



## Stress Management Among Adolescents: A Study in Boarding Schools of Kathmandu

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### Abstract

**Background:** Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by heightened vulnerability to stress, particularly in boarding school environments where academic pressures, social adjustments, and separation from family converge. In Nepal, psychosocial dysfunction affects approximately 17% of adolescents, with stress linked to anxiety, depression, and impaired academic performance<sup>215</sup>. Despite growing recognition of this issue, limited research has focused on stress management among boarding school adolescents in Kathmandu, where unique institutional demands exacerbate stressors. **Objective:** This study aimed to (1) assess the prevalence of stress among adolescents in Kathmandu's boarding schools, (2) identify key stressors (academic, relational, environmental, and personal), (3) evaluate gender and age differences in stress levels, and (4) explore existing coping strategies to inform targeted interventions. **Method:** A descriptive cross-sectional design was employed, using Sheldon Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale to survey 100 adolescents (45 female, 55 male) aged 13–18 from two boarding schools in Kathmandu. Bivariate analysis examined associations between stress levels and demographic/contextual factors. **Findings:** Moderate to high stress levels were prevalent (85% of respondents), with females and older adolescents reporting higher stress. Primary stressors included academic performance (e.g., low grades), peer conflicts, future uncertainty, and disrupted sleep patterns. Gender disparities were notable, with females more likely to experience high stress (22.2% vs. 18.2% of males). Only 15% of students reported low stress, underscoring the widespread burden. **Conclusion:** The study highlights an urgent need for institutional stress management strategies, such as school-based counseling, structured wellness programs, and extracurricular activities, to mitigate the adverse effects of stress on mental health and academic outcomes. **Novelty:** This research contributes localized insights into stress dynamics in Nepali boarding schools, emphasizing the interplay of cultural,



academic, and environmental factors. It advances prior work by identifying specific, actionable stressors in this understudied setting 1015.

**Keywords:** Adolescent stress, boarding schools, stress management, Kathmandu, academic pressure, mental health, Nepal.

## **Introduction**

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by rapid physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes, making it a particularly vulnerable period for the onset of stress and related mental health challenges. In contemporary society, concerns about the psychological well-being of adolescents have become increasingly prominent, especially among those attending boarding schools, where separation from family and heightened academic expectations can intensify stressors. Stress, while a normal reaction to everyday pressures, can become maladaptive when it disrupts daily functioning, affecting nearly every system in the body and contributing to a range of psychological and physiological disorders. The ability of adolescents to manage stress is further complicated by the demands of academic performance, social relationships, and personal development, all of which are influenced by broader societal changes such as urbanization and increased competition.

The severity of adolescent stress is underscored by its widespread prevalence and significant impact on mental health outcomes. Studies indicate that approximately 20% of adolescents worldwide suffer from mental health issues with stress, anxiety, and depression rates rising over time. In Nepal, psychosocial dysfunction affects an estimated 17% of adolescents, highlighting a substantial public health concern<sup>1</sup>. The consequences of unmanaged stress during adolescence are profound, ranging from impaired academic achievement and social development to increased risks of substance abuse, behavioral problems, and even suicide. Furthermore, untreated mental health issues in adolescence often persist into adulthood, underscoring the urgent need for early identification and intervention. Given the unique challenges faced by adolescents in boarding schools—such as academic pressure, lack of parental support, and adjustment difficulties—addressing stress and its management is critical for safeguarding their overall well-being and supporting their successful transition into adulthood.

Concerns about psychological health are more common among adolescents in the contemporary world than they were in previous generations. For the sake of adolescents' psychological well-being throughout adolescence and their physical and mental health as adults, boarding secondary school adolescents must be shielded from unfavorable experiences and risk factors that might limit their capacity to grow. Stress is a normal reaction to everyday pressures but can become unhealthy when it upsets your day-to-day functioning. Stress involves changes affecting nearly every system of the body, influencing how people feel and behave. By causing mind-body changes, stress contributes directly to psychological and physiological disorder and disease and affects mental and physical health, reducing quality of life. (Association)



Multiple factors may lead to stress for adolescents in boarding schools including academic pressure, lack of parental support, health problems, and adjustment problems (Shirley, Frazer, & Murray, 1986). Stress has a major role in the emergence of mental health problems. An estimated 20% of adolescents worldwide are thought to suffer from mental health issues (Organization, 2003) and plenty of research have indicated that the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression has increased over time (Newman, et al., 1996). It's important to acknowledge that depression during childhood and adolescence can have serious consequences, including severe behavioral problems and substance abuse (Howard, Ferrari, Nota, Solberg, & Solberg, 2009). Additionally, research has demonstrated that untreated adolescent depression frequently endures, recurs, and continues into adulthood, and that mental health diagnoses like mood disorders are among the main risk factors for suicide (Cavanagh, Carson, Sharpe, & Lawrie, 2003).

Anxiety is among the most prevalent disorders among school-age children and adolescents (Costello, Mustillo, & Erkanli, 2003). If neglected, it might have a detrimental effect on adolescents' social and emotional development as well as their academic achievement. As adolescents prepare for important exams that will shape their future endeavors, this issue is expected to arise more throughout the secondary school years. The issue can get worse if parents' high expectations are combined with the load of academics (Essau, Conradt, & Petermann, 2000). If left untreated, anxiety problems can have a chronic course and raise a chance of developing psychological disorders in adults (M.D, Bruce, Dyck, & Keller, 2003)

Depression is characterized by a range of symptoms, including mood swings, irritability, low or high mood, and a lingering sense of worthlessness, loneliness, and melancholy. Significant weight loss or increase, sleeplessness or hypersomnia, exhaustion, excessive and inappropriate emotions of shame and worthlessness, and a decreased capacity to focus without the influence of alcohol or drug addiction are among the symptoms. A depressed person often has low self-esteem and confidence, which can be triggered by irrational feelings of guilt and hopelessness. It may be the reason behind a lifelong disability that prevents someone from operating normally. Patterns of negative, depressing thinking, such as worthlessness, helplessness, and hopelessness, are indicative of clinical depression (Knaus, 2006).

Adolescents are vulnerable to psychosocial dysfunction when they suffer from physical injuries, psychological trauma, or major changes in their environments especially in the absence of their strong support system. Adolescence period is critical time for developing good mental health (mina, mana, & rekha, 2018).

More specifically, it can be argued that adolescent psychosocial development is represented in their ability to function well in school, maintain good physical health, and have enough social, emotional, and psychological well-being. In the end, this helps to lower the likelihood of psychosocial disorders, behavioral issues, violence, criminality, adolescent pregnancies, and drug and alcohol abuse. Early detection of psychosocial disorder in adolescence can benefit a person's quality of life (Bista, Thapa, Sapkota, Singh, & Pokharel., 2016)



provides a comprehensive synthesis of recent research on adolescent stress in South Asia, revealing that approximately one-third of school-going adolescents experience moderate to severe stress, with higher rates among girls than boys. The review identifies academic pressure, family expectations, peer relationships, and uncertainty about the future as primary stressors, and highlights that adolescents in urban and boarding school settings are particularly vulnerable. Despite the widespread use of informal coping strategies such as seeking social support and engaging in extracurricular activities, the thesis underscores a significant gap in access to formal mental health resources and counseling for adolescents in the region. The authors conclude that there is an urgent need for culturally sensitive, school-based mental health interventions and greater involvement of teachers and parents to address the growing burden of stress among South Asian adolescents (K. Sharma, 2024)

**Debate:**

The thesis offers a comprehensive exploration of stress and stress management among adolescents in Kathmandu's boarding schools, highlighting the multifaceted sources and significant consequences of stress in this demographic. The study's use of Sheldon Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale and its focus on gender, age, and contextual factors provide valuable empirical insights into how relationship conflicts, academic pressures, environmental uncertainties, and personal habits contribute to adolescent stress. The thesis rightly emphasizes the urgency of addressing adolescent stress, given its links to mental health problems, academic underperformance, and long-term psychosocial dysfunction, and advocates for interventions such as stress management courses, school counseling, and extracurricular engagement to mitigate these risks.

However, while the thesis successfully underscores the severity of adolescent stress and its broad impacts, it could be critiqued for not sufficiently addressing the structural and systemic factors that perpetuate stress in school environments. For instance, the study acknowledges academic pressure and parental expectations but does not deeply analyze how educational policies, societal norms, and resource limitations within Nepalese schools exacerbate these stressors. Furthermore, the thesis's recommendations, though practical, may underestimate the challenges of implementation in contexts where mental health resources are scarce and stigma remains high. A more robust discussion of policy-level interventions, teacher training, and community engagement would strengthen the thesis's call for action, ensuring that stress management is not only an individual or school responsibility but a broader societal imperative

**Purpose of the Study**

1. To assess the prevalence of stress among adolescents in boarding schools in Kathmandu.
2. To identify the main factors contributing to stress among these adolescents, including relationship, academic, environmental, and personal factors.
3. To explore the stress management techniques currently used by adolescents in boarding schools.
4. To determine gender and age differences in stress levels and sources among school-going adolescents.

5. To inform health professionals, educators, and parents about the importance of addressing adolescent stress for better mental health and overall well-being.

## **Data Methods**

The study used a descriptive cross-sectional design. This means data was collected at a single point in time to describe and analyze the prevalence of stress, its associated factors, and stress management techniques among adolescents in selected boarding schools in Kathmandu. The study was conducted on a sample of 100 adolescents (45 female and 55 male) from New Summit Academy and New Era Academy, two boarding schools in Kathmandu. Bivariate analysis examines the relationship between two variables at a time. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to the selected students, who completed it based on their experiences and perceptions regarding stress and its management.

## **Results**

Bivariate analysis examines the relationship between two variables at a time. In this thesis, bivariate analysis is used to explore how stress levels (measured by the Perceived Stress Scale) are associated with various demographic and contextual factors among adolescents. It provides actionable insights for educators, counselors, and policymakers to design more effective interventions for adolescent stress management in boarding schools.

**Table 1 : Stress and Gender**

Gender	Low stress	Moderate	High Stress	Total
Male	10	35	10	55
Female	5	30	10	45
Total	15	65	20	100

## **Description and Interpretation**

This bivariate table examines the relationship between gender (male/female) and stress level (low, moderate, high) among adolescents in boarding schools. Moderate stress is the most common level for both males and females, with 35 males and 30 females reporting it. Both males and females have an equal number (10 each) experiencing high stress. A slightly higher number of males (10) than females (5) report low stress.

## **Findings**

The study found that stress is highly prevalent among adolescents in boarding schools in Kathmandu, with significant variations observed based on gender and age. Using Sheldon Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale, it was revealed that both male and female students experience moderate to high levels of stress, but females and older adolescents tend to report higher stress levels. The analysis identified four primary categories of stressors: relationship, academic, environmental, and personal factors. Among these, conflicts with classmates or dormmates emerged as the leading relationship-related cause of stress, while academic stress was most linked to low grades. Environmental stress was predominantly due to worries about the future, and personal stress was frequently associated with changes in sleeping habits.





The findings further highlight that the impact of stress on adolescents is profound, affecting their psychological well-being, academic performance, and overall quality of life. The study underscores that unmanaged stress can lead to more severe mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and psychosocial dysfunction, which may persist in adulthood if not addressed. To mitigate these risks, the thesis recommends the introduction of structured stress management courses, the provision of school counselors, and the promotion of extracurricular activities. These interventions, according to the study, should be prioritized by health professionals, educators, and parents to effectively reduce and prevent stress among adolescents, ensuring their healthy development and well-being.

Overall, the research emphasizes the urgent need for early identification and intervention regarding adolescent stress, particularly in boarding school environments where students may face additional pressures due to separation from family and increased academic demands. By addressing the key stressors and implementing targeted support systems, the study suggests that it is possible to significantly improve the mental health outcomes and resilience of adolescents during this critical stage of development.

## **Discussion**

Previous studies, both internationally and within Nepal, have consistently shown that stress is a widespread and escalating problem among adolescents. Research has identified academic pressure, lack of parental support, adjustment difficulties, and health problems as primary contributors to adolescent stress, especially in boarding school environments. These studies report that stress can lead to significant mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, and even increased risk of suicide. For example, global data suggests that about 20% of adolescents suffer from mental health issues, and the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression has been rising over time. National studies in Nepal echo these findings, with reports indicating that 17% of adolescents suffer from psychosocial dysfunction, often linked to stress and its related factors.

The present study corroborates these earlier findings, confirming that stress is highly prevalent among adolescents in Kathmandu's boarding schools. Using Sheldon Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale, the study found significant differences in stress levels based on gender and age, with relationship conflicts, academic struggles (particularly low grades), worries about the future, and changes in sleeping habits emerging as major stressors. Like previous research, this study highlights the profound impact of stress on adolescents' mental health and overall functioning. However, the present study adds to the literature by offering specific recommendations for stress management, such as introducing stress management courses, providing school counselors, and encouraging extracurricular activities. These targeted interventions reflect a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive, school-based approaches to adolescent mental health, a theme that is increasingly emphasized in both national and international research



## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that stress is highly prevalent among adolescents in Kathmandu's boarding schools, with significant differences observed by gender and age. Key stressors include relationship conflicts, academic pressures, environmental worries, and changes in personal habits, all of which negatively impact adolescents' well-being and academic performance. The research highlights the urgent need for effective stress management interventions such as counseling, stress management courses, and extracurricular activities to support the mental health and development of school-going adolescents.

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