

**SELF-ESTEEM, STRESS, AND UTILIZATION OF COUNSELLING SERVICES  
AMONGST SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN JINJA CITY**

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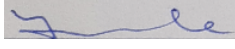
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## Declaration

I, Mande Dennis, declare this research report as my original work that has never been submitted for the award of any qualification at any university, and all the information contained herein is based on my original work.

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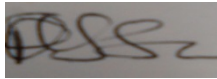
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## Approval

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this report to the administration of Amazima Ministries International for their exceptional understanding and assistance during my whole education year. May God richly bless them.

## Acknowledgement

I thank the Almighty God for His kindness and love which enabled me to complete this research dissertation by giving me the bravery, knowledge, and good health I needed. Praise and honour belong to Him.

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## Abstract

The study focused on studying self-esteem, stress and utilization of counselling services amongst secondary school students in Jinja City and was guided by objectives, namely, to find out the level of self-esteem amongst secondary school students in Jinja City, establish the level of stress amongst secondary school students, determine the relationship between self-esteem, stress and utilization of counselling services amongst secondary school students and examine the role of counsellors in helping students in Jinja City secondary schools deal with stress. The study approach was explanatory sequential mixed method, and a cross-sectional design was used. Using both questionnaires and interview guides, data was collected from a sample size of 353 respondents who were selected using simple random and purposive sampling. Of these, 346 were students and 7 were counsellors.

The study found that largely students had good self-esteem; students were averagely stressed; Counselling Services Utilization was positively correlated with self-esteem ( $r=.46$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and negatively correlated with stress ( $r=-.35$ ,  $p<0.01$ ); while stress was negatively correlated with self-esteem ( $r=-.23$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). And finally, the study also found that counsellors help students cope with problems, provide a safe environment for the students to air out their challenges without being judged, help students by showing them how to avoid problems and recommend students for medical treatment. In conclusion, students had an average amount of self-esteem but with a significant amount of stress that could be attributed to their academic needs and other life challenges. However, counsellors are in a position to help them deal with the various challenges they face, and therefore, it was recommended that schools ensure that they employ professional counsellors to ensure quality counselling services, as this will help in improving the utilization of the services.

## **Chapter one**

### **1.0 Introduction**

The study concentrated on secondary school students' usage of counselling, stress, and self-esteem. It determined the degree of stress, self-esteem, and the function of counsellors in assisting students in managing their stress.

### **1.1 Background to the study**

Around the world, more than 20% of students and teens struggle with mental health issues. This covers issues with anxiety, sadness, and stress. These impact low or high self-esteem, and consequently, individuals experiencing such challenges often forfeit many opportunities, and yet the repercussions can have long-term effects (Delaney and Smith, 2012). The victims' capacity to engage in relationships, employment, and education is impacted by issues related to self-esteem and stress. Self-esteem and stress related issues may continue throughout adulthood if they are not effectively addressed. Specifically for students, experiencing stress and low self-esteem can lead to a decreased level of concentration in class, maladaptive behaviours, and ultimately difficulty remaining in school. Gronbaek and Holm (2011) asserted that the concern about mental health is more prevalent among individuals living in poverty, those deemed vulnerable, and individuals living with disabilities. Additionally, most children and young adults facing stress and low self-esteem challenges come from low- and middle-income countries. Regrettably, in these nations, challenges with mental health are hardly recognised or often not diagnosed correctly, and because of this, they often go untreated.

People with disabilities, the poor, and the underprivileged are more prone to experience stress and low self-esteem. Additionally, the vast majority of children and adolescents who have mental health problems such as low self-esteem originate from low- and middle-income countries, where these problems are regrettably infrequently recognised and commonly misinterpreted, resulting in their untreated status (Egenti, 2016).

According to Milojevich and Lukowski (2016), there is an increasing concern regarding stress and low self-esteem issues among students globally. The two stipulate that perhaps this is happening because of a rise in documented cases related to mental health in adolescents. In contrast to previous years when the issue appears to be growing out of hand, there were reportedly less incidents of mental health issues among students in the past that were documented. However, it is unclear whether or not the students are asking for and receiving treatment. A study by Castillo and Schwartz (2013) found that mostly the female students reported being more anxious and stressed and having more suicidal thoughts as compared to men.

According to UNICEF (2015), children and adolescents make up over 57% of Uganda's population, however their mental health needs are frequently ignored. Unmet mental health requirements in children and adolescents can have detrimental, long-lasting, or difficult-to-adapt effects on their psychological and emotional development. A significant portion of Ugandan youngsters have been victims of loss, physical or sexual abuse, or psychological trauma. These are often associated with poverty or AIDS (Cacola, 2016). According to Feld and Shusterman

(2015), students express their psychological discomfort in various ways that include stress, anxiety, depression, eating disorder and sleeping disorders.

Despite the fact that children's and young adults' mental health services are in high need, Uganda does not have proper protocols for planning and implementing such programmes, or educating and collaborating with key stakeholders (Nalugya et al., 2016). This situation puts students at risk of suffering without effective intervention. Counsellors and social workers can be very instrumental in helping students deal with distressing events, as suggested by Arslan et al. (2016), that seeking help from someone is not a bad thing.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Students are susceptible to stress and low self-esteem due to insufficient physical, mental, and social growth and development (Egenti, 2016). A number of times students in many Ugandan schools have been reported to be stressed or even develop a low self-esteem due to erroneous perceptions about their body shape, physical appearance, ability to perform tasks given to them and their identity. Students in Ugandan schools face challenges integrating into school and other development programs because of being distressed and with a low self-esteem. Therefore, because of this, students experiencing stress all the time and with a low self-esteem have fewer chances of developing to full capability and are likely to have challenges associated with the conditions that they have if they reach adult life without any sort of intervention provided (Egenti, 2016). One of the known ways of dealing with stress and low self-esteem issues is counselling; however, many students do not utilise the services for a number of reasons, such as ignorance, inaccessibility, negative attitude, among others (Adelman & Taylor, 2019). A poll

conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with participation from 72 countries included 540,000 students aged 15 to 16. Overall, 59% of students in OECD countries reported that they regularly worried about finding a test difficult, and 66% of students stated they were worried about receiving poor grades (OECD, 2017). Ignoring students' psychosocial needs might result in a generation of mental health problems, which is why appropriate intervention is necessary. Based on this, therefore, the researcher sought to study self-esteem, stress and utilization of counselling services by students in secondary schools in Jinja City.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The study aimed at studying self-esteem, stress and utilization of counselling services amongst secondary school students in Jinja City.

### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

- i. To find out the level of self-esteem amongst secondary school students in Jinja City.
- ii. To establish the level of stress amongst secondary school students in Jinja City.
- iii. To determine the relationship between self-esteem, stress and utilization of counselling services amongst secondary school students in Jinja City.
- iv. To examine the role of counsellors in helping students in Jinja City secondary schools deal with stress.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

- i. What is the level of self-esteem amongst secondary school students in Jinja City?

- ii. What is the level of stress among secondary school students in Jinja City?
- iii. What is the relationship between self-esteem, stress and utilization of counselling services by Jinja City secondary school students?
- iv. What is the role of counsellors in helping students in Jinja City secondary schools deal with stress?

## **1.6 Scope of the study**

### **1.6.1 Geographical scope**

The study was carried out in Jinja City, which is found in the Busoga region. The Busoga region is found in the Eastern region of Uganda. Considering distance from Uganda's capital city, Jinja city is 89 km using the road from Kampala.

### **1.6.2 Content scope**

This study focused on finding out students' level of self-esteem, stress, the relationship between self-esteem, stress and utilization of counselling services and the role of counsellors in helping students deal with self-esteem and stress.

### **1.6.3 Time scope**

This study mainly used literature that was at least not more than 10 years old. The researcher mainly asked respondents to respond based on their experience over the last two years.

## **1.7 Justification**

Being a student comes with a number of tasks and responsibilities, some of which seem to be challenging for the students. More, secondary school students are normally at the adolescence life stage, which is so challenging for many. Therefore, there exists high tension and stress that comes with the stage that, if not dealt with

properly, the students may end up with various psychological issues such as behavioural issues and/or low self-esteem (Nikitha, Jose & Valsaraj, 2014). Nonetheless, teenage mental health and development are significantly influenced by self-esteem. This is due to the fact that a variety of social and psychological outcomes, including melancholy, anxiety, suicide, early sexual participation, and drug use, are linked to low self-esteem. How students deal with these discomforts is an issue that needed to be studied because if they keep facing these mental issues without a clear way of dealing with them, they may end up with severe mental problems.

### **1.8 Significance**

The study and its findings will be of importance to the following stakeholders:

The Ministry of Education and Sport will be informed by the study's findings about the connection between stress, self-esteem, and counselling service use. The government will have the authority to choose whether school counselling should be prioritised.

The study's conclusions will also help school authorities understand the function of counsellors in the classroom. This may be used when determining whether to employ a school counsellor. Counsellors would help students struggling with various life challenges, hence being in a position to manage/control stress and improve their self-esteem.

Other scholars and researchers will utilise the study's findings as literature for their own research. Researchers who are interested in stress, self-esteem, and the utilisation of counselling services may find the study's findings most useful as literature.

## 1.9 Theoretical framework

### The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

The transactional model of stress and coping, as articulated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), is a paradigm that recognises a dynamic, reciprocal, bidirectional relationship between the environment and the self. According to this idea, stress results from the interaction of both factors rather than being determined independently. In the researcher's view, stress is a combination of both the person and the environment. The construct of stress is of heuristic nature and cannot be the lone measurable indicator (Hill, 2012). For this matter, therefore, since stress is a result of the interaction between an individual and their surroundings, it is comprised of a set of cognitive, affective and coping components. According to this model, there are a number of elements that determine how stressful an individual will consider the experience. This may include the individual's abilities or capacities, the available resources that the individual can access in their environment, and the standards which "define" the individual's ease of utilizing available resources. Hill (2012) refers to the individual's response to the situation as their coping behaviour. Therefore, different students can interpret various situations in their lives differently depending on a variety of components, such as the kind of support they have, their prior experiences and the kind of beliefs they have.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), when looking at psychological stress, there is a need to focus and emphasize cognitive appraisal. This needs to be centred around an assessment of harm, threat and challenge. While conducting the appraisal, it is not done solely on the environment but rather with the blend of each

factor in one's experience. Lazarus and Folkman go on to assert that the perception of an individual facing a threat is a subjective assessment specific to a specific individual with specific psychological traits. Once students feel threatened, harmed, or challenged, they get stressed, feel helpless, and become vulnerable. Additionally, this study establishes the role of counsellors in assisting students with stress management.

A fundamental aspect of this model is the process known as the "unfolding of events." Lazarus and Folkman (1984) demonstrate that the emotional status of an individual is not stationary. Peoples' emotional lives keep on changing, which is also true with the environment in which people live. When facing a challenge, peoples' emotions express what is occurring. Indeed, this is also true with students that are stressed. When stressed, one may feel anxious which, may also interchange to being angry, guilty and/or loving and joyful.

### **Sociometer theory**

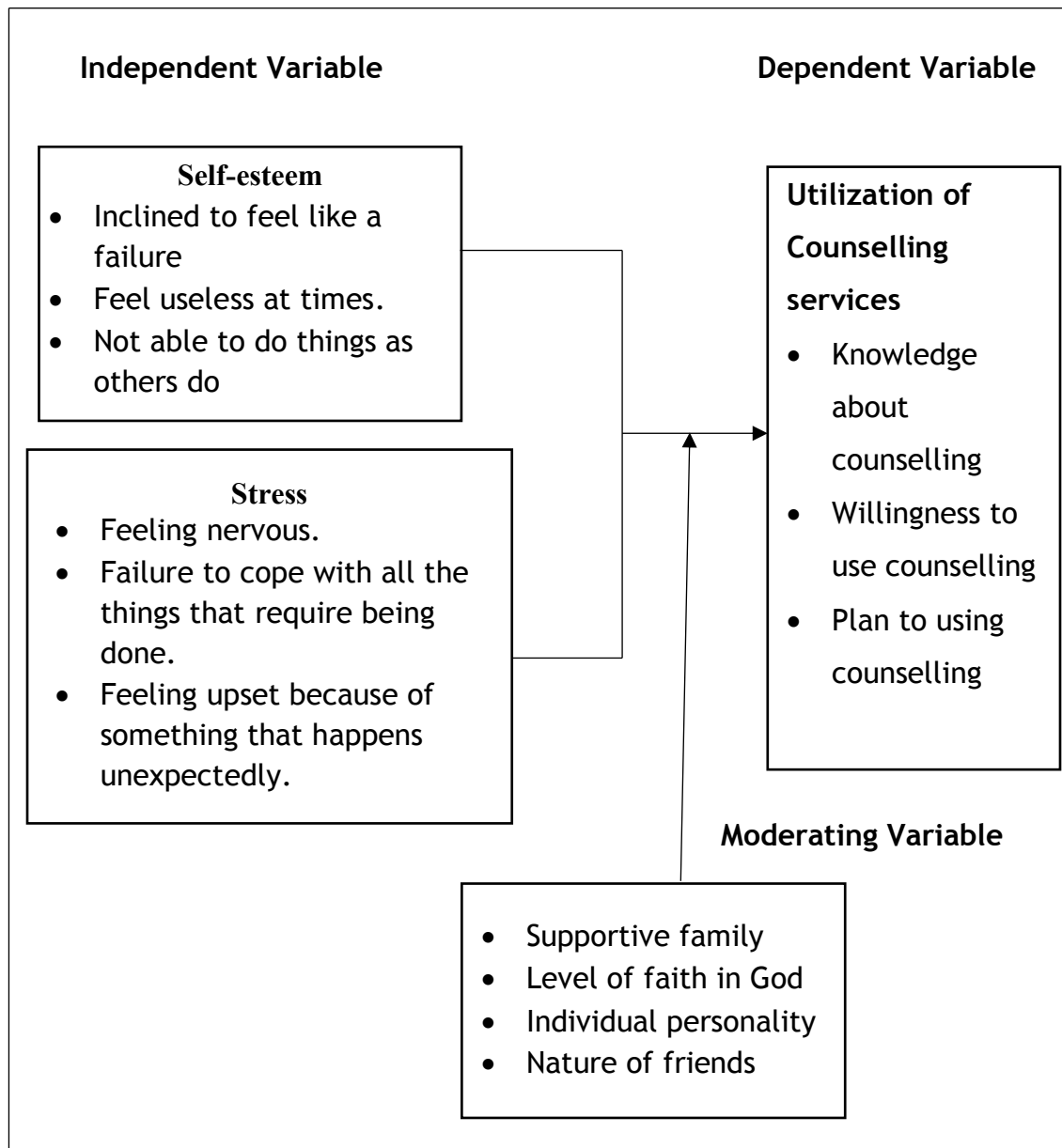
Sociometer theory is a self-esteem theory which was initially explored by Mark Leary in 1995; however, it was later studied in further detail by Kirkpatrick and Ellis (Leary & Downs, 1995). Psychological phenomena such as interpersonal and Self-serving biases, rejection responses, and intrapersonal behaviours led to the sociometer theory's implementation as a response.

The idea holds that self-esteem is a measure of one's efficacy in relationships and social interactions that monitors other people's acceptance or rejection. For the sake of students, one would look at how they relate with their peers and those in authority, such as the parents and teachers. With this in mind, therefore, a lot of pressure is put on relational value. In this case, relational value is considered to be

the degree to which an individual looks at his or her interaction with others, and its impact upon their everyday life. For instance, it is important to consider how the student's relationships with others affect their wellbeing both in and out of school. Research by scholars reveals that people that are considered to be having relational value are likely to feel a greater sense of self-esteem (Cameron et al, 2017).

The theory proposes that self-esteem is a guide to establish the quality of one's immediate and future relationships. This implies that the types of relationships students currently have reflect their levels of self-esteem. Furthermore, self-esteem evaluates both types of interactions based on their relational appreciation. Some people may see and value their relationships with the person in this way. Relational devaluation is the result of negative disparities in an individual's relational appraisal. According to Leary et al. (2000), belongingness is a kind of relationship devaluation; a negative alternation enables the sociometer gauge to highlight these risks, producing emotional distress to act in order to regain relational appreciation and balance in the person's self-esteem.

## 1.10 Conceptual Framework



*Source: Developed by author (2023)*

Students in secondary school who have poor self-esteem are prone to feel inadequate at times, like failures, and incapable of performing tasks that others can perform. The students therefore may end up not concentrating in class, they may feel nervous which may affect their academic performance as well as their psychosocial wellbeing. Further the students that are stressed may feel nervous, fail to cope with all the things that require being done and may be upset because of

something that happens unexpectedly. These however can be influenced by the nature of support they get from their families, their level of faith in God, individual personality and the nature of friends they have. The students that utilize counselling are most likely to exhibit a positive attitude towards self, satisfied with self and less likely to feel useless at times. Further, such students may barely struggle with feeling nervous, failing to cope with all the things that require being done and feeling upset because of something that happens unexpectedly.

## Chapter Two

### Review of Related Literature

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter includes a review of the literature on stress, self-esteem, and the use of counselling services from books and periodicals. The chapter primarily addresses students' self-esteem and stress levels, as well as the relationship between these factors and the usage of counselling services.

#### 2.1 Self-esteem amongst students

According to Yanti et al. (2021), a person's attitude towards oneself, whether good or negative, is a measure of their self-esteem. On the contrary, it might be viewed as a trait of self-liking or disliking. Students' positive or negative assessment of their own worth and skills might be considered their self-esteem in a school context (Yanti et al., 2021).

Teenagers frequently struggle with mental health issues, including low self-esteem (Sadaat, Ghasemzadeh & Soleimani, 2022). According to research by Sadaat, Ghasemzadeh, and Soleimani (2022), 87.4% of youth had poor self-esteem, and strong self-esteem was the psychological need that they ranked highest. A number of factors have been noticed to be influencing students' self-esteem, and these include biological, psychological, environmental, cultural and family factors alongside interpersonal experiences that they have to deal with.

Low self-esteem amongst students has been linked to a decline in academic performance, substance abuse, avoidance of reality and self-destructive behaviours (Vialle, Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2015). Self-esteem is a person's overall subjective

emotional assessment of their own value, which includes their confidence in their ability to think clearly, their rights to success and happiness, their need or desire for expression, their ability to handle difficulties, their sense of competence, and their enjoyment of the fruits of their own labour (Vialle, Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2015). Having high self-esteem commonly brings about having high expectations.

Students with high self-esteem are more confident than those with low self-esteem, which suggests that the former can more easily accomplish their goals and realise self-actualization (Allison, Eva, & Rodney, 2022). Largely, self-esteem has a number of dimensions, namely social, academic, physical, family and general dimensions. Considering academic dimensions, when a student identifies himself as being consistent with the desired self-esteem criteria and satisfies his academic accomplishment standards, it has a strong academic effect on his individual self-esteem (Allison, Eva & Rodney, 2022). Students with stronger self-esteem are frequently rated as having superior educational standing.

Self-esteem has become widely used, according to studies by Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2023). Because they think that having a strong feeling of self-worth will result in a number of positive outcomes and benefits, educators, parents, therapists, and others have focused their efforts on boosting self-esteem. This concept is examined severely in this work on the evaluation of the effects of self-esteem is complicated by a number of aspects. Since many people with high self-esteem exaggerate their accomplishments and good traits, we lay a major focus on objective measurements of results. High self-esteem is a notion that encompasses both those who freely embrace their positive attributes and those who are egocentric, defensive, and pretentious. The modest correlations between self-

esteem and academic success do not imply that strong self-esteem causes better performance. Rather, a strong sense of self-worth is a result of performing well in school. According to the study, raising students' self-esteem may even have the opposite effect of raising their academic success.

Teenagers with strong self-esteem do not necessarily abstain from drinking, smoking, taking drugs, or even having sex too young. Strong self-esteem, on the other hand, can promote experimentation, which could eventually increase the risk of students engaging in early drinking or sex. The benefits of having a high sense of self-worth may be roughly categorised into two categories: more initiative and happier feelings.

As of right now, there is little evidence that boosting self-esteem will eventually lead to benefits (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2023). The idea that better results will only occur when pupils' self-esteem is increased on its own was not supported by research findings. Unchecked praise may just as easily promote narcissism, which has less positive results, given the variety of high self-esteem. In order to boost self-esteem, Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2023) propose that praise be utilised as a reward for socially acceptable conduct and self-improvement.

Many educators consider the connection between academic success and self-esteem to be a well-established reality (Vialle, Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2015). This idea has frequently been used to argue against gifted pupils being placed in ability groups. This study disproved that widely accepted notion by analysing the connection between academic success and self-esteem in 65 high-ability secondary students, a sample taken from a longitudinal study of more than 900 students. The

study found no difference in the measured levels of self-esteem between gifted and non-gifted children. However, the study found no connection between self-esteem and academic achievement, especially for the brilliant group (Vialle, Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2025).

## **2.2 Stress amongst students**

On several occasions students lack or have low levels of self-confidence, and this causes them to doubt their abilities and obsessively fear failing their exams, which eventually causes stress and/or anxiety. The education environment of late has turned out to be so competitive, and among the elements influencing students' achievement are social media, family time, and interpersonal interactions (Likisia, 2018). Recent research established that the primary source of pupils' stress is the subject content. According to 27% of students, they usually had challenges agreeing the material. The intermediate problem, according to 18% of students, is the seemingly excessive amount of schoolwork. Approximately 17% of students reported feeling stressed out by challenging exam questions and their encounters with uninteresting, irritable, and impatient professors. Homework ranks as the For 15% of students, the fourth most frequent cause of stress (Fathiyah, 2022).

Each student reacts differently to challenging situations; stress may be advantageous if they aim to overcome academic obstacles and view them as opportunities (Sang et al., 2018); if not, it is the most common stressor that can have a detrimental effect on students' mental health (Barbayannis et al., 2022). Both students and academics should be aware of the common symptoms of stress. Lethargy, elevated blood pressure, sadness, increased desires, anxiety, restlessness,

distractibility, and tension are all symptoms of primarily stressed students (Chua et al., 2018).

Numerous physical symptoms, such as increased heart rate, hypertension, rapid breathing, elevated adrenal hormones, migraines, excessive perspiration, uncontrollably shaking, physical pains, changes in weight, and irregular sleep patterns, are indicative of academic stress (de la Fuente et al., 2020). According to Garrett et al. (2017a), it also impacts cognitive processes such as negative thinking, stress perception, despair, frustration, anxiety, guilt, and restlessness. These can lead to behaviours like substance abuse, violence, self-harm, and unnecessary crying.

When students feel driven and enthusiastic about achieving academic achievement, they experience positive stress, often known as "eustress" as psychologists do. Students that go through this type of stress are more likely to receive good grades. Up to a point, stress can improve performance; beyond that, it may have a detrimental effect on an individual's capacity to function well (Rowland and van Lankveld 2019). Students can benefit from short-term stress since it improves memory, particularly during exams (Yaribeygi et al., 2017). Additionally, mild stress can strengthen the body's defences against infections, wounds, and other ailments by strengthening the immune system (Dhabhar, 2018). According to Kenwright (2018), eustress is a crucial element of satisfaction and a motivator that encourages students to behave.

However, stress turns into a reason for concern when it surpasses a modest level. It occurs when pupils' academic demands outweigh their capacity and resources. Severe academic stress is linked to poor mental health, regardless of

gender, position, race, or academic rank (Barbayannis et al., 2022). Education stress exacerbates the symptoms of worry and hopelessness, which hinders academic achievement. Students' academic performance and general quality of life are significantly impacted by depressive symptoms brought on by stress at home and in the classroom (Deng et al., 2022). Students' physical health is also significantly impacted by stress, mostly resulting in weakness and exhaustion (Musabiq et al., 2020).

Students who were under stress were more likely to eat prepared meals and fast food, among other harmful foods (Choi, 2020). Excessive academic stress not only negatively affects mental health by resulting in anxiety, depression, and poor academic performance, but it also has a substantial effect on physical health by creating problems including headaches, stomachaches, lack of appetite, and fatigue (Deng et al., 2022). Additionally, academic stress impairs academic performance and self-esteem, delays deadlines, increases alcohol use, diminishes academic motivation, and increases absenteeism and college dropout rates (Gobena, 2024). Scholars have demonstrated a high correlation between academic stress and mental and physical health (Travis et al., 2020).

It is not impossible to handle or deal with academic stress. To deal with the stress, each kid creates their own coping strategies. While some students choose to run away from difficulties in order to escape them, others devote all of their time and energy to solving them (Kenwright, 2018). Stress-coping strategies include behavioural, psychological, cognitive, and physiological approaches to stress management (Kassymova et al., 2018a). Experts have created a variety of stress-

reduction methods. One of the most crucial strategies for managing stress is to identify the sources of it (Deng et al., 2022).

Support from friends, family, and loved ones is essential for enhancing psychological well-being and reducing depressive symptoms among stressed students (Alsubaie et al., 2019). Stress, anxiety, and depression are among the mental health conditions that students who have less social support are more likely to experience (Guo et al., 2021). Students' emphasis moves from their parents to their peers during their study tenure, and friends start to play a bigger role in providing social support than family. Students' academic stress levels are strongly inversely correlated with social support (Kugbey, 2015).

Students who feel supported are better able to control their stress levels and protect themselves from a variety of psychological problems (Camara et al., 2024). Social support lessens mental fatigue and improves education performance by growing students' self-esteem (Li et al., 2018). Perceived friend support and perceived social support from a specific person also reduce the likelihood of academic failure, which decreases the student dropout rate (Tinajero et al., 2020). By fostering a consciousness of refuge and belonging, interpersonal support enhances students' ability to manage stress and function as a buffer for education stress.

One of the best coping mechanisms for students to lessen academic stress is to adopt healthy lifestyle practices, such as eating a balanced diet, exercising frequently, getting enough sleep, and abstaining from dangerous drugs. These activities improve students' physical and mental health outcomes now and in the

future, while also improving academic performance and lowering stress (Sanchez-Hernando et al., 2021).

Students' physical, mental, and emotional health as well as their academic performance are significantly impacted by academic stress, which can reach dangerously high levels. Assessing stress is essential to avoiding unwanted consequences as soon as possible. Psychological instruments such as interviews and self-report questionnaires are frequently used by researchers to gauge students' stress levels (Jimenez-Mijangos et al., 2023b).

According to Anjali, Renu and Veenu Wadhwa (2019), in a study titled “Stress among students: An emerging issue”, stress is very unavoidable in every area of life and is a physiological as well as psychological imbalance. An individual tends to experience stress when confronted with a multitude of unmet demands. Stress can turn out to be either negative or positive depending on the persistence of an individual, their cognitive appraisal, and the social support available for that particular person. This therefore implies that students need to be attended to by parents, teachers, and counsellors through stress coping skills for their better wellbeing and future.

In their investigation of the relationship between college students' academic stress and chronic stress, Pozos et al. (2014) found that children and young people have occasionally experienced the onset of somatic episodes due to the demands of modern living. Consequently, pupils' academic performance is adversely impacted by the interaction between endogenous and external expectations.

According to Ahrberg et al. (2012), although the prevalence is unclear, stress and other factors can have an influence on sleep quality, which in turn has a significant effect on students' psychological health. This challenge is even made worse with the continuous health distresses, impaired attention and concentration, fatigue, and depression, as well as poor school performance.

According to Leonard et al. (2015), academic stress can increase young people's desire to use or misuse drugs and other substances. Students who reported higher levels of stress regarding their academic performance and admission to post-secondary education also reported using drugs and other substances, according to a study done on 128 grade 11 academicians in attendance of contending private schools in the US (Leonard et al., 2015). According to the authors, students' desires for "better academic achievement, higher perceived stress, less effective coping strategies, and less closeness with parents" are closely linked to drug and substance use.

### **2.3 Relationship between self-esteem, stress and utilization of counselling services**

There are several connections between stress and self-esteem. Stressful situations impact a person's sense of self, and a person's sense of self influences how they respond to and manage stress. As people age, their self-esteem may decline (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2023). This is due to disturbances of the HPA axis and elevated levels of diurnal cortisol secretion. An older person's ability to cope with stress is hampered when their sense of self-worth deteriorates because they lose psychological and emotional resources. As a result, a person is more likely to experience a decline in self-esteem as they become older, which increases their

vulnerability to stress and depression. Higher levels of self-esteem, on the other hand, can protect elderly individuals against the negative effects of stress and hopelessness. Self-esteem is undoubtedly connected to life satisfaction and quality of life, and it has a direct relationship with both mental and physical health.

While specifics inevitably vary from college to school, the services provided for mental health requirements comprise career counselling, mental health services, women's centres, wellness resource centres, mental health services, disability services, general health care, and programs for teaching people about alcohol and other drugs. Many factors, such as perceived risk, stigma, insurance, living on or off campus, and knowing how to use resources, impact students' decision to seek on-campus help for mental health difficulties (D'Amico et al., 2016). According to D'Amico et al. (2016), just 13% of students with any mental health condition, including depression (16%) and low self-esteem (18%), use counselling services on campus, despite data showing that up to 93% of students are aware of mental health services. Since most other estimates of college student utilisation rates combine off-campus and on-campus services, it is difficult to evaluate the impact of specific on-campus initiatives. There seems to be variation in the overall use of mental health services by disorder, gender, and race/ethnicity. In particular, use varies substantially based on the type of therapy that the individual may be experiencing.

For all health issues, including therapy, women are known to use more services than men and, in the end, receive more treatment (Rowland and van Lankveld, 2019). Comparatively, students from low-income families and rural schools have been found to report more obstacles to counselling, receive less treatment, and seek fewer counseling-related services than students from

international schools and wealthy families. This discrepancy may be explained by the fact that people from wealthy homes tend to be more forceful and have a greater grasp of therapy than people from modest and rural origins. As a result, the majority of students do not seek treatment for mental health issues, and little is known about how and where they do so. It is also unclear if the previously identified patterns in the individuals who are more likely to use resources are still present when only looking at on-campus services. It is crucial to monitor on-campus service utilisation in relation to particular mental health issues and risk factors in order to assist students in receiving the assistance they require (Rowland and van Lankveld, 2019).

Stress in early life, brought on by neglect and abuse, raises the risk that a kid may suffer from depression in later life and diminishes his feeling of self-worth and the stable relationship he has with his parents (Suzuki & Tomoda, 2018). Maltreatment, parental sickness and death, and psychopathic behaviours are all considered stressful experiences in this study. All of these elements support insecurity and avoidant and ambivalent behaviour. Students who have gone through these traumatic experiences therefore have low self-respect and may exhibit symptoms of depression. Additionally, individuals with poor self-respect react more negatively to a variety of stressful events; their hippocampus volume is decreased and their blood cortisol release is elevated (Suzuki & Tomoda, 2018).

Vialle, Heaven, and Ciarrochi (2025) claim that emotional pressures appear to be linked to low self-esteem. Mood disorders, sadness, stress, and low self-esteem have all been linked in several research. In particular, a study by Vialle, Heaven, and Ciarrochi (2025) discovered a connection between low self-worth and mental

strain and natural depression. All of the are danger causes for the onset of depression because of their incapacity to manage and regulate stressful life events.

Furthermore, a separate study by Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2023) suggests that having good stress, anxiety, and depression management skills likely result to higher levels of confidence and self-respect. According to the study, anxiety directly contributes to the explanation of depression variation, but stress and self-esteem may both directly and indirectly contribute to the explanation of depression variance by heightening anxiety. In fact, long-term stressors are more prone to experience anxiety and sadness, and a strong feeling of self-worth seems to provide protection against these disorders. Therefore, the degree of stress experienced is the only way that self-esteem indirectly explains the variance in natural depression; for example, stress has "its own power" to influence depression and explains a far larger percentage of the variance in saddening experiences than self-respect (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2023). Students must consequently use counselling services as a means of managing their mental health in order to deal with stress and sadness.

Additionally, because they are more likely to react to negative events with depressive attributions, their self-worth tends to decrease when they fail, and they are more concerned with protecting themselves under pressure, are more prone to experience anxiety and sadness, and a strong feeling of self-worth seems to provide protection against these disorders. They also find it difficult to improve their poor emotions and tend to overestimate the negative consequences of stressful situations. Because they can make it harder for students to cope and because those perceptions only serve to reinforce the initial negative biases, stressors that are

perceived as threatening and uncontrollable can exacerbate the effects of these maladaptive reactions to stressful situations (Vialle, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 25).

According to the discourse framework of stress and coping, self-respect is thought to be connected to stress adaption via altering how stress assessments affect adaptational outcomes. According to Jimenez-Mijangos et al. (2023b), self-esteem and daily stressor assessments significantly interact. More precisely, people with high self-esteem felt that negative stressor assessments had less of a negative impact on their everyday bad affect. According to Jimenez-Mijangos et al. (2023b), when those with high self-esteem thought their day's most stressful occurrence was more threatening, they tended to have lower future negative affect. Lastly, stress has a damaging effect on a person's sense of self regardless of whether they are depressed. On the other hand, depression brought on by poor self-esteem increases the likelihood of stressful situations.

Students with strong self-esteem seem to be less stressed than those with poor self-esteem and high stress levels (Deng et al., 2022). Three main categories of stress-related characteristics were studied by Deng et al. (2022): lifestyle, self-esteem, and subjective psychosocial situations of adolescents. The study's findings support the notion that a sizable portion of high school students—particularly female students—experience psychological stress.

Additionally, it has been demonstrated that students who experience high levels of stress are more likely than their less stressed counterparts to experience sleep issues, feel worse about themselves, and place a greater emphasis on their performance. Compared to their male counterparts, female students reported feeling more pressurised and had more difficulty sleeping, as well as significantly

greater stress symptoms, lower global self-esteem, and higher performance-based self-esteem. Academic procrastination is also linked to coping mechanisms, active planning, self-efficacy, academic self-esteem, and biochemical avoidant coping with stress, claim Vialle, Heaven, and Ciarrochi (2025).

According to Suzuki & Tomoda (2018), students frequently experience significant stress, increased anxiety, and a decrease in self-esteem because According to Vialle, Heaven, and Ciarrochi (2025), academic procrastination is also associated with coping skills, active planning, self-respect, academic self-respect, and biochemical avoidant cope with stress of life alteration. Students frequently exhibit distress symptoms at this critical transitional time as they learn to cope with the demands made of them. Therefore, stresses associated with life transitions seem to have the potential to undermine self-esteem. Positive personality traits and self-esteem levels are strongly positively correlated, but psychological distress symptoms and functional impairment are negatively correlated. Children with positive personality qualities may be protected against psychological harm under prolonged stress, which might lead to increased discomfort, functional impairment, and a decline in self-esteem. These results support the "scar model" of self-esteem, which maintains that low self-esteem and psychological pain are often linked because poor self-esteem might result from psychological suffering rather than the other way around (Suzuki & Tomoda, 2018).

Numerous research demonstrate that stress management strategies boost self-esteem in addition to lowering stress. First of all, by boosting focus and lowering tension, transcendental meditation enhances academic achievement. Yoga techniques such as asana, pranayama, meditation, and Vedic chanting enhance

spatial and visual memory, attentiveness, and self-worth. By boosting self-esteem, yoga may help underprivileged and stressed pupils adjust better. Students who frequently perform yoga for longer periods of time may be better equipped to manage their daily stress, since stress has been connected to low self-esteem. Numerous studies have looked at the effects of yoga's many components on attention and self-esteem, including breathing exercises, physical postures, meditation, relaxation techniques, and cleansing procedures (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2023). All of these stress-reduction methods, including yoga, may be taught to students during counselling sessions.

Vialle, Heaven & Ciarrochi (2025) stated that during counselling sessions students can be taught meditation, which has been found to be helpful in improving peoples' self-esteem. Improved emotional coping, stress reduction, relaxation, self-regulation, and self-calming are some of the advantages of mindfulness meditation for students. Students also report improved self-awareness, improved attention spans, and improved cognitive control. The Ben Meditation may be taught as a self-care technique as it has been demonstrated to be a successful way to reduce stress. Improved emotional coping, stress reduction, relaxation, self-regulation, and self-calming are some advantages of mindfulness meditation for students. This suggests that when students obtain counselling services, they can become better prepared to deal with life's challenges, which in turn helps them manage stress more effectively. At the same time, their self-esteem is maintained since they have a better understanding of themselves.

Access and utilization of counselling services helps students in realizing a self-assisting humour. Having a funny perspective on life that is used to uphold self-worth

and manage stress is an example of self-enhancing humour. Since it was discovered to have a strong negative correlation with explicit self-esteem and positive correlations with melancholy, anxiety, and other physical and mental health markers, the self-defeating humour style is especially noteworthy. This implies that the usage of this humour style is more common among those who are going through psychological discomfort (Barbayannis et al., 2022).

Furthermore, schools must pay close attention to the discomfort that students, especially candidates, experience during times of transition, such as when they are just starting school (from primary to secondary) or when they are changing grades (Rowland and van Lankveld, 2019). Students who are distressed and lack the protective resources that positive personality traits offer are particularly in need of assistance to boost their self-esteem. Students might receive training and counselling services from their schools. According to Rowland and van Lankveld (2019), schools can also help transitional students maintain or grow optimism, hope, and happiness as well as boost their self-esteem. These qualities may be particularly beneficial for newcomers as they adjust to life as students and deal with a variety of stressful situations.

According to Nikitha, Jose, and Valsaraj (2014), stress and self-esteem are two of the most commonly mentioned issues that people deal with throughout their lives. Furthermore, the study discovered that a person's stress levels and feeling of self-worth may significantly impact other aspects of their life. For that matter, therefore, students require interventions for them to be in a position to deal with the stressing events in their lives.

Nikitha et al. (2014) conducted research on secondary school students' self-esteem in a few Udipi district schools, it was reported that today's competitive world has brought about a number of academic issues that turn out to be challenges to the students. A lack of interest in attending classes, difficulties in understanding topics, and stress related to exams and tests are just a few of the challenges that students face. Academic pressure has been found to be related to the stress that students get to face, and this in most cases also leads to low self-esteem, which may also in turn bring about suicidal tendencies and depression. Hence, there is a need to have counsellors available to help students deal with the challenging situations.

According to a study by Boulton & O'Connell (2017), protective social elements are important for reducing the negative effects of stress caused by problems linked to school. USA based study on tertiary nursing students indicated that students that had higher self-reported stress were found to be having a higher incidence of substance and drug use. The proactive significance of social aspects was demonstrated by the fact that those who were thought to have received faculty support took less stimulants to aid in their studies.

According to a study by Milojevich and Lukowski (2016), self-esteem influences the emotions, thinking processes, values and goals of an individual. Self-esteem is attained when individuals are welcomed and their contributions, both individually and collectively, are recognised and appreciated, especially in a diverse community. One important element influencing a person's degree of ability in all domains is their sense of self-worth.

## **2.4 Role of counsellors in helping students deal with stress**

School counsellors assist students in acquiring the intellectual and social skills required for a smooth transition into life following graduation. This might be giving them job exploration advice or encouraging time management skills (Vialle, Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2025). Counsellors can help youngsters deal with the emotional challenges that come with childhood and school. This might include identifying and resolving mental health issues as well as managing academic stress.

The American School Counsellor Association (ASCA; 2022) states that school counsellors should plan and lead comprehensive programming counselling services to enhance each student's academic, professional, social, and personal growth. ASCA's National Model (2022) outlines a broader framework that encompasses the provision of student services as well as the administration, accountability, and fundamental elements of school counselling programs. School counsellors should, however, "spend 80 percent or more of their time in direct and indirect services to students," according to ASCA (ASCA, 2022, p. xii). According to ASCA, indirect student services are those that help students and include speaking with people other than the student (parents, teachers, and community members) through communication (such as referrals, consultations, teamwork, and leadership). Conversely, direct student services include in-person contacts that include curricular facilitation (e.g., guidance lessons in the classroom), planning for individual students and response services (such as individual, group, and crisis therapy). ASCA gives school counsellors the duty of prioritising student assistance in both situations.

School counsellors advise their clients (students) to concentrate on their successes and strengths rather than obsessing over what they believe to be their shortcomings. By doing this, individuals may begin to cultivate an internal conversation that is based on positivity instead of negativity, which can be a pivotal step in establishing a healthy sense of self-worth. Encourage the belief that errors are not only common but also present worthwhile educational opportunities (Reddy et al., 2018). School counsellors frequently tell their clients that setbacks and failures do not define them; rather, they may be utilised to improve abilities or reroute life's course. Students are better equipped to handle the stress that results from not completing certain assignments when this concept is promoted.

When their clients exhibit symptoms that point to stress, counsellors frequently assist in identifying and diagnosing the condition. Professionals can suggest a management strategy depending on students' stress levels by identifying their tension. To create efficient stress management strategies at the educational level, a thorough grasp of stressors, symptoms, stress levels (mild, moderate, and severe), and their impacts is required. Accordingly, stress management needs to be addressed on a personal, societal, and organization level (Reddy et al., 2018). Students can receive the necessary assistance to manage well, improve their academic achievement, and improve their mental and physical health by putting a complete strategy into practice. Additionally, stress may be controlled by offering a particular stress management training. Both instructors and students can benefit from extracurricular physical and mental activities to help reduce stress (Travis et al., 2020).

Additionally, to inform parents, educators, and academicians about the existence of education stress, educational organisations can host training sessions, seminars, and workshops (Vialle, Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2025). This can assist them in comprehending its characteristics, recognising its origins and indicators, and providing suitable direction. Students can acquire the abilities needed to successfully overcome obstacles, achieve academic achievement, and preserve a good balance between their personal and academic life by adopting an inclusive approach.

Counselling is one of the foremost long-term plan of action to raise and improve self-esteem (Travis et al., 2020). Talking to a mental health professional with expertise in self-esteem, self-worth, confidence and interpersonal issues can help individuals better understand where their issues stem from, how to deal with challenges associated with self-esteem and how to enhance and develop self-esteem for sustained development.

Counsellors play a big role in helping students make realistic goals (Gobena, 2024). Students often experience stress when they set goals and fail to achieve them. One of the best ways to begin the process of increasing self-esteem is by setting reasonable goals. Students might feel more accomplished and gain confidence when they have attainable and quantifiable goals. Counsellors may assist students in identifying their desired results and motivate them to divide each objective into more achievable, smaller actions that they can do one at a time.

It is necessary to examine oneself critically and acknowledge one's talents and shortcomings in order to develop self-esteem (Gobena, 2024). Additionally, it might be challenging because many individuals are accustomed to concentrating on

their desired changes. Failure for students to change things that they thought they would change makes them so stressed, and this turns out to be a big problem for them. However, counsellors may assist students in beginning by taking an impartial look at themselves and praising them whenever they mention something great about themselves, regardless of how minor or unimportant it may appear. By watching how others handle problems differently and the distinctive qualities that make each individual unique, positive reinforcement may also assist pupils in realising the strengths of people around them (Gobena, 2024).

School counsellors can assist children in reframing worry as a message their body is attempting to convey (Li et al., 2018). Students' nervousness must be addressed by counsellors since neglecting to do so might result in stress. Anxiety gives people the chance to become interested in what triggers them and what brings them back to a state of calm and inward focus. Students can then make their own "in case of emergency" bag to help them relax going forward. Students can get a great deal of empowerment from this self-discovery process. Thus, pupils who manage their anxiety avoid possible stress.

Barbayannis et al. (2022) highlighted that counsellors also help students get necessary accommodations that they need in class and during examinations. For many students, the stress of the last few years has led to the emergence of new cognitive, behavioural, and emotional difficulties as well as previously unidentified learning difficulties. Anxiety might be a major problem or an indication of something more serious. To lessen the detrimental effects of any disorders on students' capacity to thrive, school counsellors may find it helpful to work in conjunction with educators, parents, and students to make sure that all diagnoses, individualised

education plans (IEPs), and/or required accommodations for national exams have been made (Barbayannis et al., 2022).

Counsellors can collaborate with teachers and school officials to schedule time and space for students to have quiet and thoughtful moments (Li et al., 2018). Students who struggle with anger management can come here for guided meditations at the beginning or end of the day, optional yoga at lunch or breaks, or just short breathing exercises to start a guidance session.

A study by Jacqueline and Diane (2015) with the title “Alienation among college students and attitudes toward face-to-face and online counselling: implications for student learning” showed that academic performance for students is highly related to their mental well-being. While students who are mentally well are likely to achieve very well, those who are mentally ill are likely to perform poorly. This specific study also discovered that students' problems are becoming more complicated, in addition to the growing number of students dealing with mental health concerns. The results of the study indicated that the number of mental health cases had increased significantly, particularly those involving depression, romantic relationships, and students' academic worries.

Findings in a study by Egenti (2016) indicated that having counselling services provided to students can be very instrumental in influencing a child's direction from undesirable ideas that could be introduced to them by peers. Hence, there is a need for schools to have counsellors available to help in moulding students' future through counselling sessions. Counsellors in schools somehow become role models for students in schools, and they get to be very much respected. Given the nature of their training, Counsellors are expected to be friendly and helpful to students. The

counsellors also strive to create a supportive listening environment for students and offer career guidance to help them shape their future careers based on their interests.

Further, Egenti (2016) stated that the services that counsellors provide are part of school educational services. When appropriately executed by counsellors, guidance and counselling services in schools aid in developing and assessing as well as improving educational programmes in a school. Again, counsellors go ahead to enhance teaching as well as improve the competence levels of a teacher, which in a way reduces the cost for the students. Counsellors get to be faced with the duty of helping students cope with changes related to the adolescence stage while developing a sense of responsibility and making rational decisions.

Basing on findings of Lai-Yeung (2014), while providing their services, counsellors ensure that they help students adjust to the school environment. In order to ensure this is done well, counsellors have to ensure proper cooperation between students and the school at large. A good relationship between students and the teachers/school is one that ensures that the students utilize the resources available at the school to achieve maximum performance in their studies and life as a whole.

A survey by Akinade (2012) showed that for students to manage and deal with their problems, counsellors need to help the students by counselling them regarding the developmental problems that they experience at this stage of life. Counsellors are considered to be well-suited to help students navigate this stage, as assigning this role to teachers would require them to dedicate significant time to it instead of concentrating on the syllabus. The counsellors therefore exonerate teachers when

they help students resolve their life difficulties, which may also end up fostering higher academic performance.

Egbo (2013) presented that counsellors teach students whereby students get to learn and understand themselves and the surroundings in which they live. The students get the opportunity to be in a better position to decide the best behaviour, which can assist with social and emotional growth. Counsellors therefore play a pivotal role in transforming students both within and outside the school.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

#### 3.0 Introduction

This specific study also discovered that students' problems are becoming more complicated, in addition to the fact that the number of students experiencing mental health issues is increasing. The study's findings suggested that there had been a sharp rise in mental health cases, particularly those involving depression, romantic relationships, and students' academic worries.

#### 3.1 Research Approach

The study used a mixed approach where both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed. To be specific, the explanatory sequential mixed method was used. Explanatory sequential methods design is where the researcher goes for quantitative research, analyses the findings and then goes ahead to get qualitative data, which is used to explain in detail the quantitative results (Creswell, 2014). This is because the study required relating some of the variables, and this could best be done using a quantitative approach yet the study also had to examine the role of another variable, and this could be effectively done using a qualitative approach.

#### 3.2 Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design to gather information from secondary schools in Jinja City. According to Setia (2016), a cross-sectional survey is a type of research design where the researcher collects data from many different participants at the same time. This design was utilized because it is able to measure prevalence for all factors under investigation, yet it is also rather quick

and easy to conduct as compared with other designs since it does not have long periods of follow-up.

### **3.3 Information sources**

Both primary and secondary data were considered for this study. The researcher gathered primary data from the study respondents using data collection instruments such as the questionnaire and interview guide.

For the case of secondary data that was utilised in this study, the researcher used books and journals, especially when getting literature that was considered for this study.

### **3.4 Population**

This study mainly consisted of students in secondary schools around Jinja City. The students that were considered were from Jinja Senior Secondary School, with a population of 3,851 students; Jinja Modern Secondary School, with a population of 458 students; and Parvatiben Muljibhai Madhvan Girls School (PMMGS), with a population of 523 students.

### **3.5 Sample Size**

Morgan and Krejcie (1970) define sample size as the number of individuals or data points selected from a population to represent it in a study, which can be determined using their established table that calculates the appropriate sample size based on the total population size, typically aiming for a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan table for determining the sample size, with a population of 4,832 students, the ideal sample size for this study was 357 students and 7 school counsellors. School counsellors were purposively selected, and these provided qualitative data for the study.

### **3.5 Sampling techniques**

Every student at the chosen schools had an equal chance of participating in the study thanks to the use of simple random sampling. From among the students who were accessible on the days that data was gathered, the researcher chose responders at random.

For qualitative data, the researcher selected respondents using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to the non-probability sampling method whereby participants are selected because they have the characteristics required by the study (Setia, 2016).

### **3.6 Procedure for data collection**

The researcher first got an approval letter from the Research Ethics Committee, and it was used by the researcher while introducing themselves. In order to obtain authorisation to conduct the study in the schools, the researcher delivered this letter to the authorities. Such a letter assisted the researcher in developing rapport and confidence with the research participants. Scheduling was used for the researcher to suit the respondents' time to avoid inconvenience and resultant biases. The collected data was edited first to ensure reliability of data, as only screened data was considered for analysis.

### **3.7 Data collection instruments**

A questionnaire and interview guide were considered by this study as the research instruments.

#### **3.7.1 Questionnaire**

The study utilized a questionnaire as a tool for data collection. The researcher used questionnaires because they are relatively easy to formulate and distribute,

they save time, and they do not require much skill to administer. There are some potential flaws in using a questionnaire. Such possibilities include: excluding those respondents who are illiterate, respondents may bring back questionnaires that are only partially completed, and some individuals may even lose the questionnaires.

### **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)**

Morris Rosenberg created the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which is widely used in research, particularly in the social science field, and is based on Rosenberg (1979). A scale from 0 to 30 is used to score the tool. Scoring below 15 shows low self-esteem. The questions are divided equally, with 50% phrased in a positive way and the other 50% phrased in a negative way. Scoring for this scale involves methods of combined ratings, and a higher score indicates higher self-esteem.

### **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)**

Cohen and Williamson (1988) stated that the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is among the commonly used instruments to measure stress. The design of this instrument reveals the respondents' perception of their lives as unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded. The PSS has 14 items, and these are designed to determine the significance of which events in an individual's life are considered stressful. The questions in the PSS ask about feelings and thoughts from the past month. In each case, respondents are asked how often they felt a certain way.

### **3.7.2 Interview guide**

Both open-ended and closed-ended interview questions were included in the semi-structured interview guide. This was chosen due to its versatility and in-person execution. It was used to fully comprehend the phenomenon being studied. The interview guide can be costly and time-consuming and can result in bias and

decreased anonymity - the last of which is a concern for many respondents. The tool was used to collect data from only the key informants (school counsellors).

### **3.8 Strategy for data processing**

After gathering questionnaires, the process of editing, coding and classifying the data was conducted. The data was examined to determine the validity of the responses. Data was edited to correct the errors and make any changes that were necessary. This work was done through the use of Microsoft Word, Excel and SPSS version 17.

Qualitative data was checked for correctness and then prepared in different themes based on the study objectives and what was required to be explained in detail based on the findings from the quantitative data. The data was presented in a narrative format in the different themes that were developed.

### **3.9 Data analysis**

Data analysis involved providing organization and interpretation to all collected data. Quantitative analytical techniques were used while analyzing data, like percentages, mean and standard deviation (and this was used especially for objectives 1, 2 and 3). The researcher used multiple linear regression while analyzing the data collected for objective 3, which required establishing the relationship between self-esteem, stress and utilization of counselling services. Qualitative data was analyzed based on the systematic themes that had been generated. This was mainly objective number 4, and it required establishing the role of counsellors in helping students deal with stress. The researcher got a clear understanding of what the respondents had provided to be the explanation for the results obtained from the quantitative data. The researcher then presented all that

in a narrative format in various themes. The researcher conducted an analysis of the findings to transform the gathered information into a format suitable for viewing and manipulation.

### **3.10 Quality/Error Control**

The researcher ensured this through validity and reliability measures.

#### **Validity**

Validity refers to the suitability, importance, and usefulness of certain inferences made from test results. The efficacy of the instrument was evaluated, and any necessary adjustments were made, after a discussion of the questionnaires with the supervisor and testing on a trial sample that was not included in the study.

#### **Reliability**

Reliability is the consistency of a measurement over time and items (Dillman & Smyth, 2023). Cronbach (1951) stated that research instruments need to have a value of 0.70 and above for them to be considered reliable. The reliability of this study's research instruments and data was established after pre-testing the instruments before their use on the actual study respondents.

### **3.11 Anticipated methodological constraints**

Some of the respondents lost the questionnaires when they had been left to fill out and submit later. The researcher ensured that questionnaires were distributed when there was enough time for the respondents to answer and complete the questionnaire. However, due to time constraints and other school programs, the researcher had to leave some respondents to submit their questionnaires later. Out

of these, indeed some lost the questionnaires, but they were not a significant number.

Regarding scoring, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, one of the instruments utilised in this study, is challenging. High self-esteem is indicated by scores between 0 and 2, and poor self-esteem is indicated by values between 3 and 6. Such a result can lead to the data being interpreted incorrectly. When entering the study's findings, the researcher took these things into account.

### **3.12 Ethical considerations**

The researcher maintained the highest level of confidentiality both during and after the data collection process. Appropriate permission was secured from the administrators of the schools before data collection began. All the study respondents had to first consent to providing information before considering their responses. The researcher also identified only published sources of literature for the study. And lastly, the researcher ensured that face masks were available for the participants to use during interviews to ensure that Covid-19 was not transmitted.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter focusses on the data presentation, analysis, and interpretation for the study that examined the association between stress, self-esteem, and counselling services used by secondary school students in Jinja City. The findings are based on questionnaire responses of 346 secondary school students and interviews with 7 school counsellors who were coded as (C1, C2.....C7) from schools coded as (Sch1, Sch1.....Sch7). Descriptive and interview findings on the problems under investigation are provided after the results on the respondents' demographic characteristics. Finally, inferential analyses on the study objectives are presented.

#### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The respondents' demographic data is shown in this section. Students' personal information is shown first in Table 1.

**Table 1: Personal information about students**

*Personal Information of Students (N=346)*

Gender	n	%
Male	187	54.0
Female	159	46.0
<b>Age</b>		
10-15 years	88	25.4
16-20 years	133	38.4
21-25 years	98	28.3
26-30 years	27	7.8
<b>Class</b>		
S1	103	29.8
S2	145	41.9
S3	26	7.5
S4	43	12.4
S5	29	8.4
<b>Religion</b>		
Catholic	170	49.1
Protestant	89	25.7
Muslim	25	7.2
Others	62	17.9

*Source: Primary data from the field (2024)*

#### **4.1.1 Gender of respondents**

Female respondents made up 46.0% of the sample, while male respondents made up the majority (54.0%), according to Table 1's statistics. Consequently, the data given reflected the views of both sexes.

#### **4.1.2 Age of respondents**

We asked the respondents how old they were. The majority (63.8%) were between the ages of 10 and 20, according to Table 1's statistics. In order to lead more adjusted lifestyles, the majority of respondents need counselling services since they were in the teenage period and were more likely to have difficulties related to growing up. It can also be noticed that there is a good number of respondents that

were between the age of 26 years and 30 years which is not so common, this surprised the researcher but it is what was found during the study. In most cases students finish university at the age of 24years, so finding this big number of students in this age bracket at secondary level was really surprising.

#### **4.1.3 Class**

Respondents indicated their current class. The information in Table 1 shows that the majority (91.6%) were in O-level and mostly S1-S3, implying they were still adjusting to the life of secondary school, hence in more need of counselling services.

#### **4.1.4 Religious Affiliation**

Respondents were asked to mention their religion. Table 1 shows that the majority (74.8%) were Christians of Protestant and Catholic faiths, implying that participants may have had information about the challenges of growing up and the need for counselling services from their churches. There is also a possibility of the churches playing a part in helping students deal with their concerns hence having students with an average level of self-esteem.

#### **4.1.5 Demographic Information for Key Informants**

The school counsellors who served as key information provided important personal information, and it is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Demographic information of key informants**

*Demographic Information of Key Informants (n=7)*

Counsellor	Gender	Training in Counselling	Nature of training	Period served as counsellor (years)
C1	Female	Yes	Certificate	3
C2	Female	Yes	Course unit	4
C3	Female	Yes	Workshop	5
C4	Male	No	None	7
C5	Female	Yes	Diploma	2
C6	Female	Yes	Diploma	6
C7	Male	Yes	Degree	8

*Source: Primary data from the field (2024).*

According to Table 2, the study targeted both male and female counsellor who were providing counselling services to students in their respective schools and so had some experience in counselling secondary school students. Table 2 shows that the majority (5/7) were female, had formal training in counselling (4/7) and had served as counsellors for more than 3 years (5/7). The fact that the majority of counsellors had some training in counselling and had served long in their position, implied that they had a good understanding of the context of school counselling and the counselling needs of students, so they were able to provide credible information on these issues.

#### **4.1 Level of self-esteem amongst secondary school students**

Determining the degree of self-esteem among Jinja secondary school pupils was the study's primary goal. Self-esteem, the independent variable was measured as a person's perception of their self-respect, self-confidence and feeling of competence using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which is a Likert scale

with 10 items on a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree. The findings are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Mean response, SD and ratings on self-esteem**

*Mean response, SD and ratings on self-esteem*

Aspects	Mean	SD	Rating
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	3.00	.85	agree
I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	3.17	.70	agree
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am successful.	2.35	1.03	disagree
I am able to do things as well as most other people.	3.13	.91	agree
I feel I do have much to be proud of.	2.29	1.02	disagree
I take a positive attitude toward myself.	2.95	.97	agree
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	2.69	1.04	agree
I have more respect for myself.	2.75	1.03	agree
I certainly feel useless at times	2.58	.91	Agree
At time I think I am no good at all	2.37	1.05	disagree
<b>Overall Score</b>	<b>2.73</b>	<b>.31</b>	<b>agree</b>

*Source: Primary data from the field (2024)*

Key: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree

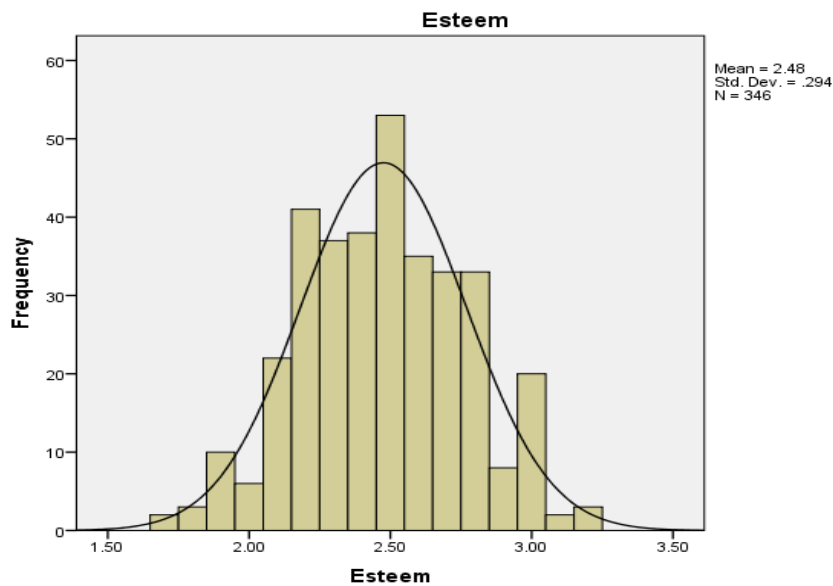
The results in Table 3 show that generally respondents agreed (mean = 2.73, SD = .31) to having adequate self-esteem. They agreed that they have personal worth and are at least on an equal plane with others (mean=3.00, SD =.85), they have a number of good qualities (mean=3.17, SD=.70); they are able to do things as well as most other people (mean=3.12, SD=.91); they take a positive attitude toward themselves (mean=2.96, SD=.98); they are satisfied with themselves (mean=2.69, SD=1.04); and they have more respect for self (mean=2.75, SD=1.03).

Respondents further agreed that they certainly feel useless at times (mean=2.58, SD=.90) and at times they think they are not good at all (mean=2.37, SD=1.06). It was further revealed that respondents disagreed to being inclined to feel that they are successful (mean=2.33, SD=1.04) and to feeling they do have much to be proud of (mean=2.29, SD=1.02). Therefore, respondents only felt to a small extent that they were persons of worth.

The researcher then examined the distribution of data on the self-esteem of respondents, using the normal curve. Figure 1 displays the findings.

**Figure 1: Histogram for self-esteem**

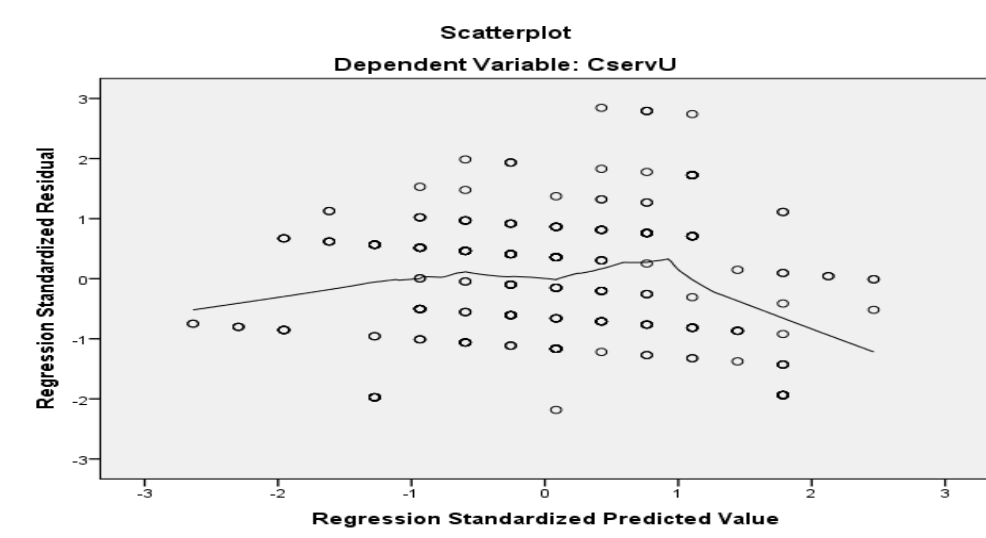
*Histogram for Self-esteem*



The curve in Figure 1 also confirms that data on self-esteem was normally distributed. The researcher also tested whether the independent variable self-esteem could linearly estimate the dependent variable, counselling services utilization. The scatter plot in figure 2 shows the findings.

**Figure 2: Scatter plot of self-esteem against counselling services utilization**

*Scatter plot of Self-esteem against counselling services utilization*



Although the black line in figure 2 did not lie perfectly on the horizontal zero line, it moved around it, and no extremely large deviation was evident. So, a linear function of the independent variable was good enough to estimate the dependent variable. Hence, data on self-esteem against counselling services utilization was linear and normally distributed, and appropriate results could be obtained when subjected to linear correlation and regression.

#### **4.2 Level of stress experienced by students**

Determining the degree of stress experienced by Jinja City secondary school pupils was the study's second goal. A person's perception of how things were going for him was used to measure stress. Students' stress levels were determined using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). 1-items on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 denotes "never" and 5 denotes "very often," were used to measure the variable. Greater stress was indicated by items with a score of 4 or above. Table 4 provides a summary of the results.

**Table 4: Mean response, SD and ratings for stress**

*Mean response, SD and ratings on stress*

<b>Aspects</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Rating</b>
In the past month, how often have you felt nervous or stressed?	3.48	1.30	fairly often
In the past month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle personal problems?	3.42	1.32	sometimes
In the past month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	3.73	1.16	fairly often
In the past month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things you had to do?	3.30	1.44	sometimes
In the past month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	3.42	1.47	sometimes
In the past month, how often have you felt that you were not top of things?	3.67	1.13	fairly often
In the past month, how often have you been angry because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	3.30	1.44	sometimes
In the past month, how often have you felt that difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	3.35	1.28	sometimes
<b>Overall Score</b>	<b>3.37</b>	<b>.76</b>	<b>fairly often</b>

*Source: Primary data from the field (2024)*

Key: 1=Never, 2=Almost never, 3=Sometimes, 4=Fairly often, 5=Very often

Table 4's findings indicate that, on average, respondents experienced a considerable level of stress (mean=3.37, Sd=.76) because they occasionally felt stressed. Over the course of the previous month, they experienced anxiety somewhat frequently (mean=3.48, Sd=1.3), success (mean=3.73, Sd=1.16), lack of organisation (mean=3.67, Sd=1.13), and infrequent confidence in their capacity to manage personal issues (mean=3.42, Sd=1.32), were unable to handle all of their

responsibilities (mean=3.30, Sd=1.44), were able to manage their annoyances (mean=3.42, Sd=1.47), had experienced anger due to events beyond their control (mean=3.30, Sd=1.44), and believed that they were unable to overcome the challenges they were facing (mean=3.35, Sd=1.28). This suggests that there was some tension among the students.

The researcher then examined the distribution of the stress results. A histogram of the distribution of data was run to ascertain its normality, and the findings are shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Histogram for Perceived Stress**

*Histogram for Perceived Stress*

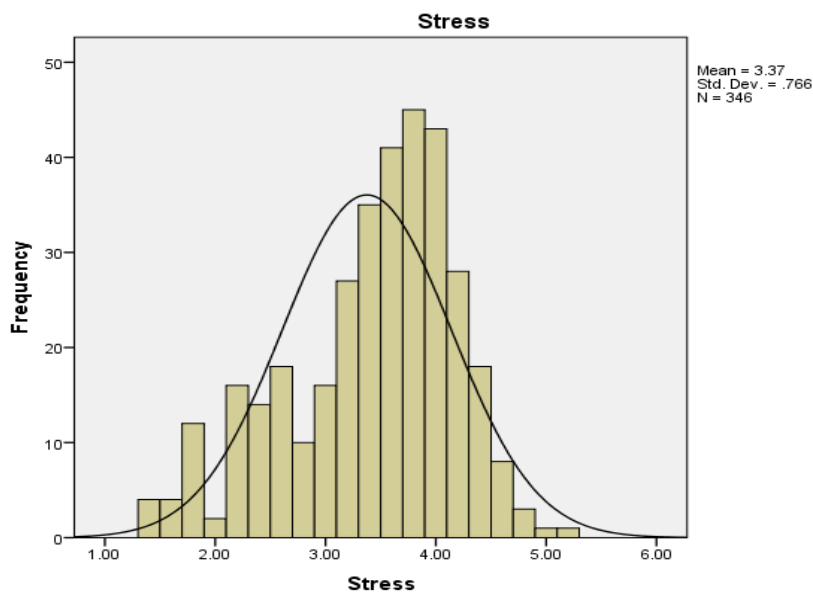
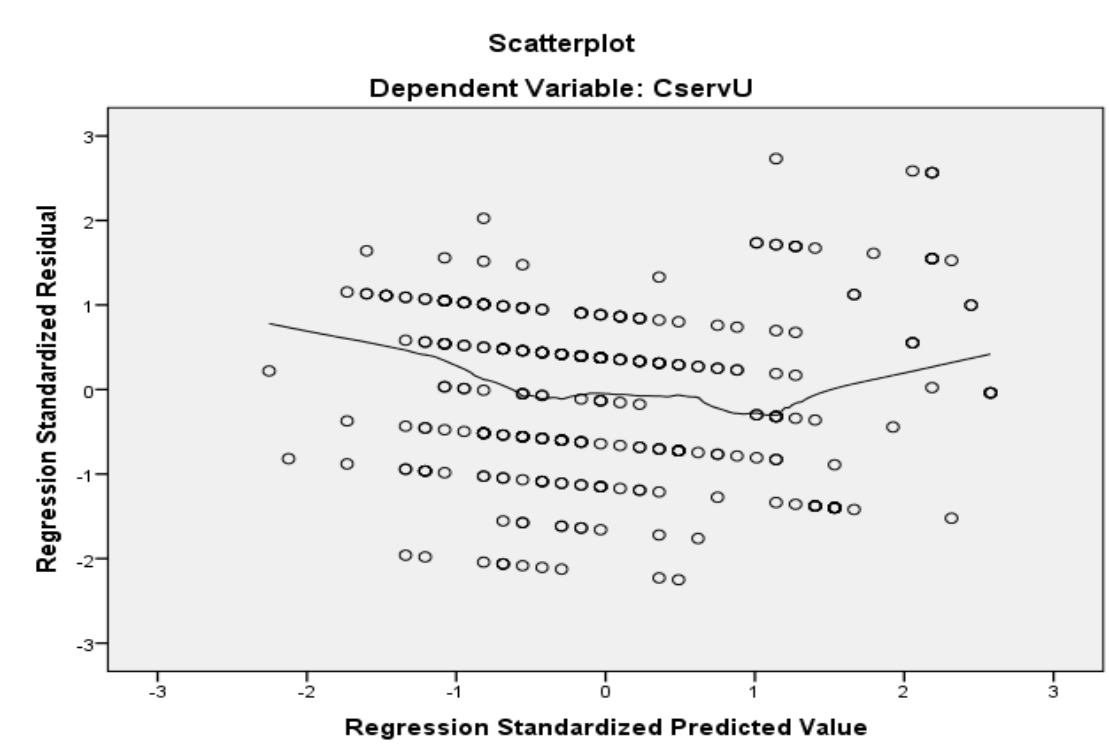


Figure 3's curve confirms the normal distribution of the stress data. The researcher also tested whether the independent variable stress could linearly estimate the dependent variable, counselling services utilization. The scatter plot in figure 4 shows the findings.

**Figure 4: Scatter plot of stress against counselling services utilization**

*Scatter plot of stress against counselling services utilization*



According to figure 4, the black line did not lie perfectly on the horizontal zero line, but it moved around it, and extremely large deviations were not evident. So, a linear function of the independent variable was good enough to estimate the dependent variable.

Students provided information on the stress they had and how they handled this problem. The information is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: How students with stress deal with it**

*How students with stress deal with it*

Response	Frequency	Percent
I don't know	228	65.9
They just cope	69	19.9
talk to friends	24	6.9
talk to parents	14	4.0
Seek counselling	11	3.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Primary data (2024)*

The results in Table 5 show that the majority (65.9%) of students did not know how to manage stress; 19.9% just used their own ways of coping while only 14.1% talked to someone such as a counsellor, parent, or friend.

The researcher then tested whether the independent variables self-esteem and stress had any collinearity. The results of the collinearity diagnostic test are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6: Collinearity Coefficients**

*Collinearity Coefficients*

Model	Tolerance	VIF
Stress	1.00	1.00
Self-esteem	1.00	1.00

Both stress and self-esteem had VIFs of 1.0, which is below the threshold value of 3.0, according to the data in Table 6. This suggests that there were no

concerning collinearity problems between stress levels and self-esteem. Because the data on stress, self-esteem, and the use of counselling services were linear, normally distributed, and free of collinearity, linear correlation and regression could yield the right results.

#### **4.3 Utilisation of counselling services among students**

The dependent variable, Counselling Services Utilization was conceptualized as secondary school students seeking professional counselling and applying guidance and counselling tips given to them. The variable was measured using 10 items on a binary scale, and items with a mean value of 1 implied that respondents were inclined to seek and using counselling services, provided especially in their schools. The findings are summarised in Table 7.

**Table 7: Mean response, SD and ratings on counselling services utilization**

*Mean Response, SD and Ratings on Counselling Services Utilization by secondary school students*

<b>Aspects</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Rating</b>
I regularly go for counselling whenever there is need	1.43	.502	Yes
I regularly engage in counselling as required by my school counsellor	1.56	.49	No
I regularly engage in counselling support services as required by school counsellor	1.35	.47	Yes
I strictly honour all counselling appointments with counsellor	1.46	.49	No
Even when I have difficulties, I do all it takes to meet my counsellor	1.26	.44	Yes
I do not allow any negative peer pressure to prevent me from interacting with my counsellor	1.65	.70	No
I do not allow negative feelings to prevent me from receiving counselling	1.27	.43	Yes
Even when I feel that I have not been treated fairly by the counsellors, I will not stop going for counselling	1.52	.49	No
I do not allow negative talk by others to prevent me from getting counselling	1.41	.58	Yes
Whatever life challenges that I may get in future, I will never stop seeing my counsellor	1.43	.54	Yes
<b>Overall score</b>	<b>1.43</b>	<b>.19</b>	<b>Yes</b>

*Source: Primary data from the field (2024)*

Key: 1=Yes, 2=No

The results in Table 7 show that generally respondents agreed (mean=1.43, Sd=.19) that they seek and use the counselling services available. They agreed that they regularly attend counselling session whenever there is need (mean=1.43,

Sd=.50), regularly engage in counselling support services as required by the school counsellor (mean=1.35, Sd=.47), even when they have difficulties, they do all it takes to meet their counsellor (mean=1.26, Sd=.44), and do not allow negative feelings to prevent them from receiving their counselling (mean=1.27, Sd=.44).

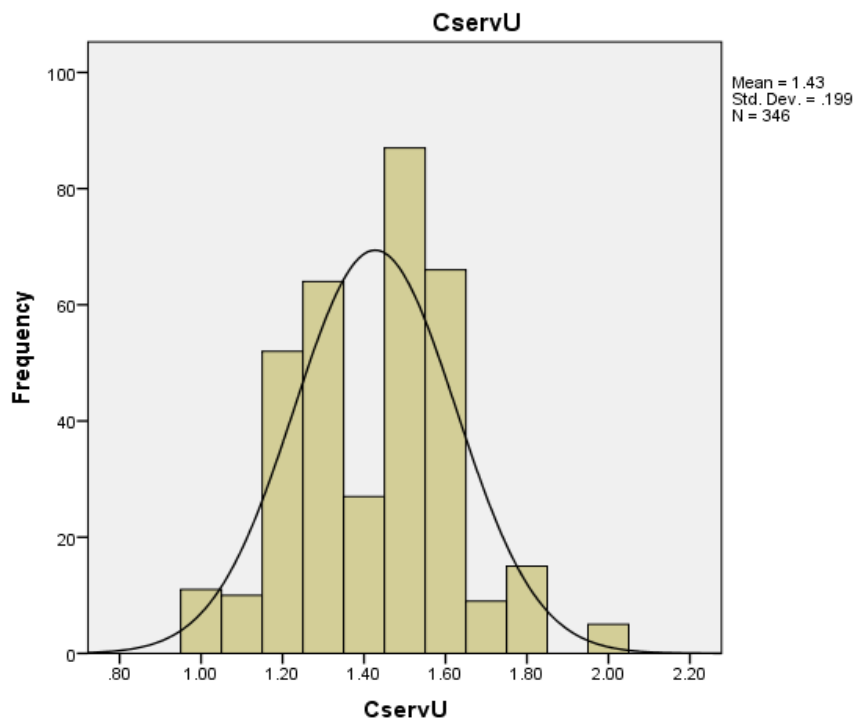
They further agreed that even when they feel that they have not been treated fairly by the counsellors, they will not stop going for counselling (mean=1.42, Sd=.49), do not allow negative talk by others to prevent me from getting counselling (mean=1.41, Sd=.58), and whatever life challenges they may get in future, they will never stop seeing their counsellor (mean=1.43, Sd=.54).

However, they disagreed that they regularly engage in counselling as required by their school counsellor (mean=1.56, Sd=.49), they strictly honour all counselling appointments with the counsellor (mean=1.46, Sd=.48), and they do not allow any negative peer pressure to prevent them from interacting with their counsellor (mean=1.65, Sd=.70). So, the findings show that while participants had a high regard for counselling, they were not so committed to consistently using it.

The researcher then examined the general distribution of results on Counselling Services Utilization by secondary school students using the normal curve. Figure 5 displays the findings.

**Figure 5: Histogram for counselling services utilization**

*Histogram for Counselling Services Utilization*



The curve in Figure 5 also confirms that data on Counselling Services Utilization was normally distributed and appropriate results could be obtained when subjected to linear correlation and regression.

The researcher then explored students' views on the role of counsellors in helping with their problems. The information is summarized in Table 8.

**Table 8: Students’ views on the role of counsellors in helping students cope with stress**

*Students’ views on the role of counsellor in helping students cope with life’s challenges*

Response	Frequency	Percent
I don’t know	68	19.7
help them cope	211	61.0
Show them how to avoid	46	13.3
Recommend them for medical treatment	21	5.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Primary data (2024)*

The results in Table 8 show that generally students had a positive view of counsellors and their services; the majority (61.0%) said that counsellors help students cope with problems, and 13.3% said they show them how to avoid problems, while 5.5% said they recommend them for medical treatment.

#### **4.4. Relationship between Self-esteem, Stress and Counselling Services**

##### **Utilisation**

The third objective of the study was to ascertain the relationship between stress, self-esteem, and counselling service use among secondary school students in Jinja City. The researcher also examined the relationship between stress and self-esteem and counselling service utilisation. Hierarchical regression was used to investigate the predictive potential of stress and self-esteem on the use of counselling services. Table 9 displays the findings.

**Table 9: Results of regression analysis of predictors on counselling services utilization**

*Results of regression analysis of predictors on counselling services utilization*

Model	Predictors	Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	P-value
I	Main Effect		.21	.21	.005*
	Self-Esteem	.45			
II	Main effect		.19	.02	.012*
	Self-Esteem	.42			
	Stress	.01			

Key: p<.05\*

Dependent Variable Counselling Services Utilization:

The results in Table 9 show that generally, the two predictors, self-esteem and stress, explained 19% of the variation ( $R^2 = .19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) in counselling services utilization while stress alone explained 21% ( $R^2 = .21$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Hence, stress reduced the predicative potential of the two variables on counselling services utilization. There is therefore a statistical significance overall, particularly for self-esteem. This implies that self-esteem makes a bigger variability in counselling services utilization than stress.

#### **4.5 The role of counsellors in helping students in Jinja City secondary schools deal with stress**

The study's fourth goal was to investigate how counsellors can help Jinja City secondary school pupils manage their stress. Counsellors contributed valuable insights organized around three key themes: the availability of counselling services, the factors influencing students' decisions to seek, access and utilize these services, and the specific roles counsellors play in delivering effective support.

## Availability of counselling services

The first theme was availability of counselling services, and in line with this theme, key informants (counsellors) intimated that counselling services were available for secondary school students through school counsellors, and students received counselling and guidance on how to manage their lives, their education, relationships and cope with life challenges. However, counsellors revealed that some students who had major counselling problems such as depression and anxiety rarely sought the help of counsellor. A counsellor from school 1 intimated that;

*We mainly provide psychosocial counseling, though secondary school students are increasingly having psychopathology such as loneliness, personality disorders, substance abuse problems, stress, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and eating disorders, yet we do not have enough capacity to cater for this need. So, students with these problems often come once, and they do come again after realizing we can't help them much (C1).*

Another issue that was brought up by key informants is that secondary school students do not perceive counselling issues as priority health problems and so do not feel the urgency of seeing a counsellor. Many of the students do not perceive counselling related issues such as stress, anxiety, or emotional challenges as priority health concerns. As a result, they often underestimate the significance of mental and emotional well-being compared to physical health problems. This perception leads to a lack of urgency or motivation to consult a therapist, even if they are significantly distressed psychologically. The normalization of stress, or the belief

that such issues can be managed independently without professional support, further contributes to their reluctance. Consequently, counselling services are underutilized and students may continue to struggle in silence, It could negatively impact their social connections, academic performance, and general well-being. Regarding this matter, a School 3 counsellor reaffirmed that

*Students often come to us immediately when they get a medical health problem, and they want to use counsellors to talk to the school nurse about it. But they often do not mention their psychological problems until we probe them deeply (C6).*

### **Factors that could prevent students from fully utilizing counselling services**

In the second theme, key informants also gave information on factors that could prevent students from fully utilizing counselling services. In the quantitative results, students had revealed that they did nothing, coped on their own or talked to friends and parents when they got problems that stressed them. So, counsellors featured less. Regarding stress as a factor that may hinder secondary school students from utilizing counselling services, a counsellor from school 1 explained that;

*The education system overloads students and teachers, and parents pressure them to do well. So, in the end, they get performance anxiety. Stress is actually the commonest mental health problem affecting students, though often they do not realize it (C1).*

A counsellor from school 3 showed another limitation to counselling services utilization by secondary school students, related to adequacy, competence and

access. In many schools, the number of counsellors is insufficient to meet the needs of the entire student population, leading to long wait times or limited interaction between students and counsellors. Additionally, concerns about the competency of some counsellors whether due to inadequate training, lack of experience or inability to connect effectively with students, can diminish trust in the counselling process and discourage students from seeking help. Accessibility is also a major barrier; counselling services may be available only during limited hours, located in areas that lack privacy or not well publicized, making them difficult for students to reach or feel comfortable using. These factors collectively hinder students' willingness and ability to engage with counselling support even when they are in need. Counsellor 3 intimated that;

*We have few qualified counselling professionals in schools, only (1:94) for the school population, and some schools just use untrained teachers. We are often overwhelmed, we lack appropriate manpower, and sometimes we do not give students the time and care they need. They realize this and often do not come back (C3).*

Counsellors believed that high levels of stress students get from academic, growth and development, and relationship issues are affecting students' wellbeing. A counsellor from school 2 explained that;

*We receive many students with stress showing all over their bodies. They initially think it is general body weakness, but when they are tested in clinics, results show they have no physical illness. They come back to us, and we provide them counselling. They recover in a few days (C5).*

But a counsellor from School 7 revealed that;

*Often our schools are not aware that they are overloading students with an overly academic timetable. Students have no time to do sports or recreation. Students may take time to unwind, but they often still feel tense and unhappy (C7).*

### **The students' self-esteem**

Regarding the third issue, key informants also shared data regarding students' self-esteem and how it influences their use of counselling services. The counsellors felt that students had sufficient esteem to motivate them to seek counselling. A counsellor from School 3 explained that;

*We are sometimes overwhelmed with clients. The personnel and infrastructure are not enough to fully serve the needs of students (C7).*

Another counsellor from school 4 explained that clients are able to confidently mention and explain clearly their problems and needs. He said that;

*Students often suggest the kind of treatment they want and show willingness to participate in the implementation of the treatment plan (C4).*

However, a counsellor from school 6 mentioned differences in the health-seeking behaviors of girls and boys. She intimated;

*We receive more girls than boys, and they are able to clearly explain their issues. They often come back and explain whether treatment is working or not. However, very few boys return to explain their treatment progress (C6).*

Students with a healthy sense of self-worth are therefore more likely to view obtaining counselling services as normal, which has a favourable impact on service use.

### **Role of counsellors in providing counselling services to students**

The researcher explored what role counsellors felt they played in helping students, and these were the fourth theme. By offering professional counselling services that address a variety of academic, emotional, social, and psychological issues, counsellors play a critical role in the overall growth and well-being of students. Their main duty is to provide a private, encouraging space where students feel comfortable sharing their worries and asking for advice. Counsellors assist students in identifying the sources of stress, such as academic pressure, peer relationships, family issues, or personal insecurities, and help them develop coping strategies to manage these challenges effectively.

A counsellor from school 1 intimated that;

*Stress is a serious mental health issue that predisposes many students to substance abuse, personality disorders, and anxiety. Students with these problems can't study and perform well. So, school counsellors have come out with practical ways of helping students (C1).*

Regarding career guidance, the study found that counsellors are very helpful to students when it comes to helping students set realistic academic and career goals. Counsellors help students by guiding them on how to make decisions and coming up with the best career paths and how to achieve them. In the same line, counsellors always help students when it gets to coming up with information about various

university and vocational programmes and career opportunities. A counsellor from school 1 had this to say:

*“As part of the career committee of the school and the school counsellors, I always make sure we have career guidance days for senior five and three. We also provide career guidance to the rest of the students as and when they show need.... (C1)”*

On the other hand, a counsellor from school 2 reiterated:

*In the past we school counsellors used to concentrate on providing guidance. We were even named guidance counsellors, but now students have real psychological problems, and we are expected to effectively manage them. So, we need to rethink our strategies (C5).*

In addition, counsellors offer preventive and developmental support through workshops, group sessions, and awareness programmes aimed at promoting mental health and resilience. They also help students build important life skills such as decision-making, time management, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation. In cases where deeper psychological issues are identified, counsellors serve as a bridge, referring students to external mental health professionals for specialized care.

Findings showed that counsellors contribute significantly to fostering a positive school environment where students can thrive academically and personally. Their role is not only reactive, responding to crises, but also proactive, aiming to prevent problems before they escalate by maintaining a consistent and visible presence within the school community. Counsellor 2 stated that;

*On many occasions we organise class meetings, or groups where we have talks on various topics such as bullying, drugs and substance use and abuse, and career guidance, among others. In these meetings we are helping students handle issues before they even experience them, we prepare the students to deal with these things, which turns out to be very helpful....*

*(C2)*

On the strategies for increasing student interest in using school counselling services, a counsellor from school 3 informed that;

*We have to come out of the closet and handle the bull by its horns. We have to make our presence felt. Let us go to the students instead of waiting for them to come to us. We have to sell to students our services instead of waiting for them to come and buy.... (C7)*

## Chapter Five

### Discussion, conclusion, and recommendations

#### 5.0 Introduction

The discussion, conclusion, and suggestions are presented in this chapter. It discusses the data that the researcher gathered in the field in relation to the study's goals.

#### 5.1 Discussion

##### 5.1.1 Level of self-esteem amongst secondary school students in Jinja City

The results of the study showed that students' self-esteem was typically average. It seems logical that students have an average level of self-esteem as it represents a person's subjective perception of their total value. It's probable that many of the students are taking advantage of the therapy services that are offered, which is why they may have high or average self-esteem. Further, the involvement of parents and teachers in the students' lives could be enabling the students to have an average esteem. Most of the students agreed to having adequate self-esteem, and this can be attributed to a number of factors, such as students being able to get support from teachers, peers or parents, or that the students are just generally resilient to mention but a few. This is in agreement with Milojevich and Lukowski (2016), who stated that self-esteem influences the emotions, thinking processes, values and goals of an individual. Nevertheless, Allison, Eva, and Rodney (2022) also pointed out that pupils with high self-esteem are more confident than those with low self-esteem, suggesting that the former can more readily achieve their objectives and reach self-actualization. The notion that self-esteem has become a common phrase was also investigated by Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs

(2023). The results of this study are consistent with the efforts made by educators, parents, therapists, and others to increase self-esteem since they believe that this will lead to several benefits.

The respondents also expressed their belief in their personal worth and their equality with others. This can be attributed to their individual personalities, supportive families and/or their level of faith in God. It is also true that students might have accepted the situation in which they are, knowing that they are not in a position to change anything but rather to accept the conditions and be happy. For example, a person can accept that they are average, so when they get average exam scores, they think of how to improve instead of feeling bad about it. This result is consistent with Allison, Eva, and Rodney's (2022) observation that students with high self-esteem exhibit higher levels of confidence than those with low self-esteem. This suggests that students with high self-esteem are more likely to achieve their goals and reach self-actualization.

The study's findings further indicated that most respondents are capable of performing tasks at a level comparable to that of their peers. The students believed in themselves and trusted that they are just like others. This means, therefore, that they are not looking at themselves as being any less than others. This attitude enables them to compete with others without feeling disadvantaged or inferior. With this kind of attitude and perception towards themselves, they are most likely to perform well in their academics, seek help when they have to and also handle difficult moments amicably. This is in agreement with what Egbo (2013) stated that students get the opportunity to be in a better position to decide the best behaviour which can assist with social and emotional growth.

However, the study also revealed that some of the respondents feel useless at times. This feeling could be coming about because of issues such as failing to perform well in class, feeling unsupported by their parents and teachers, being sick of chronic illnesses, negative self-image, among other issues. In these kinds of circumstances, students often lose hope and develop poor self-esteem. To assist such students in improving their self-esteem, a great deal of assistance from parents, instructors, and experts, such as counsellors, would be required. This is consistent with Akinade (2012), who said that students require counsellors to assist them in overcoming whatever developmental obstacles they may be facing at this point in their lives in order to manage and resolve their issues.

#### **5.1.2 Level of stress among secondary school students in Jinja City**

Determining the degree of stress experienced by secondary school students was the study's second goal, and the results showed that, on average, the students were under a lot of stress.

Findings showed that students fairly often felt nervous, and this can be attributed to a number of things, such as tests and examinations that they need to take during the school term. Part of what students have to do is sit for examinations, and this is intended to assess whether they understood what they have been taught. Unfortunately, both the school system and home environment seem to make a big deal about the results that students get from the examinations, and this ends up mounting pressure, hence making the students nervous. Again, students also get stressed about their results, especially when they are targeting particular careers, and whenever they get a feeling or thought that they might not get enough grades to get them those particular careers they get more nervous. This is in agreement

with Anjali, Renu and Veenu Wadhwa (2019), who stated that stress is very unavoidable in every area of life and is a physiological as well as psychological imbalance. When an individual gets faced with several demands they cannot meet, they tend to get stressed. The findings are also in line with Jimenez-Mijangos et al. (2023b), who underlined that academic stress may escalate to alarming levels and significantly affects students' academic performance in addition to their mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

The study found that students were not on top of things fairly often. Several times students find themselves in situations where there are a number of things happening in their lives, and they have no control over the things. At the level of students, there are many things that happen that the parents, teachers and other carers have control over, so this lack of autonomy sometimes makes it hard for the students. Further, having numerous assignments that need to be done at a given period of time sometimes disturbs students, and they end up feeling like they have no control, hence feeling like they are not on top of things and stressed. This is in line with Egenti (2016), who stated that the number of times students in many Ugandan schools have been reported to be stressed or even develop a low self-esteem due to erroneous perceptions about their body shape, physical appearance, ability to perform tasks given to them and their identity.

The findings also indicated that at times, students struggled to manage all of their responsibilities. Being a student involves doing a lot of tasks, both academic and non-academic, not forgetting that the students are also children and some were day schooling, which implies that they also had to help out with house chores. Sometimes these tasks can become overwhelming for the students, and they end up

getting stressed. Also, there is no doubt that some students are engaging in things like coupling, drug and substance use plus any other indiscipline cases that could lead them into trouble with the school and/or parents. It is these numerous things that keep piling up and make it challenging for the students to handle. This also concurs with Leonard et al. (2015), whose study findings revealed that stress due to academics has the potential to escalate young peoples' urge to use or abuse substances and drugs.

Still, the study found that students were sometimes feeling because they were unable to overcome the obstacles that were stacking up so high. The role of being a student become overwhelming, and sometimes these tasks can become overwhelming for the students. Some tasks involve assignments, tests, and examinations. These are core, and one has to fulfil them before they can be awarded certificates of completion of a certain level of education. Students further often have other tasks to accomplish in co-curricular activities, and these can also pile up and become a challenge. As if this is not enough, students are involved in things like drug and substance use, coupling, among others. These activities can also become complicated for students, and this could add to the pile that they already have from the academic side. This is also consistent with Leonard et al. (2015), whose research showed that academic stress can increase young people's desire to use or misuse drugs and other substances.

### **5.1.3 Relationship between self-esteem, stress and utilization of counselling services among secondary school students in Jinja City**

The study's third goal was to determine how self-esteem, stress, and counselling service use were associated. The results showed that using counselling

services was adversely connected with stress but favourably correlated with self-esteem. Thus, students are more inclined to seek therapy as long as they have a high sense of self-worth. It's also possible that some of the students' self-esteem was bolstered by counselling, and they continue to seek counselling, particularly after having a positive experience with counselling on their first try. This could therefore imply that counsellors ensure that they do a good job with students to ensure that the students' esteem is kept high and they are more willing to continue with counselling. It should also be understood that when a student leaves the counselling room feeling supported, they are likely to encourage or refer others for counselling services. This is in agreement with Milojevich and Lukowski (2016), who stated that self-esteem influences the emotions, thinking processes, values and goals of an individual. Students with high esteem are most likely to seek out counselling services in case they are faced with a challenging situation. Still, Allison, Eva and Rodney (2022) also highlighted that students that have high self-esteem are found to have high confidence levels, which would imply that those students would easily consider seeking counselling when challenged.

Further, stress was found to be reducing the self-esteem of students, which also meant reducing their utilization of counselling services. When students get stressed, they get demotivated and lose interest in most of the things, and with that, they start looking at themselves as though they are worthless. This in a way affects their self-esteem, and they end up either showing off as the undisciplined children or they just get withdrawn. Students such as these need to be encouraged to be seeing counsellors so that they learn better ways of coping with stress in their lives. This is so important because being a student is full of stress from various aspects. The findings here are in line with Nikitha, Jose and Valsaraj (2014), who

reported self-esteem and stress as being among the frequently raised concerns that people have to cope with in their life journey.

#### **5.1.4 The role of counsellors in helping students in Jinja City secondary schools deal with stress.**

The fourth objective of the study was to establish the role of counsellors in helping students deal with stress, and the following was found.

Findings showed that counsellors generally helped students in various ways. The findings indicated that counsellors assist students in coping with their problems. Counsellors provide a safe environment where students can express their challenges without fear of judgement. The students take their problems to the counsellors, and the counsellors are able to help the students internalise, have a better insight and think of possible solutions to the problems that they have. In doing so, the counsellors help the students concentrate and focus better on their academics. This is in agreement with Akinade (2012), who showed that for students to manage and deal with their problems, counsellors need to help the students by counselling them regarding the developmental problems that they experience at this stage of life.

The study also found that counsellors help students by showing them how to avoid problems. Students learn how to steer clear of issues with their classmates, parents, and instructors through counselling and advice. At this stage of life, students tend to be very inquisitive and always want to try out things. In doing so, they end up making many mistakes, and this brings problems between them, and others around them such as the peers, teachers and parents. Counsellors therefore help students navigate this stage without having to collide so much with the parents and teachers. This is still in line with Akinade (2012), who showed that for students

to manage and deal with their problems, counsellors need to help the students by counselling them regarding the developmental problems that they experience at this stage of life.

Still, the study found that counsellors recommended students for medical treatment. Sometimes people present with symptoms that require medical attention, but when they do not know that what they have is a medical condition. Therefore, a counsellor can help in identifying this and making referrals. Additionally, some students may exhibit symptoms that necessitate ruling out any medical conditions. For example, a student can present with oversleeping in class, bedwetting or having constant headaches. Each of these can be associated with medical conditions but also, they could be psychological. Therefore, counsellors normally find themselves referring students to medical centres for proper diagnosis. This is in agreement with Reddy et al., (2018) who stated that counsellors often detect and identify stress and other conditions. Where counsellors have to refer clients for proper diagnosis, they do that.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

In summary, the study found that students' self-esteem was average, which allowed some of them to feel secure enough to seek and use counselling services. This does not necessarily mean that there were no students that had low self-esteem, schools do have students with a low esteem and they need to be supported by parents, teachers, counsellors and any other stakeholders. In a related way, it was also discovered that students had a significant level of stress and this can be attributed to their academics needs, life challenges from all corners such as from family and friends. These challenges could easily pile up and make the students

stressed hence the need for counsellors to intervene and help the students find appropriate ways of managing stress in their life. Since it was discovered that an increase in stress leads to a low level of self-esteem and counselling utilization, a lot of emphasis needs to be put in empowering students to be better at helping themselves manage their life so as to minimize stress and its consequences.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The following suggestions were made in light of the study's findings: Students should maintain a healthy balance between their study and leisure time in order to reduce stress brought on by academic demands. Students frequently neglect their leisure time in favour of concentrating only on their studies, which has a negative impact on them.

Students also need to ensure they are getting enough sleep as well as participating in games and sports since these are very good remedies for stress.

Schools should ensure that they employ professional counsellors to ensure quality counselling services as this will help in improving on the utilization of the services. Having teachers doing counselling may bring out conflict of interest and would also make it hard to create boundaries between the teaching and the counselling roles.

School administration also needs to ensure there is allocated time for counsellors to be able to meet students in their classes or groups as this can help in creating rapport and could be a starting point for students to consider having individual sessions with the counsellors. Through these meetings, the counsellors

can also help address any myths or hinderances that could be deterring students from seeking out counsellors.

Parents and other stakeholders need to be involved or at least informed of the availability of counselling services at schools as this can help them know that they can utilize the services in case they notice something happening with their students at home that may require the services of a counsellor.

School counsellors also need to ensure that they address any things that could be deterring students from seeking out counselling services. In so doing, students can then start freely going for the services without any fears.

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Yaribeygi H, Panahi Y, Sahraei H, Johnston T.P, Sahebkar A. (2017). The impact of stress on body function: a Review Article. *EXCLI Journal*, 16 (2017), pp. 1057-1072, [10.17179/excli2017-480](https://doi.org/10.17179/excli2017-480)

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Questionnaire

I'm Mande Dennis, and I'm a counselling psychology master's degree candidate at Uganda Christian University. I'm researching Jinja City secondary school students' self-esteem, stress levels, and use of counselling services. You have been chosen to take part in this research, and we really value your sincere collaboration and participation. As a result, we respectfully ask that you read the questions and respond appropriately. Your provided information will be kept completely private and used exclusively for academic reasons.

#### Section A: background information/ bio data

In this section tick and/or fill in as appropriate.

1. In which age group do you belong?

- a) 10 - 15 years  b) 16 - 20 years  c) 21 - 25 years.  d) 26 - 30 years

2. Which class are you currently?

.....

3. Gender

- a) Male  b) Female

4. What is your religious affiliation?

- a) Catholic  b) Protestant.  c) Muslim

d) Others (Specify) .....

#### Section B: Counselling Services Utilization

The questions that follow enquire as to whether or not you have had access to counselling services. Check the option that best answers the questions (yes or no).

No	Items	Yes	No
1	In accordance with my school counselor's requirements, I routinely attend counselling sessions whenever necessary.		
2	I frequently provide counselling support services in accordance with the school counselor's requests.		
3	I completely keep all of my counselling appointments with the therapist. Despite my challenges, I make every effort to see my counsellor.		
4	I don't let any unfavourable peer pressure stop me from talking to my counsellor.		
5	In accordance with my school counselor's requirements, I routinely attend counselling sessions whenever necessary.		
6	I frequently provide counselling support services in accordance with the school counselor's requests.		
7	I don't let my bad emotions stop me from getting counselling.		
8	I will continue to attend counselling sessions even if I believe the therapists have not treated me fairly.		
9	I don't let people's disparaging remarks stop me from seeking counselling.		
10	No matter what obstacles I face in the future, I will continue to see my therapist.		

### Section C: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

A 10-item measure that evaluates both positive and negative self-perceptions in order to determine an individual's overall sense of worth. The scale is believed to be one-dimensional. All item responses are on a 4-point Likert scale, which ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Below is a collection of statements that address your general self-perception. To indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement, please tick the corresponding boxes.

No	Items	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly disagree (4)
1	Overall, I am happy with who I am.				
2	Sometimes I feel like I'm completely useless.				
3	I believe I possess many positive traits and can perform tasks just as effectively as the majority of individuals.				
4	I don't think I have anything to be proud of, and sometimes I do feel worthless.				
5	Overall, I am happy with who I am.				
6	Sometimes I feel like I'm completely useless.				
7	I believe that, at the very least, I am a valuable human being.				
8	I wish I could treat myself with more dignity.				
9	Overall, I tend to believe that I am a failure.				
10	I adopt an optimistic outlook on myself.				

Reverse scoring is used for items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9. Assign 1 score for "Strongly Disagree," 2 for "Disagree," 3 for "Agree," and 4 for "Strongly Agree." total scores

for each of the 10 items. Maintain a continuous scale for scoring. Higher self-esteem is indicated by higher scores.

#### **Section D: Perceived Stress Scale**

The questions that follow enquire about your thoughts and feelings during the last month. You will be asked HOW OFTEN you felt or thought a particular way in each question. Even though some of the questions are identical, you should approach each one as a distinct inquiry because they differ somewhat. The best course of action is to respond really rapidly. In other words, give me the response that generally seems to be the best rather than attempting to tally the precise number of times you had a certain emotion. Please indicate if you have ever thought or felt any of the following for each statement: never, nearly never, sometimes, pretty often, or very often. Every time, read every possible response.

**Instructions:** Tick accordingly

**0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Often 4 = Very Often**

Item	0	1	2	3	4
How many times in the last month have you been upset by an unforeseen circumstance?					
How many times in the last month have you felt powerless over the significant aspects of your life?					
How many times did you feel anxious or stressed in the last month?					
How many times in the last month have you felt assured of your capacity to manage personal issues?					
How many times did you feel like things were going your way in the last month?					
How many times in the last month did you feel like you couldn't handle everything you had to do?					
How many times in the last month have you been able to manage your annoyances?					
How many times did you feel like you were on top of things in the last month?					
How many times did you feel upset over events that were beyond your control in the last month?					
How many times in the last month have you felt that you were unable to conquer the challenges that were mounting so high?					

7. How do stressed students manage themselves?

.....  
 .....

8. According to you, what is the role of counsellors in helping students deal with stress?

.....  
 .....

*Thank you for participating*

## Appendix 11: Interview Guide

I'm Mande Dennis, and I'm a counselling psychology master's degree candidate at Uganda Christian University. I'm researching Jinja City secondary school students' self-esteem, stress levels, and use of counselling services. You have been chosen to take part in this research, and we really value your sincere collaboration and participation. As a result, I respectfully ask that you respond to the following questions. Your provided information will be kept completely private and used exclusively for academic reasons.

1. Kindly share about yourself in terms of position, gender, training in counselling and the period served as a counsellor.
2. How would you rate the level of self-esteem amongst secondary school students in Jinja City?
3. In your view, what is the prevalence of stress amongst students in Jinja City secondary schools?
4. What is the relationship between self-esteem, stress and utilization of counselling services amongst secondary school students in Jinja City?
5. How are the secondary school students in Jinja City managing stress?
6. What more do they need to do to deal with the stress better?
7. According to you, what role do counsellors play in helping secondary school students deal with stress?

*Thank you for participating!*

## Appendix 111: Approval Notice



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

UG-REC-026 Approval Version 4.0

11th March, 2024

Mande Dennis  
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11<sup>th</sup> March, 2024

### UG-REC-026 APPROVAL NOTICE

To: Mande Dennis, Principal Investigator

Re: UCU-REC Application titled: Self-Esteem, Stress And Utilization Of Counseling Services Amongst Secondary School Students In Jinja City

Application Number: UCUREC-2023-796

Version: 4.0

Type:  Initial Review  
 Protocol Amendment  
 Letter of Amendment (LOA)  
 Continuing Review  
 Material Transfer Agreement  
 Other, Specify:



I am pleased to inform you that the UG-REC-026; UCUREC approved the above referenced application.

Approval of the research is for the period from 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2024, to 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2025  
This research is considered minimal risk category.

As Principal Investigator of the research, you are responsible for fulfilling the following requirements of approval:

1. All co-investigators must be kept informed of the status of the research.
2. Changes, amendments, and additions to the protocol or the consent form must be submitted to the REC for re-review and approval prior to the activation of the changes. The REC application number assigned to the research should be cited in any correspondence.
3. Reports of unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or other must be submitted to the REC. New information that becomes available which could change the risk: benefit ratio must be submitted promptly for REC review.

1 of 2

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[Ugandachristianuniversity](https://www.facebook.com/ugandachristianuniversity) [@UCUniversity](https://www.instagram.com/ucuniversity), Founded by the Province of Church of Uganda, Chartered by the Government of Uganda.

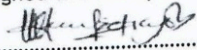


4. Only approved consent forms are to be used in the enrollment of participants. All consent forms signed by subjects and/or witnesses should be retained on file. The REC may conduct audits of all study records, and consent documentation may be part of such audits.
5. Regulations require review of an approved study not less than once per 12-month period. Therefore, a continuing review application must be submitted to the REC **eight weeks** prior to the above expiration date of 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2025 in order to continue the study beyond the approved period. Failure to submit a continuing review application in a timely fashion may result in suspension or termination of the study, at which point new participants may not be enrolled and currently enrolled participants must be taken off the study.
6. The REC application number assigned to the research should be cited in any correspondence with the REC of record.
7. Your research details have been shared with the Executive secretary of Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) and you are **not** required to get clearance since you are a Masters Degree research. Refer to UNCST Research registration and clearance Policy and guidelines (July 2016) in Uganda section 6(e).

The following is the list of all documents approved in this application by UG-REC \_026:

	Document Title	Language	Version	Version Date
1.	Protocol	English	1.0	2024-02-14
2.	Data collection tools	English	1.0	2024-02-14
3	Informed Consent Form	English	1.0	2024-02-14

Signed and Stamped

  
Prof. Peter Waiswa,  
UCUREC Chairperson,  
[pwaiswa@musph.ac.ug](mailto:pwaiswa@musph.ac.ug)

