

Short Communication

Health and Safety Concerns after the Gen Z Movement in Nepal

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Abstract

Fire incidents and civil unrest are emerging threats to human safety, health, and social stability in low-income countries, including Nepal. This article critically examines the health and safety concerns emerged with Gen Z movement in Nepal (September 2025), which began as a youth-led protest and escalated into violent unrest and widespread fires. The movement resulted in deaths, injuries, and destruction of public and private property, which reveals weaknesses in governance, public safety management, and mental health support systems. Drawing from national reports and international studies, this paper explores the health, safety, and psychosocial implications of the movement and the lessons it gives for policymakers, health educators, and communities. It concludes that integrated, evidence-based strategies combining preventive education, mental health interventions, digital literacy, and transparent governance are vital to fostering a culture of safety and resilience in Nepal.

Article History



OPEN ACCESS

Received: 04 October 2025

Accepted: 14 November 2025

Published: December 2025

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.3126/jhp.v13i1.87167>

Keywords:

Gen Z movement; Health and safety; Mental health; Disaster preparedness; Youth activism; Nepal

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Background and Introduction

The Gen Z movement that unfolded in Nepal on 8–9 September, 2025 reflected a growing wave of frustration among young Nepalese toward governance failures, corruption, and entrenched social inequalities. News outlets such as The Kathmandu Post (2025) and Online Khabar (2025) reported that youth participants accused the government of systemic corruption, favoritism toward political elites' children ("Nepo kids"), and a lack of job opportunities despite rising education levels. Similar youth uprisings have occurred globally—in Sri Lanka (2022), Chile (2019), and Hong Kong (2019)—driven by demands for transparency and justice amid socioeconomic despair and political alienation. The Government of Nepal's temporary suspension of social media platforms and online news during the protests was justified as an effort to curb misinformation, but many protesters perceived it as the suppression of free expression (Nepal News, 2025). The move of the security forces intensified anger and expanded protests nationwide. Fires broke out in major public and private buildings, including Singha Durbar, the Parliament Building, and Bhatbhateni Supermarkets. Dozens were killed or injured, and public anxiety reached unprecedented levels.

While these incidents are often analyzed politically, their public health and safety dimensions—ranging from mental health effects to community preparedness—have been largely overlooked. In this regard, this paper focuses on the health and safety concerns arising from the Gen Z movement, situating it within broader social and behavioral contexts. It identifies gaps in emergency preparedness, psychosocial support, and health education that became visible during the crisis.

Impact of the Gen Z Movement

The Gen Z movement was not merely a political uprising—it evolved into a national emergency with long-term socioeconomic and health consequences. Physically, the fires and violence led to the destruction of vital institutions, businesses, and educational facilities. Reports from Nepal News (2025) and Setopati (2025) documented severe structural losses, injuries, and smoke-related incidents. Dozens of students were trapped inside burning schools and hostels, heightening parents' fears about children's safety. Environmental degradation also occurred as fires released toxic gases into the air, further aggravating respiratory problems in urban areas already burdened by pollution (Jaffe & Wigder, 2020).

Socially and psychologically, the events fractured community trust and generated widespread fear, trauma, and anxiety. Many Gen Z protesters experienced burnout (The Himalayan Times, 2025)—a state of emotional exhaustion linked to continuous activism, unemployment, and disillusionment (Deloitte, 2023). This exhaustion was amplified by constant exposure to distressing social media content and by witnessing the destruction of familiar institutions. The long-term impact on youth mental health remains a pressing concern for Nepal.

Globally, similar kind of movements—from the Arab Spring to France's 2023 pension protests—have shown that when governments fail to address youth grievances, protests can escalate into safety crises (Kılavuz, 2020; Bérout, 2023). Nepal's Gen Z movement thus highlights the need for integrated health, safety, and governance frameworks that protect lives while upholding democratic rights.

Mental Health Prioritization

Mental health emerged as a defining concern of the Gen Z movement. Generation Z—raised amid digital stress, economic uncertainty, and environmental anxiety—already faces high rates of psychological distress (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). In Nepal, the situation was worsened by exposure to violent events, the deaths of peers, and the destruction of familiar public spaces.

Sources of burnout could be prolonged unemployment, perceived injustice, constant digital engagement, and hopelessness about political reform. Evidence shows that sustained exposure to political violence can cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and sleep disturbances (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018). During the protests, youth volunteers and medical students reported feeling helpless and emotionally drained while assisting victims.

In this context, mental health must be treated as a core component of national safety. Existing provisions such as psychosocial support hotlines, trauma counseling services, and community-based mental health programs have been initiated through governmental and non-governmental efforts. However, strengthening their accessibility and outreach can further help young people process collective trauma and prevent long-term psychological harm.

Workplace Safety and Flexibility

The movement also exposed issues related to occupational and institutional safety. Although Nepal's Gen Z did not explicitly demand workplace reforms, the unrest indirectly affected work environments through shutdowns, property loss, and fear of retaliation. Studies from neighboring countries, such as India and Bangladesh, demonstrate that social unrest significantly disrupts worker safety and organizational trust (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2019; Safety Culture, 2022).

Nepali youth increasingly expect transparency, fair treatment, and flexibility in workplaces. These expectations mirror global trends—Deloitte (2023) found that 77% of Gen Z employees value psychological safety and work flexibility more than salary. Thus, while the Gen Z protests were not workplace-centered, their broader call for dignity, fairness, and safety resonates within the occupational domain.

Continuity and safety protocols are already in place through national frameworks such as Nepal's School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) and the Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF); however, implementation remains inconsistent across institutions. It underscores the need for stronger enforcement and capacity building (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2016; UNICEF, 2019). Enhancing risk communication, offering remote work options, and establishing protective policies can ensure that civic disruptions do not jeopardize worker well-being.

Digital and Online Safety

Social media played a dual role in the Gen Z movement—serving as both a mobilization tool and a source of vulnerability. Platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) facilitated rapid protest organization but also amplified misinformation and surveillance risks. Studies show that social media can significantly fuel rumor propagation and misinformation during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Cinelli et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2020).

Misinformation during the protests contributed to violent escalations (The Kathmandu Post, 2025), while state monitoring of online activities raised privacy concerns. Additionally, cyber harassment and doxing of protesters by political opponents caused emotional harm, posing serious mental health risks. Therefore, digital and online safety are integral to public health.

Strengthening digital literacy, protecting user data, and promoting ethical media behavior are essential for creating a safe civic space where young people can express dissent responsibly.

Fire Safety and Prevention

Although fire safety initially appeared peripheral, it became a central element of the Gen Z movement's public health crisis. Fires from arson and uncontrolled crowds destroyed buildings and endangered lives, exposing the fragility of Nepal's emergency response systems.

Nepal has existing strategies and standards such as the Fire Prevention and Control Guideline (2018), the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act (2017), and Local Disaster

and Climate Resilience Plans (LDCRPs), which guide fire preparedness and the emergency response. Building on these, municipalities should enforce fire codes and building standards, install early detection systems, conduct regular fire drills in public institutions, and strengthen coordination between fire brigades, health facilities, and security forces (Ministry of Home Affairs [MoHA], 2018; Government of Nepal, 2017). When integrated into national disaster management frameworks, these measures can prevent avoidable tragedies and reinforce community resilience.

Role of Health Education Professionals

Health educators in Nepal play a vital yet underrecognized role in crisis prevention and recovery. During the Gen Z movement, their engagement could have reduced harm through awareness, coordination, and psychosocial support. Specifically, they can:

- a. Design youth-focused campaigns on safe protest participation, mental health, and emergency response through universities and youth clubs.
- b. Conduct psychosocial first aid and community counseling in collaboration with hospitals and NGOs following traumatic events.
- c. Integrate civic safety education into school health curricula to raise awareness on peaceful protest, crowd behavior, and emergency preparedness.
- d. Support local governments in risk mapping, evacuation planning, and fire safety drills in urban centers.

By grounding their efforts in Nepal's socio-political realities, health educators can transform awareness into resilience, bridging the gap between activism and safety.

Conclusion

The Gen Z movement in Nepal represents more than a political protest. It exposes critical intersections between youth activism, health, and safety. The tragedy revealed how inadequate preparedness, mental health neglect, and weak governance can transform civic expression into a national crisis.

This paper illustrates how physical hazards (fires, injuries), psychosocial burdens (stress, burnout), and systemic failures (corruption, poor emergency response) converge during such movements. At the same time, it highlights that Nepal's youth possess strong civic energy that, if guided by inclusive policies and effective safety systems, can become a force for positive change.

To move forward, Nepal must institutionalize health and safety education, integrate mental health into national disaster frameworks, modernize fire and digital safety systems, and empower young citizens through participatory governance. Addressing these priorities would not only prevent future tragedies but also strengthen democratic resilience and public trust. Ensuring the health and safety of Generation Z ultimately means protecting Nepal's social and developmental future.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this work.

Funding

NA.

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