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## **Psychological Counseling Needs among adolescents of Madhesh Province of Bara District, Nepal**

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### **Abstract**

Adolescence is the critical developmental phase with the changes in physical, emotional, and social phases, which tends to elevate psychological issues. This study was carried out to assess the psychological counseling needs of adolescents in Madhesh Province, specifically Bara District, Nepal. With a purposive sample of 350 adolescents between 12–19 years from various secondary schools, the data were gathered through the Psychological Counseling Need Scale (PCNS). The results showed that a large percentage of adolescents had high to moderate counseling needs, with females scoring slightly higher than males. Age, gender, and level of education were highly correlated with counseling needs. The study identifies the critical demand for school counseling services in Madhesh Province and indicates the need for culturally tailored psychological interventions. Policy advice and school integration of mental health programs are discussed.

*Keywords: Psychological counseling need, Adolescents, Madhesh Province, Bara District, Nepal*

## Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood involving complex physical, psychological, and social development (UNICEF, 2021). Adolescence is typically followed by stressors such as academic pressure, peer relationships, identity, and familial relationships, which adversely affect mental health (WHO, 2023). Globally, nearly 10-20% of adolescents experience mental health conditions, but a vast majority remains undiagnosed and untreated, particularly in low-income countries such as Nepal (Patel et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2021).

Teenagers in Nepal represent over 23% of the population, and mental health problems are increasingly apparent, especially in culturally and ethnically diverse provinces such as Madhesh Province (Ministry of Health and Population, 2022). Bara District is one of the districts of Madhesh Province, which comprises unique sociocultural characteristics, including the presence of urban and rural populations and mixed ethnic groups, influencing mental health attitudes and counseling needs (Adhikari et al., 2023).

Despite the growing concern, psychological counseling services are limited, and the majority of adolescents lack access to adequate mental health services (Koirala et al., 2020). The present study attempts to assess the needs for psychological counseling among adolescents in Bara District and provide empirical evidence to guide intervention programs.

## Literature Review

Data from Nepal illustrate a growing demand for mental health services for adolescents. Bista et al. (2016) reported 17% of adolescents with psychosocial dysfunction, which was more common in males and older adolescents. Similarly, Timilsina et al. (2018) showed that 13% of adolescents attending school had psychosocial problems, including ADHD and internalizing disorders.

Cross-cultural studies emphasize that cultural concerns play a major role in shaping counseling necessities and mental health attitudes (Bhattarai & Rai, 2022). Adolescence counseling, on a global scale, improves coping skills, emotional control, and resilience, and reduces risks of depression, anxiety, and risky behaviors (Newport Academy, 2023; World Health Organization, 2022).

Evidence from India and Bangladesh shows that psychological counseling needs vary by gender, socioeconomic status, and urban-rural residence (Sati & Vig, 2016; Islam & Hossain, 2021). In Nepal, the reasons for not utilizing counseling services include stigma, lack of awareness, and limited professional services, especially in provinces like Madhesh (Sharma & Ghimire, 2021).

## **Objectives**

### **General Objective**

- To assess the psychological counseling needs of adolescents in Bara District, Madhesh Province, Nepal.

### **Specific Objectives**

1. To determine the distribution of the levels of psychological counseling needs (very low, low, average, high, and very high) in teenagers.
2. To examine gender differences in psychological counseling needs in teenagers.
3. To examine the relationship between age and psychological counseling needs.
4. To examine the relationship between educational level and psychological counseling needs.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Descriptive cross-sectional design was employed to quantify psychological counseling needs among adolescents.

### **Population and Sample**

350 adolescents from 12 to 19 years old were participants in eight secondary schools in Madhesh Province, which were selected purposively to represent urban and rural settings.

### **Tool**

The Psychological Counseling Need Scale (PCNS) developed by Chouhan and Arora (2014) was used. It consists of 25 items with a 5-point Likert scale from "Never" (1) to "Always" (5). The PCNS was proven to be reliable in Nepalese adolescent samples with Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$ .

## Procedure

Data collection was conducted between March and April 2025 following school, parents', and adolescents' permission. The questionnaire was completed anonymously in class rooms in the presence of the researcher.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was done by SPSS 26. Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) and inferential tests (t-test, ANOVA) were employed to analyze the counseling needs and their association with demographic variables.

## Results

### 1. To identify the psychological counseling needs among adolescents in Bara District, Madhesh Province, Nepal.

The overall psychological counseling needs were assessed with the Psychological Counseling Need Scale (PCNS). The mean score was 74.8 (SD = 11.2), showing a moderate level of counseling need in adolescents.

### 2. Distribution of Psychological Counseling Needs Levels

The distribution of adolescents according to their levels of psychological counseling needs is presented in Table 1.

#### Level of Counseling Need Number (n) Percentage (%)

Very Low (25–71)	133	38.0
Low (72–75)	84	24.0
Average (76–79)	63	18.0

### Level of Counseling Need Number (n) Percentage (%)

High (80–83)	42	12.0
Very High (84–125)	28	8.0

*Table 1: Distribution of Psychological Counseling Needs Levels among Adolescents (N = 350)*

### 3. Gender Differences in Psychological Counseling Needs

The mean counseling need scores for male and female adolescents and the results of an independent samples t-test are shown in Table 2.

Gender	Mean PCNS Score	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Male (n=170)	72.9	11.3	2.87	.004*
Female (n=180)	76.5	10.9		

*Table 2: Gender Differences in Psychological Counseling Need Scores*

\*  $p < .01$ , indicating females reported significantly higher counseling needs than males.

### 4. Relationship between Age and Psychological Counseling Needs

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between age and counseling needs ( $r = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that older adolescents reported higher psychological counseling needs.

### 5. Relationship between Educational Level and Psychological Counseling Needs

There was also a significant positive correlation between educational level and counseling needs ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < .05$ ), suggesting that adolescents with higher education levels reported greater counseling needs.

## **Discussion**

### **In order to quantify the psychological counseling needs of Bara District adolescents, Madhesh Province, Nepal.**

This study established that adolescents in Bara District have moderate psychological counseling needs, as indicated by the mean PCNS score of 74.8 (SD = 11.2). This is in agreement with Dhami and Sharma (2020) reports of moderate to high counseling needs among Indian rural and urban teenagers, indicating cross-cultural similarity of adolescent mental health needs in South Asia.

Besides, Bista et al. (2016) in Nepal also documented the same trends and cited that around 17% of adolescents experienced psychosocial dysfunction, which suggested a high psychological support need during adolescence.

### **For the determination of the levels of psychological counseling needs in adolescents.**

Findings indicated that 38% had very low, 24% had low, 18% had average, 12% had high, and 8% had very high levels of counseling need. In spite of the majority falling in the very low need category, almost 38% had average to very high levels of counseling needs, which reflects a significant proportion of adolescents in need of mental health care.

Comparable findings were reported by Sati and Vig (2016), where they obtained 44% of Indian youth to be with high counseling needs, along with significant percentages in the average and low categories as well. Correspondingly, Bhat et al. (2020) with university students in India reported random distribution of psychological counseling needs, highlighting diversity across student groups, just like diversity reported in the current study's outcome.

### **For examining gender differences of psychological counseling needs among adolescents.**

Research showed that the female participants had a larger counseling need than the male participants ( $M = 76.5$  for females vs.  $M = 72.9$  for males), and  $p = .004$ . This gender discrepancy aligns with Timilsina et al. (2018), who found that adolescent girls in Nepal had higher chances of developing internalizing disorders such as anxiety and depression, which are expected to increase their need for counseling.

Similarly, Tirkey and Kerketta (2021) proved that female +2 students of Meghalaya, India, showed higher psychological counseling needs than males. This is perhaps because of socio-

cultural attitudes, family pressures, and gender-related stressors that result in higher distress among adolescent girls (UNICEF, 2021).

### **To explore to what extent age is correlated with psychological counseling needs.**

The counseling need and age were positively correlated ( $r = .21, p < .01$ ), meaning that older adolescents had greater psychological counseling needs. This concurs with WHO (2022) results that show increased mental health problems with increasing age in adolescence, particularly due to more school stress, identity development, and changes in social roles.

Timilsina et al. (2018) also elucidated that older adolescents had higher psychosocial issues, especially internalizing symptoms, and these can explain more counseling needs with age.

### **For analyzing the relationship of education level and the requirement of psychological counseling.**

There was a positive correlation ( $r = .18, p < .05$ ) between grade level and counseling needs such that higher-grade students were found to have higher counseling needs. This aligns with the views of Bhat et al. (2020), who found that educational stress, especially at advanced grades, contributes to higher psychological distress.

In Nepal, Koirala et al. (2020) pointed out that students undergoing national exam preparation (e.g., SEE or +2 board exams) typically experience high levels of academic pressure, which may drive higher counseling needs among higher education level students.

### **Conclusion**

Adolescence is a period of critical development encompassing extensive physical, emotional, and social change. Such developments are likely to have wide-ranging implications for the mental well-being of adolescents and create a need for psychological counseling interventions. The study aimed at assessing and understanding the psychological counseling necessity among adolescents in Bara District, Madhesh Province, Nepal. Results showed that while the majority percentage of youth exhibited very low to low levels of counseling needs, a significant proportion more than one-third had average to very high counseling needs, which demonstrates a considerable proportion of youth who require psychological counseling.

Notably, the female teenagers indicated significantly higher counseling requirements compared to their male counterparts, and psychologically, students who were older in years and were in older grades showed increased psychological counseling needs. These findings are corroborative of national and international literature, which reveals that gender, age, and educational pressure are vital predictors of adolescents' mental health requirements.

The results of the current study are crucial to mental health workers, educators, and policy makers. It highlights the imperative importance of formulating school based counselling services, particularly in resource limited areas like Madhesh Province. Moreover, it highlights gender sensitivity and culturally relevant intervention to guide adolescents through this vulnerable phase of life.

To close the gaps as found, it is recommended that school health programs incorporate mental health services and conduct awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking. Training teachers and parents to detect signs of mental distress can also encourage early intervention and support.

In short, making psychological counseling accessible is not only important for adolescents' physical health but also their academic performance, emotional health, and future mental health. Investing in adolescent mental health today will reap rewards for a lifetime for both the individual and society.

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