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Association of School Bullying with Mental Health and Academic Achievement among Secondary School Students in Nepal: Evidence from a Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Bullying in school settings is no longer viewed only as a behavioural concern; it also shapes students' psychological well-being and their experience of learning. It generally involves repeated negative interactions among peers within relationships marked by unequal power. Such experiences are often linked with emotional strain, particularly symptoms of anxiety and depression, and may also influence students' engagement with academic activities. Although these relationships have been explored in many contexts, analytically grounded evidence from Nepal remains limited. This study therefore examines how school bullying is associated with mental health and academic achievement among students in community secondary schools.

Method: A cross-sectional analytical design was used. The study included 411 students selected through a multi-stage sampling process. Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed with reference to the Olweus bullying-victim framework and adapted to the local school context. The instrument assessed bullying involvement (perpetration and victimization), symptoms of depression and anxiety, and indicators of academic achievement. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multivariate linear regression techniques.

Result: A considerable proportion of students reported involvement in bullying, either as victims or perpetrators. Approximately one-quarter of participants exhibited moderate to elevated levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms, with a strong positive correlation observed between the two conditions. Both the frequency and severity of victimization were significantly associated with mental health outcomes, indicating higher levels of psychological distress with increasing exposure. Bullying perpetration showed a similar pattern. Bullying behaviours also demonstrated significant variation across selected socio-demographic characteristics, particularly age and grade level. Academic achievement demonstrated a modest negative association with victimization, with victimization frequency showing a statistically significant relationship, while other bullying-related variables were not significantly associated.

Conclusion: The study points to a clear association between school bullying and adverse mental health outcomes among adolescents, while its relationship with academic achievement appears comparatively weaker. Addressing bullying in school settings therefore requires attention not only to behaviour but also to students' psychological well-being. Approaches that support early identification, strengthen teacher response, and incorporate basic mental health support mechanisms may help reduce its impact.

Key words: School bullying; Mental health; Academic achievement; Depression; Anxiety; Cross-sectional study; Nepal

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in school settings has increasingly been recognized as an issue that extends beyond disciplinary concerns and influences students' psychological well-being and engagement with learning. It generally refers to repeated negative behaviour occurring within peer relationships characterized by an imbalance of power. In school environments, bullying may appear in different forms, including physical aggression, verbal harassment, social exclusion, rumor spreading, and behaviours occurring through digital communication platforms. These actions often develop gradually through repeated peer interactions rather than as isolated events^{1,2}. Evidence from different regions of the world suggests that a substantial proportion of school-aged children experience bullying in one form or another, while the expansion of digital communication has further changed both the nature and reach of bullying behaviours³⁻⁵. Consequently, bullying is increasingly viewed not only as a threat to school safety but also as a factor associated with emotional well-being and educational participation.

Adolescence represents an important developmental stage characterized by emotional, cognitive, and social

transitions. During this period, peer relationships strongly influence self-perception, social identity, and emotional adjustment. Students exposed to bullying frequently report fear, humiliation, low confidence, anxiety, and withdrawal from school-related activities^{6,7}. Previous studies have consistently shown associations between bullying victimization and depressive symptoms, emotional distress, and anxiety-related conditions among adolescents^{8,9}. Involvement in bullying as a perpetrator has also been linked with psychosocial and behavioural difficulties, suggesting that bullying may reflect broader emotional and social challenges rather than only disciplinary misconduct^{1,10}. These experiences may affect concentration, motivation, classroom participation, and overall academic engagement. Patterns of bullying have also changed over time. While physical aggression continues to exist in schools, indirect forms such as teasing, exclusion, social manipulation, and rumor spreading are increasingly reported among adolescents^{2,11}. Such behaviours are often less visible to teachers and school authorities but may produce lasting psychological effects. The growing use of digital communication has additionally expanded bullying beyond the physical school setting, allowing harmful interactions to

continue through social media and online communication⁵. These developments indicate that bullying should be understood as a broader social and relational process operating across both physical and virtual environments.

Although bullying has been widely studied in high-income countries, evidence from low- and middle-income settings remains comparatively limited. In many resource-constrained contexts, structured reporting systems, counselling services, and institutional response mechanisms are either inadequate or inconsistently implemented^{3,4}. Similar concerns are evident in Nepal. Existing studies conducted among Nepalese adolescents have mainly focused on the prevalence and distribution of bullying behaviours, with relatively limited analytical attention given to the relationship between bullying, mental health outcomes, and academic functioning¹². Furthermore, few studies have simultaneously examined different dimensions of bullying, including perpetration, victimization frequency, and victimization severity, in relation to depression, anxiety, and academic achievement.

The present study is guided primarily by the bully-victim framework developed by Dan Olweus and the cognitive perspective associated with Aaron T. Beck. Olweus conceptualized bullying as repeated aggressive behaviour occurring within unequal power relationships, emphasizing the relational and repetitive nature of victimization¹³. Beck's cognitive framework further explains how repeated negative experiences may contribute to emotional distress through adverse patterns of thinking and self-perception¹⁴. Together, these perspectives provide a conceptual basis for understanding how repeated bullying experiences may influence symptoms of anxiety, depression, and difficulties in academic engagement among adolescents.

The school environment in Nepal is influenced by social hierarchy, peer-group dynamics, cultural expectations, and institutional practices, all of which may shape how bullying behaviours are expressed and interpreted. In some situations, teasing or exclusion may be normalized within peer culture and therefore remain insufficiently addressed. At the same time, access to psychosocial support and structured anti-bullying interventions in community schools remains limited. Understanding bullying within this socio-cultural setting is therefore important for identifying its broader implications for students' emotional well-being and educational functioning.

Against this background, the present study examines the association between school bullying, mental health, and academic achievement among students studying in community secondary schools in Nepal. The study specifically focuses on bullying perpetration, victimization frequency, and victimization severity in relation to depression, anxiety, and academic achievement. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of bullying perpetration and

victimization among secondary school students in community schools?

2. Is school bullying associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety among adolescents?
3. Is school bullying associated with students' academic achievement?
4. Which dimensions of bullying demonstrate stronger relationships with mental health and academic outcomes?

By examining these relationships within the context of Nepalese community schools, the study contributes context-specific evidence regarding the psychological and educational implications of bullying among adolescents.

METHODS

Study Design and Setting

A cross-sectional analytical study design was used to examine the association between school bullying, mental health, and academic achievement among students studying in community secondary schools of Nepal. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the assessment of relationships among study variables within a defined population at a single point in time. The study was conducted in selected community secondary schools of Lalitpur and Chitwan districts of Bagmati Province. These districts were selected to reflect variation in socio-educational and geographical settings, including relatively urban and semi-urban school environments. Differences in school management systems, student composition, and institutional resources across these settings were considered relevant for examining bullying experiences and their relationship with students' psychological well-being and academic functioning.

Study Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Procedure

The study population consisted of students studying in Grades 9 to 12 in community secondary schools of Bagmati Province, Nepal. The sample size was determined using the single population proportion formula considering a 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, and $p=0.5$ to ensure maximum variability in the absence of nationally representative analytical estimates regarding bullying and mental health outcomes among Nepalese adolescents. After adjustment for the multi-stage sampling procedure and possible non-response, the required sample size was determined as 416 students.

A multi-stage sampling approach was followed to improve representation across administrative and school levels. Bagmati Province was selected purposively because of its heterogeneous socio-cultural and educational characteristics. Within the province, Lalitpur and Chitwan districts were selected purposively to capture variation in geographical location and school context. Lalitpur represented a comparatively urban educational setting, whereas Chitwan reflected a relatively semi-urban context. This variation was considered important for understanding bullying experiences across different school environments. Each district was divided according to local government

structures. One municipality from each district—Bharatpur Metropolitan City in Chitwan and Mahalaxmi Municipality in Lalitpur—was selected using a lottery method. A list of community secondary schools operating Grades 9–12 was prepared prior to sampling. Sixteen eligible schools were identified in Bharatpur Metropolitan City and six in Mahalaxmi Municipality. Two schools from each municipality were then selected using simple random sampling, resulting in four schools in total.

Within the selected schools, students from Grades 9–12 were grouped into classroom clusters. Altogether, 16 classroom clusters were formed. The required sample size was proportionally distributed across these clusters. From each class, 26 students were selected through simple random sampling, resulting in an initial sample of 416 participants.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Students studying in Grades 9–12 in the selected community secondary schools who were present during the data collection period and willing to participate were included in the study. Students who were seriously ill during data collection, unable to complete the questionnaire independently, or who submitted substantially incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the final analysis.

Research Tool and Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed by the researcher based on the objectives of the study, relevant literature, and established theoretical perspectives, particularly the bully–victim framework proposed by Dan Olweus and the cognitive perspective associated with Aaron T. Beck. Existing literature related to school bullying, depression, anxiety, and adolescent academic functioning was reviewed during the development of the instrument.

A context-adapted instrument was developed instead of adopting a single standardized tool because previously validated instruments addressing bullying, mental health, and academic engagement simultaneously within the Nepalese community school context were limited. The questionnaire was therefore designed to incorporate locally relevant behavioural expressions, peer interaction patterns, and school-related experiences commonly observed among Nepalese adolescents. The tool included sections related to bullying perpetration, victimization frequency, victimization severity, depression-related symptoms, anxiety-related symptoms, and school-related academic achievement indicators.

Academic achievement was assessed through school-related academic engagement indicators, including motivation toward learning, desire to attend school, perceived learning progress, school safety, and educational support within the school environment.

The questionnaire was initially prepared in English and later translated into Nepali using forward and backward translation procedures with support from language experts to maintain consistency in meaning between versions.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Content validity and construct relevance of the instrument were established through extensive review of empirical literature, theoretical frameworks, and consultation with subject experts in education and mental health research. The questionnaire items were reviewed to ensure conceptual consistency with the study objectives and major constructs related to bullying, depression, anxiety, and academic engagement.

Prior to the main study, pilot testing was conducted among 41 students who shared characteristics similar to the target population but were not included in the final sample. Feedback obtained during the pilot phase helped improve item clarity, language consistency, and response formatting. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The major scales related to bullying involvement, anxiety, and depression demonstrated Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80, indicating satisfactory reliability of the instrument for the study context.

The complete questionnaire used in the study has been attached as an annexure to improve methodological transparency.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted within classroom settings using a structured self-administered questionnaire. Before questionnaire distribution, students received a brief explanation regarding the objectives of the study and instructions for completing the form. Participation was voluntary, and students completed the questionnaire independently.

Completed questionnaires were checked immediately after submission to minimize missing responses. Where minor omissions were identified, participants were politely requested to complete unanswered items if they agreed to do so. This process helped reduce incomplete responses and potential non-response bias. Of the 416 questionnaires distributed, five were excluded because of substantial incompleteness, resulting in a final analytical sample of 411 students and a response rate of 98.8%.

Data Analysis Procedure

Descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were calculated to summarize participant characteristics and study variables. Chi-square test and phi coefficient analysis were performed to examine the association between socio-demographic characteristics and bullying-related behaviours. Correlation analysis was subsequently conducted to examine relationships among study variables. Multivariate linear regression analysis was used to assess the association of bullying-related variables, including perpetration, victimization frequency, and victimization severity, with depression, anxiety, and academic achievement outcomes. Statistical significance was interpreted at a 95% confidence level.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the

Institutional Review Committee (IRC) of Tribhuvan University prior to data collection. Permission was also obtained from the selected schools. Students were informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any stage without negative consequences.

As the study involved school-aged participants, assent was obtained from students and parental or guardian consent was taken where applicable. No identifying personal information was collected, and all responses were kept confidential. The collected information was used only for academic and research purposes.

RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants (n = 411)

Characteristics	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	174	42.3
Female	237	57.7
Age (in Years)		
12	7	1.7
13	36	8.8
14	101	24.6
15	164	39.9
16	103	25.1
Ethnicity		
Brahman	56	13.6
Chhetri	78	19.0
Newar	31	7.5
Dalit	58	14.1
Janjati	95	23.1
Madhesi	86	20.9
Religion		
Hindu	319	77.6
Buddhist	57	13.9
Christian	24	5.8
Grade		
9	104	25.3
10	105	25.5
11	101	24.6
12	101	24.6

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. The study included 411 students in total. Female students formed a larger proportion of the sample (57.7%) compared to male students (42.3%). The mean age of participants was 14.78 years (SD = 0.98), with the highest number of students observed in the 15-year age group. Participants represented diverse ethnic backgrounds, with Janjati (23.1%) and Madhesi (20.9%) groups accounting for the largest shares. A majority of students identified as Hindu (77.6%). The distribution of participants across grade levels was relatively even.

Table 2: Distribution of Bullying Perpetration Levels (n = 411)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not involved in perpetration	139	33.82
Occasional perpetration	135	32.85
Moderate perpetration	86	20.92
Frequent/Severe perpetration	51	12.41
Total	411	100%

Table 2 shows the level of bullying perpetration among students. Around one-third of the participants reported that they were not involved in bullying activities. Similar proportions reported occasional involvement, whereas fewer students were classified under moderate and frequent/severe perpetration categories. The findings indicate that bullying behaviour was present among students at different levels of involvement.

Table 3: Distribution of Bullying Victimization Frequency (n = 411)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not a victim	99	24.09
Occasional	104	25.30
Moderate	95	23.11
Frequent/Severe	113	27.49

Table 3 outlines the distribution of victimization among students. A notable proportion of students reported experiences of victimization, with 27.49% classified as frequent or severe victims. Overall, more than half of the participants fell within moderate to high levels of victimization, indicating considerable exposure to bullying within the school environment.

Table 4: Levels of Depression among Students (n = 411)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Normal	189	45.99
Mild	81	19.71
Borderline	39	9.49
Moderate	64	15.57
Severe/Extreme	38	9.25

Table 4 summarizes the distribution of depressive symptoms among students. Nearly half of the students were within the normal range. However, 34.31% of participants reported depressive symptoms ranging from borderline to severe levels, suggesting the presence of psychological distress among a notable proportion of students.

Table 5 details the distribution of anxiety levels among students. Nearly half of the students reported minimal levels of anxiety. The remaining participants experienced varying degrees of anxiety, with 25.31% falling within the moderate to severe categories, suggesting that anxiety was present among a considerable proportion of the study population.

Table 5: Levels of Anxiety among Students (n = 411)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Minimal	199	48.42
Mild	108	26.28
Moderate	68	16.55
Severe	36	8.76

Table 6 shows differences in bully status by gender, age group, and grade level. The share of students identified as moderate to frequent perpetrators varies across these categories. In contrast, similar patterns are seen across ethnicity and religion, where the distribution of bullying involvement remains largely consistent within the sample.

Table 6: Association Between Bully Status and Background Characteristics. (n=411)

Characteristics	Bullis		Phi	P-value
	Never or Occasional	Moderate and Frequently		
Gender				
Male	103 (25.06%)	71(17.27%)	0.14	0.008
Female	171(41.60%)	66 (16.0%)		
Age				
12-14 years	115 (27.98%)	20 (4.86%)	0.21	<0.001
15-16 years	159 (38.68%)	108 (26.28%)		
Ethnicity				
Brahmin/Chhetri	87 (21.16%)	47 (11.43%)	-0.03	0.68
Others	187 (45.50%)	90 (21.90%)		
Religion				
Hindu	212 (51.58%)	107 (26.03%)	-0.01	0.96
Others	62 (15.08%)	30 (7.30%)		
Class				
9 and 10	158 (38.44%)	51(12.40%)	-0.19	<0.001
11 and 12	116 (28.22%)	86 (20.92%)		

Table 7: Association Between Victim Frequency of Bullying and Background Characteristics(n=411)

Characteristics	Victim frequency of bullying event		Phi	P-value
	Never or Occasional	Moderate and Frequently		
Gender				
Male	84(20.43%)	90 (21.90%)	0.02	0.77
Female	119 (28.95%)	118(28.71%)		
Age				
12-14 years	86 (20.92%)	58(14.11%)	0.15	0.003
15-16 years	117 (28.46)	150 (36.49%)		
Ethnicity				
Brahmin/Chhetri	65(15.81%)	69 (16.78%)	-0.01	0.89
Others	138(33.57%)	139 (33.81%)		
Religion				
Hindu	151(36.73%)	168 (40.87%)	-0.08	0.15
Others	52(12.65%)	40 (9.73%)		
Class				
9 and 10	116 (28.22%)	93 (22.62%)	-0.12	0.015
11 and 12	87 (21.16%)	115 (27.98%)		

Table 7 shows the association between victim frequency of bullying and background characteristics. Statistically significant associations were observed with age (p=0.003)

and class (p=0.015). However, no significant association was found with gender, ethnicity, and religion (p>0.05).

Table 8: Association Between Victim Severity of Bullying and Background Characteristics (n=411)

Characteristics	Victim severity of bullying event		Phi	P-value
	Never or Occasional	Moderate and Frequently		
Gender				
Male	54 (13.13%)	79 (19.22%)	-0.01	0.94
Female	74 (18.0%)	113 (27.49%)		
Age				
12-14 years	48 (11.67%)	53 (12.89%)	0.1	0.08
15-16 years	80 (19.46%)	139 (33.81%)		
Ethnicity				
Brahmin/Chhetri	42 (10.21%)	63 (15.32%)	0	1
Others	86 (20.92%)	129 (31.38%)		
Religion				
Hindu	90 (21.89%)	153 (37.22%)	-0.11	0.07
Others	38 (9.24%)	39 (9.48%)		
Class				
9 and 10	67 (16.30%)	83(20.19%)	-0.09	0.14
11 and 12	61(14.84%)	109 (26.52%)		

Table 8 shows the bivariate relationship between levels of bullying victimisation and selected background characteristics. Victim severity does not vary significantly by gender, age group, ethnicity, religion, or grade level. The distribution of victimisation levels remains broadly similar across all demographic groups in the sample, with no notable differences observed between categories.

Table 9: Correlation among Key Variables (n=411)

Variables	R	p-value
Depression & Anxiety	0.79	<0.001
Victim Frequency & Depression	0.51	<0.001
Victim Severity & Anxiety	0.48	<0.001
Academic Achievement & Depression	-0.13	0.008

Table 9 shows the correlations among the study variables. A strong positive correlation was observed between depression and anxiety (r = 0.79). Bullying-related variables showed moderate associations with mental health outcomes. Academic achievement was weakly and negatively correlated with depression

Table 10: Predictors of Depression (n=411)

Variables	B	p-value
Bully score	0.67	<0.001
Victim frequency	0.85	<0.001
Victim severity	0.75	<0.001

Note: B= Standardized regression coefficient, p=significant level
Table 10 indicates the association between bullying-related variables and depression. All bullying-related variables were

significantly associated with depression. Among these, victimization frequency showed the strongest association, suggesting that repeated exposure to bullying is linked with higher levels of depressive symptoms.

Table 11: Predictors of Anxiety (n=411)

Variable	B	p-value
Bully score	0.50	<0.001
Victim frequency	0.73	<0.001
Victim severity	0.66	<0.001

Table 11 outlines the association between victimization and anxiety. Both victimization frequency and severity were significantly associated with anxiety. Higher levels of exposure, reflected in both frequency and severity, were associated with increased levels of anxiety among students

Table 12: Predictors of Academic Achievement (n=411)

Variable	B	p-value
Bully score	-0.05	0.267
Victim frequency	-0.08	0.027
Victim severity	-0.003	0.935

Table 12 shows the association between bullying-related variables and academic achievement. Victimization frequency demonstrated a small but statistically significant negative association with academic achievement. In contrast, bullying perpetration and victimization severity were not significantly associated with academic achievement. Among the variables examined, only the frequency of victimization showed a measurable relationship with academic performance, although the strength of this association was limited.

Overall, the results suggest stronger relationships between bullying and mental health outcomes, while the association with academic achievement remained comparatively modest.

DISCUSSION

Bullying was reported by a considerable proportion of students studying in community secondary schools, either through direct involvement in bullying behaviour or through repeated experiences of victimization. Experiences related to teasing, social exclusion, and verbal humiliation appeared more common than overt physical aggression. This pattern indicates that bullying within the school environment often operates through routine peer interaction rather than through isolated physical conflict alone^{2,11}. Similar observations have been described in studies conducted among adolescents in Nepal and other South Asian settings, where indirect and relational forms of bullying were reported more frequently than physical forms^{12,17}. Because such behaviours are less visible within classroom settings, they may remain unnoticed for longer periods and therefore continue without timely intervention.

The additional bivariate findings showed that bullying perpetration differed according to gender, age, and grade level. Older students and students studying in higher

grades demonstrated comparatively greater involvement in moderate to frequent bullying behaviour. Male students also showed relatively higher participation in bullying activities. These differences may reflect changing peer relationships during adolescence, where competition for social influence, group acceptance, and dominance becomes increasingly important within school environments^{16,18}. As students move into higher grades, peer-group structures often become more complex, which may increase opportunities for aggressive or exclusionary behaviour.

In contrast, victimization frequency varied significantly according to age and grade level but remained relatively similar across ethnicity, religion, and gender categories. This pattern may indicate that bullying experiences within schools are shaped more strongly by day-to-day peer interaction and classroom social dynamics than by broader demographic background. Previous studies have likewise reported that victimization can occur across different social groups when bullying becomes normalized within school culture^{12,24}. The absence of major ethnic or religious differences in the present study may also suggest that bullying behaviours are widely distributed within the student population rather than concentrated within specific social categories.

A different pattern emerged in relation to victimization severity. Severe victimization did not vary significantly across demographic characteristics. One possible explanation is that once bullying becomes persistent or intense, its effects may extend beyond particular groups and affect students more broadly across the school environment. This finding may reflect the influence of school climate, peer culture, and institutional response rather than individual background characteristics alone. In this regard, bullying appears to function not only as interpersonal misconduct but also as a socially reinforced behaviour shaped by everyday interaction within the school setting^{10,17}.

The relationship between bullying and mental health outcomes was particularly noticeable in this study. Students exposed to more frequent and severe victimization reported higher levels of depressive and anxiety-related symptoms. Similar findings have been documented in earlier international and regional studies examining adolescent bullying and emotional distress^{7,8,18}. Repeated exposure to humiliation, exclusion, or intimidation may gradually weaken emotional security and increase psychological strain among adolescents. The findings therefore support the view that bullying carries important emotional consequences extending beyond immediate peer conflict.

Depression and anxiety were also strongly correlated with each other. Students reporting depressive symptoms frequently experienced anxiety-related symptoms simultaneously. Earlier adolescent mental health research has similarly shown that bullying-related distress rarely appears in a single emotional form and often involves overlapping psychological difficulties^{6,20}. This overlap may reflect the cumulative emotional burden associated with repeated victimization, especially during adolescence when peer acceptance and social identity remain highly important. Compared with mental health outcomes, the association

between bullying and academic achievement appeared weaker. Victimization frequency showed a small but statistically significant negative relationship with academic performance, whereas perpetration and victimization severity were not significantly associated. This finding may indicate that the academic consequences of bullying operate indirectly rather than immediately. Emotional distress, reduced concentration, avoidance of classroom participation, and declining motivation may gradually influence educational engagement over time²¹. International student well-being reports have also described bullying as a factor that may affect learning through its impact on emotional adjustment and school connectedness rather than through direct academic disruption alone²².

The broader social context of Nepalese schools may also help explain some of these findings. In many school environments, teasing and exclusion are sometimes interpreted as ordinary adolescent behaviour rather than as harmful peer victimization. Such normalization may discourage reporting and delay institutional response. At the same time, many community schools continue to have limited access to counselling support, structured anti-bullying systems, and formal psychosocial services. Students experiencing repeated bullying may therefore receive little emotional support within the school setting. The stronger relationship observed between victimization and emotional distress in this study highlights the importance of recognizing bullying as both an educational and mental health concern within adolescent school life.

Overall, the study indicates that repeated and severe bullying experiences are closely connected with students' emotional well-being. Although the relationship with academic achievement was comparatively modest, the psychological effects associated with bullying were consistently observed across multiple indicators. These findings reinforce the importance of early identification, supportive school response mechanisms, and basic psychosocial support within community school settings.

LIMITATION

This study has some limitations that should be considered while interpreting the findings. Because the study used a cross-sectional design, causal relationships between bullying, mental health, and academic achievement could not be confirmed. The information was collected through self-reported responses, which may have been influenced by recall or response bias. The study was conducted in selected districts of Bagmati Province; therefore, the findings may not represent all community secondary schools in Nepal. In addition, academic achievement was assessed using student-reported academic indicators rather than official examination records. Nevertheless, the study offers useful context-based evidence regarding bullying, mental health, and academic functioning among Nepalese adolescents.

CONCLUSION

Bullying was identified as a common experience among students studying in community secondary schools in Nepal, with many students reporting involvement either as victims or as participants in bullying behaviour. Indirect forms of bullying, particularly teasing, verbal humiliation, and social exclusion, appeared more frequently than physical aggression, indicating that bullying is often embedded within routine peer interaction inside the school environment.

The study demonstrated that bullying involvement varied across certain demographic characteristics, particularly age and grade level, while some forms of victimization remained relatively similar across gender, ethnicity, and religious groups. These findings suggest that bullying within schools may be influenced more by peer-group dynamics and school interaction patterns than by broader socio-demographic background alone.

A clear association was observed between bullying and students' emotional well-being. Higher levels of victimization, especially repeated and severe exposure, were linked with increased symptoms of anxiety and depression. The findings indicate that the emotional consequences of bullying may accumulate over time, affecting students beyond immediate peer conflict situations.

Compared with mental health outcomes, the relationship between bullying and academic achievement appeared relatively weaker. Although victimization frequency demonstrated a statistically significant negative relationship with academic performance, the strength of this association remained modest. This may indicate that the educational effects of bullying operate indirectly through emotional distress, reduced classroom engagement, and decreased motivation toward learning.

Overall, the study highlights that bullying should not be understood solely as a disciplinary or behavioural issue. It is closely connected with adolescents' emotional health and everyday school experience. The findings further emphasize the importance of early identification, supportive school response systems, and basic psychosocial support mechanisms within community schools. By providing context-based evidence from Nepalese secondary schools, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how bullying influences adolescent mental health and educational functioning within resource-limited educational settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicate the importance of developing school-based mechanisms for the early identification and management of bullying among adolescents. Since victimization frequency and severity were strongly associated with depression and anxiety, schools may benefit from introducing simple student reporting systems, designated teacher focal persons, and periodic classroom discussions related to peer behaviour and emotional well-being.

The study also highlights the need for basic psychosocial support within community schools. Orientation programs for teachers on recognizing emotional distress, student

counselling support where feasible, and referral mechanisms for severe psychological difficulties may help reduce the mental health burden associated with bullying experiences. At the institutional level, clearer implementation of anti-bullying practices within existing child-friendly school frameworks may strengthen school responses. Greater coordination among teachers, parents, and local education stakeholders may further support safer and more supportive learning environments for adolescents. Future research using longitudinal approaches, wider geographical coverage, and standardized psychological assessment tools may provide deeper understanding of the long-term effects of bullying on adolescent mental health and educational outcomes in Nepal.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Krishna Kumari Paudel Subedi was primarily responsible for the overall investigation, including the conceptualization of the study, review of the literature, development of the methodology, data analysis, and finalization of the manuscript. Bhimsen Devkota contributed to the critical editing and refinement of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no competing interests

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