisfaction, and meaning in life, and serves as a protective factor against stress and anxiety during transitional periods.

Keywords: early adulthood, life transition, self acceptance, systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

Self-acceptance is an important psychological aspect in maintaining an individual's mental health and well-being. Self-acceptance is an individual's ability to accept themselves as they are—including their flaws, mistakes, and limitations—unconditionally. Ellis (2001), in his Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) approach, emphasizes that self-acceptance is crucial in developing a rational and healthy mindset. Recent research findings also indicate that self-acceptance is closely linked to psychological health and a reduction in emotional distress (Chamberlain & Haaga, 2019). When a person accepts themselves fully, they will not become trapped in negative evaluations of their failures or shortcomings.

Self-acceptance becomes particularly important during early adulthood, a developmental phase marked by change and new demands. Early adulthood, which generally spans the ages of 18 to 29, often involves various life transitions, such as continuing one's education, entering the workforce, forming more serious romantic relationships, and beginning to chart one's life course. This period as "*emerging adulthood*," a time of self-discovery and exploration. This process often leads to feelings of uncertainty, social pressure, and stress, as individuals are required to make significant life decisions (Luyckx et al., 2018).

According to Erikson (1968), early adulthood falls within the developmental stage of *intimacy versus isolation*, where individuals must build close relationships with others without losing their sense of self. At this stage, self-acceptance serves as a crucial foundation. Individuals who have not yet learned to accept themselves tend to feel more insecure, fear failure, and worry about others' judgments. Conversely, individuals with strong self-acceptance are better equipped to face life's challenges and changes with a calmer and more open mindset (Kivity et al., 2021).

In the concept of psychological well-being, Ryff (1989) notes that there are six main dimensions of psychological well-being, and one of the most fundamental is self-acceptance. Recent research also confirms

that self-acceptance is a key component of eudaimonic well-being, which relates to self-actualization and the meaning of life (Huta, 2020). Individuals with high levels of self-acceptance typically have a more realistic self-view, are able to accept the past without excessive regret, and adapt more easily to difficult situations. This makes them better prepared to face the pressures and demands of daily life.

Several experts also emphasize the importance of self-acceptance as a safeguard for mental health. Rogers (1961) states that positive self-acceptance helps individuals develop to their full potential and feel more valuable as human beings. Furthermore, Neff (2003) explains that self-acceptance, coupled with a compassionate attitude toward oneself, can reduce the tendency to engage in excessive self-criticism, particularly when facing failure (Ferrari et al., 2019). This attitude is particularly crucial during early adulthood, a time when individuals frequently compare themselves to others.

Research findings indicate that low self-acceptance in early adulthood is associated with an increased risk of depression, anxiety, and low life satisfaction, particularly when facing major life changes. Conversely, individuals who are able to accept themselves tend to have healthier emotional regulation, greater resilience in the face of stress, and better psychological well-being.

Although the importance of self-acceptance in early adulthood has been widely discussed in various studies, systematic reviews that synthesize these findings remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a *Systematic Literature Review* on self-acceptance in early adulthood during life transitions, in order to provide a more comprehensive and easily understandable overview of the role of self-acceptance in helping individuals cope with various life changes.

Study Method

This study employs a systematic literature review approach to examine self-acceptance among young adults during life transitions. This method was chosen to systematically and structurally compile, evaluate, and synthesize empirical evidence from various scientific sources. The literature search was conducted using several electronic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, PubMed, ScienceDirect, Garuda, and ResearchGate. Keywords used in the literature search included: “Self-Acceptance,” “Self-Acceptance in Young Adults.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to broaden or narrow the search results to ensure greater relevance; subsequently, the authors checked all journals for duplication using Rayyan.

The inclusion criteria for this study include empirical articles—both quantitative and qualitative—that address topics related to self-acceptance among young adults; focus on young or early-adult populations (ages 20–30); are written in Indonesian or English; and were published between 2018 and 2025;

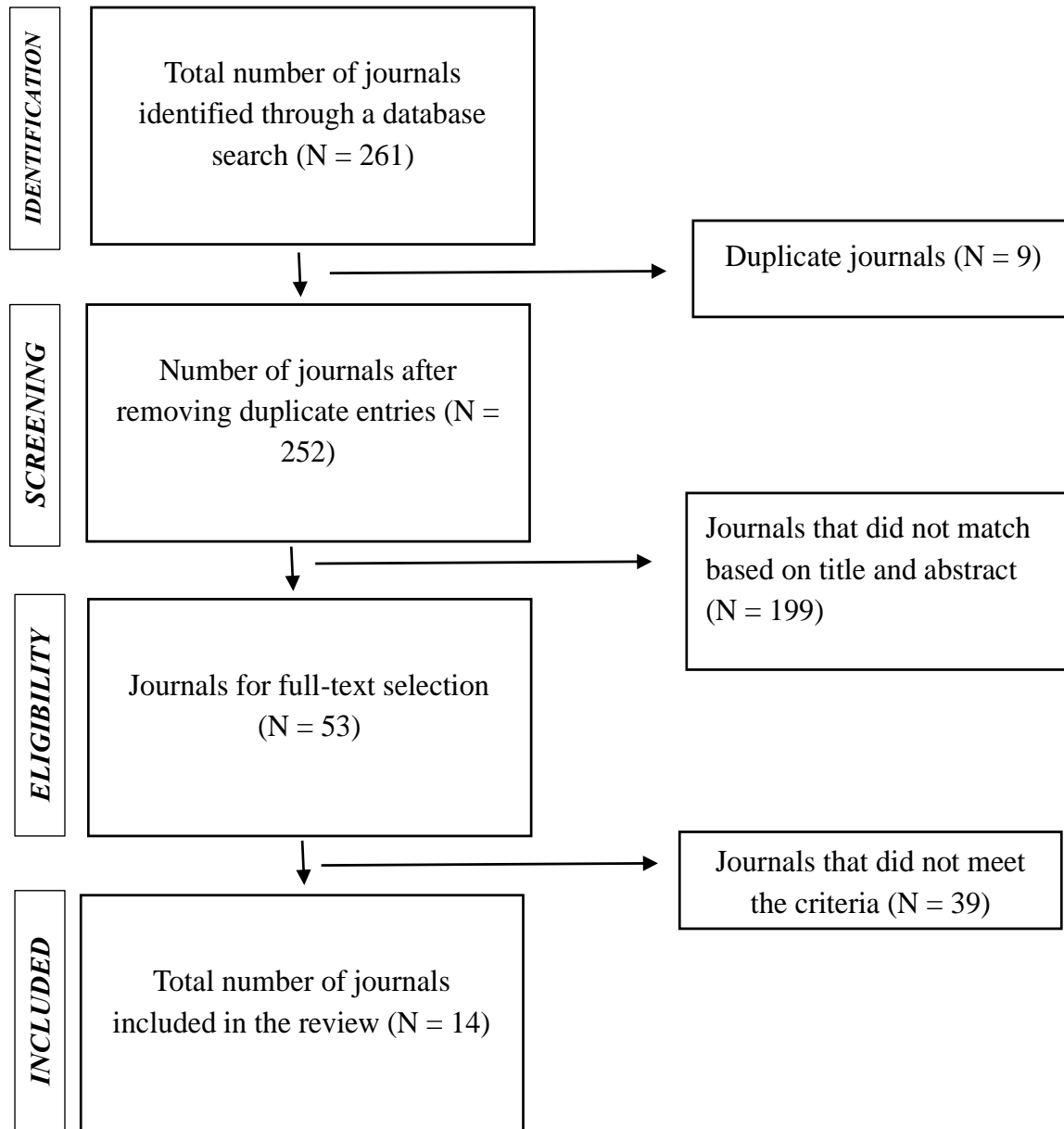
The article selection process was conducted in three stages: identification based on titles and abstracts, screening based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, and assessment of eligibility by reading the full text of the articles. Data from the selected articles were analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach. This analysis aimed to identify key themes related to self-acceptance among young adults. The synthesis process was conducted narratively and descriptively, without using statistical meta-analysis, given the variation in study designs and instruments among the analyzed studies. The results of this synthesis are expected to provide a deeper understanding of self-acceptance among young adults who are in the process of establishing their lives.

The author derived search terms from the research questions and expanded them to create a comprehensive list of search terms. The search terms used were: *self-acceptance*, *self-acceptance* in adulthood . The author used these search terms to retrieve 261 articles from the Google Scholar database. In the next step, the author checked all journals for duplication using Rayyan. The author screened all journals that passed the duplication check based on their titles and abstracts. The journals that passed the title and abstract screening were then analyzed based on their full-text versions. After selecting from the 261 journals found, 14 journals were identified that discussed self-acceptance and self-acceptance in young adults.

The journal selection flowchart is available. The authors established the following criteria for this review: (1) journals addressing self-acceptance among young adults; (2) participants were young adults (ages 20–30); (3)

both quantitative and qualitative research designs; and (4) studies conducted between 2018 and 2025. Journals not included in the criteria are: (1) journals discussing self-acceptance in young adults, (2) articles classified as reviews, reports, books, literature reviews, and studies where the methodology is not clearly described.

Figure 1. PRISMA Journal Selection Flowchart



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature review yielded a number of articles relevant to the study topic. In general, the research findings indicate that self-acceptance has a significant positive relationship with various indicators of psychological well-being in early adulthood.

Several studies found that self-acceptance acts as a protective factor against stress and anxiety arising during life transitions, such as the academic transition to the workforce or changes in social roles. Individuals with high levels of self-acceptance tend to have better emotional regulation and higher levels of resilience.

In addition, self-acceptance has also been found to be associated with life satisfaction and life meaning in early adulthood. Longitudinal studies indicate that an increase in self-acceptance over time contributes to improved overall psychological well-being, particularly when facing failure or future uncertainty.

Table 1. Self-Acceptance in Early Adulthood During Life Transitions

No	Author & Year	Research Objective	Participant Characteristics	Methods & Instruments	Key Findings
1	Kim & Lee (2018)	Examining the relationship between self-acceptance and psychological well-being in young adults	Young adults aged 18–29	Quantitative survey; Psychological Well-Being Scale	Self-acceptance is positively associated with psychological well-being and life satisfaction
2	Vasile et al. (2019)	Analyzing the role of self-acceptance in life transition stress	Senior students	Cross-sectional; Self-Acceptance Scale	Self-acceptance acts as a protective factor against academic stress and anxiety
3	Santos et al. (2021)	Examining self-acceptance and resilience during the first job transition	Fresh graduates	Mixed methods; resilience scale	Self-acceptance enhances resilience in the face of career uncertainty
4	Li et al. (2022)	Analyzing the structure of self-acceptance and mental well-being	Early adulthood in the general population	Network analysis	Self-acceptance is a central node in the psychological well-being network
5	Rahmawati & Putra (2023)	Examining self-acceptance and life meaning among young adults in Indonesia	Early adults aged 20–30	Quantitative survey; Meaning in Life Questionnaire	Self-acceptance significantly contributes to meaning in life
6	Nguyen et al. (2024)	Assessing the role of self-acceptance in early adulthood transition adaptation	Cross-cultural early adulthood	Longitudinal study	Increased self-acceptance predicts long-term psychological adaptation
7	Park & Jung (2025)	Examining self-acceptance, self-compassion, and mental health	Early adulthood, young working adults	SEM; Self-Compassion Scale	Self-acceptance plays a direct and indirect role in mental health
8	Pujilasti & Agustina (2025)	Analyzing the relationship between body image and self-acceptance in young adult women	Early adult women (18–25 years)	Quantitative correlational; Body image scale & self-acceptance scale	Body image is positively associated with self-acceptance
9	Rohmah et al. (2024)	Examining the influence of self-acceptance on psychological well-being	College students	Psychological well-being scale	Self-acceptance contributes significantly to improved psychological well-being and life satisfaction
10	Li et al. (2025)	Examining the influence of self-acceptance on prosocial behavior	Early adulthood	Self-acceptance scale	Self-acceptance enhances empathy and prosocial behavior through better emotional regulation
11	Sitorus & Rahmatulloh	Examining the relationship between	Students aged 18–25	Self-acceptance	There is a significant negative relationship; the

	(2024)	self-acceptance and the quarter-life crisis		and quarter-life crisis scales	higher the self-acceptance, the lower the quarter-life crisis
12	Buratta et al. (2023)	Examining factors influencing self-acceptance	College students (emerging adulthood)	Self-esteem & self-control scales	Self-esteem and self-control explain approximately 33% of the variance in self-acceptance, indicating that internal factors are highly dominant
13	Ramadani, N. T. et al. (2023)	Understanding the influence of self-image on self-acceptance in early adulthood	early adulthood	Self-acceptance & body image scales	Self-image has a significant effect on self-acceptance in young adults
14	Rafi Damri (2024)	Examining the relationship between self-acceptance and fear of negative evaluation in emerging adulthood	early adulthood (18–25)	BFNE-II & PWB self-acceptance subscale	Self-acceptance is negatively correlated with fear of negative evaluation

Self-acceptance serves a preventive function against the emergence of psychological problems in early adulthood. Individuals who are able to fully accept themselves—including their limitations, failures, and negative experiences—tend not to get trapped in excessively negative self-evaluation. This is particularly important given that early adulthood is often marked by social pressure to meet certain standards in education, career, and interpersonal relationships. Self-acceptance allows individuals to respond to these demands in a more realistic and flexible manner, thereby reducing the risk of chronic stress, anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness.

From a protective perspective, self-acceptance has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety levels that arise during periods of transition. Research by Vasile et al. (2019) indicates that self-acceptance acts as a protective factor against academic stress among senior-year college students. This finding aligns with the research by Sitorus and Rahmatulloh (2024), which revealed a negative relationship between self-acceptance and the quarter-life crisis. This indicates that individuals with high levels of self-acceptance tend to be better able to manage developmental pressures and complex social demands in early adulthood.

In addition to serving as a protective factor, self-acceptance also acts as a facilitating factor in the decision-making process and the formation of self-identity. Research by Santos et al. (2021) indicates that self-acceptance contributes to increased resilience in individuals transitioning into the workforce. Furthermore, Li et al. (2025) found that self-acceptance is associated with better emotional regulation, which ultimately fosters prosocial behavior. Thus, self-acceptance can be understood as an internal factor that supports emotional stability and an individual’s adaptive capacity.

In the context of psychological well-being, several studies indicate a consistent positive relationship between self-acceptance and psychological well-being. Kim and Lee (2018) and Rohmah et al. (2024) found that self-acceptance is positively correlated with life satisfaction and psychological well-being. In fact, Li et al. (2022), through a network analysis approach, demonstrated that self-acceptance is a central component in the structure of psychological well-being. These findings reinforce the concept proposed by Ryff (1989) that self-acceptance is a fundamental dimension of psychological well-being.

Furthermore, self-acceptance also plays a role in the formation of life meaning and the long-term adaptation process. Research by Rahmawati and Putra (2023) shows that self-acceptance makes a significant contribution to life meaning in early adulthood. Meanwhile, Nguyen et al. (2024), through a longitudinal study, found that

increased self-acceptance can predict sustained psychological adaptation. This suggests that self-acceptance not only impacts current psychological well-being but also plays a role in an individual's future development.

In terms of influencing factors, self-acceptance is influenced by various internal and external factors. Buratta et al. (2023) found that self-esteem and self-control are significant predictors of self-acceptance. Additionally, external factors such as body image (Pujilasti & Agustina, 2025; Ramadani et al., 2023) and fear of negative evaluation (Rafi & Damri, 2024) also have a significant relationship with self-acceptance. This indicates that the development of self-acceptance is the result of a complex interaction between personal factors and the social environment.

From a methodological perspective, a review of empirical studies (2018–2025) also reveals consistent findings across research designs, including quantitative, longitudinal, and cross-cultural studies. This consistency strengthens the external validity of the findings that self-acceptance is a stable and relevant psychological construct across various contexts of early adulthood. However, some studies also note that the relationship between self-acceptance and psychological well-being can be moderated by contextual factors, such as social support, cultural values, and environmental demands (Rahmawati & Putra, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Consequently, the results of this synthesis underscore the importance of developing self-acceptance-based psychological interventions, particularly for young adults navigating life transitions. Such interventions should not only focus on reducing negative psychological symptoms but also on strengthening individuals' internal resources, such as self-acceptance, emotional regulation, and self-compassion. In the Indonesian cultural context, an approach sensitive to collectivist values, social norms, and family roles is crucial to ensure that efforts to enhance self-acceptance can proceed optimally and sustainably.

Overall, the discussion based on the Summary Table of Empirical Studies (2018–2025) confirms that self-acceptance is not merely an aspect of psychological well-being but the foundation of early adults' psychological adaptation in facing the dynamics and uncertainties of life transitions. These findings further solidify the position of self-acceptance as a key construct in developmental psychology and mental health, while also opening opportunities for further research that is more contextual and practical.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results of a systematic literature review of 14 empirical articles published between 2018 and 2025, it can be concluded that self-acceptance is a psychological construct that plays a central role in supporting psychological well-being during early adulthood, particularly in coping with various life transition dynamics. Self-acceptance functions not only as one dimension of psychological well-being but also as a protective factor capable of minimizing the negative impacts of stress, anxiety, and social pressures that arise during transitional processes, such as the transition from the educational to the professional world, the formation of interpersonal relationships, and the search for self-identity.

The findings of this study indicate that individuals with high levels of self-acceptance tend to possess more adaptive emotional regulation skills, greater resilience, and a more realistic self-perception regarding their strengths and limitations. Furthermore, self-acceptance also contributes significantly to increased life satisfaction, a sense of life's meaning, and the quality of social relationships. Thus, self-acceptance can be understood as a crucial foundation in the psychological adaptation process of young adults.

In practical terms, the findings of this study have important implications for the development of psychological interventions, particularly in the context of mental health promotion and prevention. Intervention programs focused on enhancing self-acceptance—such as self-compassion training, emotional regulation development, and self-acceptance-based counseling—can serve as effective strategies for helping young adults cope with life's pressures and uncertainties. In the context of education and psychological services, these findings can also serve as a foundation for designing support programs for students or individuals currently in a life transition phase.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, the number of articles analyzed is limited to 14 studies, so generalizations of the findings should be made with caution. Second, variations in the research methods and instruments used in these studies may potentially affect the consistency of the synthesis results. Third, most of the research still focuses on quantitative approaches, so a deeper understanding of individuals' subjective experiences regarding self-acceptance still needs to be developed through qualitative research.

Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the volume and scope of the literature, as well as to integrate more diverse methodological approaches, such as longitudinal and experimental studies, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of self-acceptance. Additionally, it is important to examine the influence of contextual factors, such as culture, social values, and environmental support, particularly within the context of Indonesian society, which exhibits collectivist characteristics. The development of contextual and practical self-acceptance-based intervention models is also a key priority for future research.

Overall, self-acceptance can be viewed as an essential psychological resource in helping young adults navigate life transitions in a more adaptive, healthy, and meaningful way. Therefore, efforts to strengthen self-acceptance are not only the responsibility of the individual but also require support from the social environment, educational institutions, and the broader mental health services.

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