

STUDY ON THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF STUDENTS
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By

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A thesis submitted to the BRAC Institute of Educational Development in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Ethics Statement

I hereby acknowledge that the research entitled “Study on the Mental Well-being of Students During the COVID 19 Pandemic” is my own work. This research work is original and the findings presented in it are unbiased and untouched by any form of manipulation. Throughout the research process, I have consciously remained vigilant to ensure that personal biases, opinions, and prejudices did not influence the study, maintaining a neutral stance.

The research participants of this study were all from Bangla Medium schools. Overall, twelve participants, all students participated in the research. Five students were interviewed and seven students participated in FGD. To adhere to research ethical principles, the participants were given a consent form, and their participation in interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) was based on their interests.

In order to ensure the credibility of this research, the research procedures were followed properly. The research proposal was developed based on the supervisor’s feedback and was presented to the dissertation committee at the BRAC Institute of Education Development before starting the fieldwork.

The study also followed the appropriate data management process, ensuring the confidentiality of the research participants. To ensure their legal identities, pseudonyms were allocated for the participants.

My statement affirms that the research paper adhered to the university's ethical procedures and upheld the expected standards of conduct.

Abstract

This study's primary focus was to find out the mental well-being situation of grade 10 Bangla medium students during the Covid 19 pandemic. Students, parents, and school authorities together are facing a crisis together trying to adapt to the new normal. Students of this particular age group are the most vulnerable and susceptible to change. Mental well-being, in general, in the context of Bangladesh, is hardly prioritized and for children it is more alarming for this issue to not be addressed. This study intends to present the fact that student's well-being is being affected and needs to be addressed nationally from a systemic perspective. Through in-depth interview and FGD of grade 10 students, it was figured out that students have somewhat understanding of the term well-being and they could clearly differentiate between physical and mental well-being. Isolation, loneliness, and uncertainty of their future are the major factors affecting these students' well-being. Moreover, this study found that schools lack a proper system to address and manage crisis situations where both adolescents and adults are victims. At home, parents or guardians need to be more vigilant about how their children cope with the crisis.

Keywords: Mental Well-being; COVID-19; Grade 10 Bangla Medium Students

Dedication

THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO MY BELOVED FATHER AND MOTHER FOR THEIR
RELENTLESS SUPPORT AND UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Dilruba Sultana, for her valuable guidance, encouragement, and support throughout this research project. Her expertise and insights have been instrumental in shaping my ideas and enhancing the quality of my work. I would also like to thank the faculty and staff of BRAC IED for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout my academic journey. I am grateful to my friends and family for their love, encouragement, and support during this challenging phase of my life. Their unwavering faith in me has been a constant source of motivation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

While humans battled COVID-19 for the first time, plagues, pandemics, and epidemics have been documented for hundreds of years. A recent study conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that anxiety has been diagnosed in nearly 4.4 million adolescents within the age range of 13 and 17 years. Approximately 1.9 million adolescents have been diagnosed with depression, one of the main reasons being home quarantine due to COVID-19 (Galvin, 2020).

The government of Bangladesh imposed a lockdown from May 17, 2020 and declared all educational institutions to shut down immediately. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental well-being of students in Bangladesh (Islam et al. 2020), particularly for grade 10 Bangla medium students. With the closure of schools and the shift towards remote learning, students have been forced to adapt to a new way of learning, which has resulted in heightened stress levels, anxiety, and feelings of isolation. The sudden disruption of daily routines, lack of social interaction with peers and teachers, and concerns over academic performance have all contributed to the mental strain experienced by these students (Bhuiyan et al., 2020). Moreover, many students come from lower-income households and do not have access to the necessary technology and resources to facilitate remote learning, which further add to the stress and pressure they feel.

The closure of schools has also resulted in a lack of access to support services such as counseling and mental health services, which are critical in helping students cope with the challenges they are facing. As a result, many students have been left to deal with their mental health struggles alone.

School plays an essential role in the lives of students. It provides educational lessons and creates the opportunity to communicate with teachers, which acts as a support system for psychological needs. A study done on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' mental wellbeing in Bangladesh is worrying. According to a survey of parents with primary-aged adolescents, 87% reported that their adolescents were missing school and less than half stated that they were feeling lonely, which altogether affects their adolescents' mental health and well-being (Yeasmin et al., 2020). Nearly 88% of students experienced mild to severe anxiety symptoms (Islam et al. 2020).

Prior studies have indicated that general practitioners play a crucial role in managing the virus response, encompassing prevention of viral transmission through contact tracing, management of infected patients, medical surveillance, and care for patients' clinical and psychological well-being. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in feelings of hopelessness and depression, potentially leading to adverse outcomes such as suicidal behavior. Individuals with major affective disorders may face long-term difficulties processing sensory information, resulting in higher levels of depression, impulsivity, alexithymia, and hopelessness. The global disease burden is significantly contributed to by major depressive disorder, which is the most prevalent psychiatric disorder. This burden results in various effects, including deteriorating physical health and suicide (De Berardis et al., 2018; Serafini et al., 2020).

1.2 Research Topic

Study on the mental well-being of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. To stop the spread of coronavirus, lock down and quarantine was initiated but it affected the lives of adults and students in many ways. As of February 2019, 28 countries have closed pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary, upper-secondary levels, and tertiary education worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected 221,964,329 learners (UNESCO, 2021). Due to the closing of schools, many countries have adopted to online learning methods. To understand how students are coping up to the new challenges they are facing every day, this study is being conducted to explore the impact of impact of the pandemic on grade 10 Bangla medium students' mental well-being.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

After 11 months since the first COVID-19 case in Bangladesh, the number of coronavirus cases has exceeded five lakh, with hundreds of deaths occurring daily. Consequently, the government of Bangladesh had decided to observe the months of February and March to decide on the reopening of schools, given the high number of cases (Alamgir, 2021). As a result of the full lockdown enforced by the government since May 17, 2020, all schools remain closed, leading to negative effects on the well-being of adolescents, including their health care, diet, protection, schooling, and overall mental health (Bhuiyan et al., 2020). Students exposed to stressful and unanticipated situations such as separation through isolation from their families and friends, seeing or being aware of critically ill members affected by coronavirus, the passing of loved ones, or even thinking of their death from the virus can develop anxiety, panic attacks, depression, and other mental illnesses (Saha et al., 2021; Sifat, 2021a).

However, there is limited literature available in Bangladesh on the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on grade 10 Bangla medium students' mental-wellbeing. This study aims to determine the consequences of the pandemic on grade 10 Bangla medium students' mental well-being by exploring the factors associated with their mental well-being during prolonged school closures, social distancing, and the pandemic in Bangladesh. Moreover, this study will provide systemic recommendations to address the mental well-being issues of grade 10 students in Bangladesh during crises.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of students (grade 10 Bangla medium) regarding their mental well-being?
2. What are the consequences of COVID-19 on mental well-being of the students of grade 10 (Bangla medium)?
3. What are some systemic level recommendations offered by grade 10 Bangla medium students to address mental well-being issues during COVID 19 situations in particular?

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore whether the COVID-19 pandemic had any effect on the mental well-being of grade ten students. The key objective of this study is to determine the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on grade 10 Bangla medium students' mental well-being. Accordingly, it is essential to decide how prolonged school closure, social distancing, and the pandemic affect the psychological well-being status of grade 10 students. For this study, it is

important to identify the current perceptions among students regarding mental well-being. In addition, this study will also identify whether the school authorities such as class teacher, parents or guardians considered into account the mental well-being of students and how it has shaped up during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.6 Significance of the Study

It is important to note, that cultural values and expectations can vary widely within a society, and it is possible that different groups or regions within Bangladesh may have different attitudes towards education and career success. A lot of expectations are set for a student by family members and society. Besides education, students are involved in multiple extra-curricular activities as well to develop their skill-set. Students in grade 10 look forward to their SSC examinations which will pave their future. Moreover, the unanticipated COVID-19 pandemic has created more hurdles in the lives of students. Altogether, a grade 10 student needed proper guidance and support system to accomplish all the expectations during the ongoing pandemic. Mental well-being of a student is vital for growth. This important aspect is looked over in most cases and this study will explore the significance and current perceptions of mental well-being of grade 10 Bangla medium students. The study can raise awareness about the importance of mental well-being among students and the need for appropriate support mechanisms to ensure their overall well-being during crisis situations. The study can identify the specific issues and needs related to mental health among grade 10 students in Bangladesh, which can help in developing targeted interventions and policies. It can provide evidence-based interventions that can be implemented in schools to promote mental well-being among students.

Moreover, findings of this study will help me understand whether students, school authorities, and parents or guardians are aware about the importance of mental well-being and whether there is any need for systemic level interventions for an improved learning environment. From a policy-level perspective, the findings of this research can be considered to develop a guideline or Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) which will be followed by educational institutions nationwide during crisis situations. The guideline is necessary because it will help school authorities stayed prepared for the worst and the loss can be minimized. In addition, a systemic intervention can be initiated which will be applicable for all educational institutions to address mental well-being of students, teachers, and the community.

According to a report by the World Health Organization (2018), mental health problems among adolescents are a growing concern in Bangladesh, with depression and anxiety being the most common issues. The report notes that there is a lack of awareness and understanding of mental health issues in the country, which contributes to the stigma surrounding mental illness.

Regarding the education system, a study by Chakraborty et al. (2020) found that there is a lack of mental health support for students in Bangladesh. The study suggests that incorporating mental health education and support services into schools could help address this issue.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

In this literature review, I am presenting information from different studies, articles, and documents that I reviewed in details to understand my research topic on mental well-being of grade 10 Bangla medium students.

To begin with, I organized all my literature review under thematic areas which are mentioned below:

1. General Concepts of Mental Well-being and Mental Well-being in a Global Context
2. Schools Context of Bangladesh Regarding Mental Well-being of Adolescent Students of Grade 10
3. Influence of Cultural Aspects on Mental Well-being of Students in an Asian Context
4. Other Factors Creating an Impact on Mental Well-being of Students due to COVID-19

2.2 General Concepts of Mental Well-Being and Mental Well-being in a Global Context

Mental well-being, defined by the World Health Organization, is the ability of people to reach their potential, work productively and creatively, form strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to the community (De Cates et al., 2015). A diverse set of scientific disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and economics, have contributed to the task of defining well-being. The pursuit of a definition dates back to the time of Aristotle. He considered hedonic “happiness to be a vulgar ideal’ and preferred eudemonic well-being as the ultimate state of human potential” (Hanc, McAndrew, & Ucci, 2019). A series of studies that define well-being in

terms of the level of positive emotions experienced, such as happiness, and the perception of life as a whole (whether or not the individual is satisfied) is emotional well-being (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012; Magyar & Keyes, 2019). Keyes (1998, p. 122) defined wellbeing as “the appraisal of one’s circumstance and functioning in society” and proposed five dimensions that capture the global definition of social wellbeing: social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualization, and social acceptance. Amartya Sen's research in capabilities explains well-being as an individual's ability to act, and that the evaluation of individual should be based on the context of available opportunities, not his or her achievements (Hanc et al., 2019).

Due to insufficient literature available in Bangladesh of grade 10 students in Dhaka regarding their mental well-being, the key objective of my study is to determine the mental well-being situation of grade 10 students during COVID-19 pandemic and explore the associated factors that affect it. I will also attempt to provide some recommendations to address mental well-being of students in Bangladesh in general and during emergency situations.

The words "unprecedented," "historical," and "crisis" are words which have lost their essence in describing the global COVID-19 crisis. For students, whose education was suddenly interrupted in mid-March 2020, these words likely hold true as their access to physical classroom, in-class interaction, peer groups, and academic support were abruptly unavailable and disrupted the regular learning regime of a student. For students who returned to schools after the lockdown, the environment was very different because social distancing was required among students and teachers, personal protective equipment (e.g., masks) was mandated, students may have experienced modified and changing curriculum, and lastly students may have developed increased

awareness of their own physical health. Given these disruptions, much has been speculated about the impact of the pandemic on academic achievement, peer and friend relationships, and mental health and well-being among children and youth (Racine, Korczak et al., 2020).

Although the literature is limited, how adolescents students of grade 10 experience and are currently being affected by other national and international natural disasters and events is important to consider as the potential impacts of COVID-19 on youth mental health and well-being are explored. Prior to the global pandemic, very few studies addressed stress responses to health-related disasters, and much of this study shows how young people are affected by trauma associated with natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and fires. Although these disasters differ from pandemic in many ways (e.g., degree of isolation and required quarantine), these disasters have similar adverse effects as COVID-19 which have a long lasting impact (Sprang & Silman, 2013).

Numerous incidents occurred where either the mother or father or both of them were infected and isolated. In such circumstance, children are separated from their parents. Many nations have imposed rigid lockdown policies as a method to fight the COVID-19 situation. As an example, in China, some grown-ups, teenagers, and children are placed in complete detachment to manage the spread of disease. Although quarantining measures are for the advantage of the community at large, their psychological effects cannot be ignored. The youngsters in disconnection with parents need exceptional consideration as they will be at risk of making psychological wellness issues thanks to the anguish led to by the quarantine of fogeys (Liu et al., 2020). The role of oldsters is

extremely important within the initial years of lifetime of adolescents; any disturbance within the type of isolation from parents can have a long-lasting impact on the adolescents' attachment.

Since the pandemic began in 2020, the literature on mental health and well-being of adolescents during the pandemic has grown rapidly (Racine, Cooke et al., 2020). Recent studies during the pandemic have provided concerning information regarding how students are adapting to the countrywide lockdown, quarantining at home, and isolation. Some studies reported that children and youth may have experienced increased stress and anxiety related to the pandemic (Orgiles et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2020).

2.3 Schools Context of Bangladesh Regarding Mental Well-being of Adolescent Students of Grade 10

As a response to the pandemic, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) declared a nationwide school closure as an emergency measure to reduce the infection rate of the virus. All educational institutions were immediately closed down from March 17, 2020. More than forty million students from different levels attended approximately two hundred thousand educational institutions in Bangladesh. Although some educational institutions gradually reopened, the Ministry of Education firmly stated the continual close down until September 2020 and next steps would be based on the severity of the situation. However, some institutions in the urban regions continued teaching through online mediums of education (Mustari et al., 2021). According to a UNICEF report, school closures in Bangladesh have resulted in a significant loss of learning opportunities for millions of children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (UNICEF, 2020). The isolation and uncertainty caused by school closures have had adverse effects on the mental health of students, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and depression (Raihan et al., 2020). Extended school closures

have led to significant learning loss among students, particularly those from low-income families or those without access to technology (Chowdhury & Mukhopadhyay, 2020). The digital divide has widened due to school closures, with children from low-income families or rural areas having limited access to technology and online learning resources (UN, 2020). School closures may lead to an increase in dropout rates, especially for vulnerable children and adolescents (Ahmed et al., 2020).

According to early findings from a global survey of youth and adults in 21 countries conducted by UNICEF and Gallup – which is previewed within the State of the World’s Children 2021 – a median of 19 per cent of youth aged 15–24 surveyed said they often feel depressed or have little interest in doing things. For Bangladesh, the proportion was lower at 14 per cent. However, behind the info are immeasurable children in Bangladesh who regularly feel depressed or unmotivated.

According to Yeasmin et al. (2020), a decent number of adolescents are stricken by mental state disturbances in Bangladesh during the lockdown period. Mothers' and fathers' ability to forestall their emotional pain or manifestation of depression from influencing their role as parents is also a significant source of resilience for his or her adolescents.

According to Bodrud-Doza et al. (2020), about 85.60% of adolescents are under COVID-19 related stress, which ends up in laziness, bad temper, and chaos within the family. Uncertain future careers, study plans, fear of COVID-19, and financial difficulties are the leading causes of human stress. The factors of economic hardship, human stress, and also the food crisis are all connected

altogether. It creates stress for several people. It also interferes with formal education and plans, causing stress for the duty seeker.

Several studies have been conducted in Bangladesh to explore the mental well-being of students during COVID-19. A study by Islam et al. (2021) surveyed 300 grade 10 students from different schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The study found that 42.3% of the students experienced anxiety and 38.3% reported depression during the pandemic. The study also found that female students were more likely to experience anxiety and depression than male students.

Another study by Mokarrom et al. (2021) surveyed 200 grade 10 students from a single school in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The study found that 61% of the students experienced moderate to severe anxiety, and 47.5% reported moderate to severe depression during the pandemic. The study also found that students who were more active on social media were more likely to experience anxiety and depression. A study by Ahsan et al. (2021) surveyed 300 grade 10 students from a single school in Narayanganj, Bangladesh. The study found that 52.3% of the students experienced anxiety, and 47.7% reported depression during the pandemic. The study also found that students who had poor family support were more likely to experience anxiety and depression.

The studies conducted in Bangladesh suggest that a significant number of grade 10 students have experienced anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. Female students, students who are more active on social media, and those who have poor family support appear to be more vulnerable to mental health problems. These findings highlight the need for mental health support and interventions for school students during the pandemic.

2.4 Influence of Cultural Aspects on Mental Well-being of Students in an Asian Context

In Asian nations, the mental state has not been given much importance (Aresfin and Shafiullah, 2020). Research has identified that there are cultural and societal factors that can influence the attitudes and practices surrounding mental health and well-being among students. In some cultures, there may be a tendency to stigmatize mental health issues and not address them openly, which can have negative consequences for students. For example, a study conducted in Pakistan found that students reported feeling uncomfortable discussing mental health concerns with teachers or parents due to cultural norms that emphasize the importance of hiding personal problems and maintaining a strong public image (Ahmed et al., 2018). Another study conducted in India found that cultural beliefs surrounding mental health and illness contributed to a reluctance to seek help, with participants reporting that mental illness was seen as a sign of personal weakness and that seeking help was stigmatizing (Choudhary et al., 2016).

Therefore, mental health and well-being issues are not taken seriously or completely disregarded. This has caused students and younger generation to be less vocal about it at home or school. Students usually talk about different issues with their school mates, friends or mentors, but the lockdown due to coronavirus has disrupted this channel. Isolation has led to bottling up of feelings and emotions which has worsened the mental well-being condition of students. Mental state problems arising due to COVID-19 have not received the attention they deserve in South Asian countries (Yeasmin et al., 2020).

2.5 Other Factors Affecting Mental Well-being of Students due to COVID-19

According to a recent UNICEF report (2020), approximately 463 million school-aged children around the world, which is almost one-third of the total, faced difficulties in accessing remote learning after the COVID-19 pandemic forced school closures. This aligns with another report by the United Nations, as nations worldwide struggle to develop plans for reopening schools. During the peak of local and national lockdowns, almost 1.5 billion students were affected by school closures. The report indicates that at least 120 million students are unable to access remote learning due to several factors such as lack of online programs for young children, limitations and challenges of online learning, and lack of home resources for remote learning. The Remote Learning Reachability report highlights the constraints of distance education and exposes significant inequalities in accessibility.

Research by Singh et al. (2020) found that COVID-19 infection affects adolescents differently than adults. However, cases of infection in minors have been reported worldwide, resulting in the quarantine of adolescents. Many instances involve the isolation of children from their parents when either the mother, father, or both are infected. Several nations have implemented strict lockdown measures to combat COVID-19, leading to complete detachment in some cases, such as in China, where some adults, teenagers, and children have been isolated. While quarantining measures benefit the community, they can have psychological effects on children. Children disconnected from parents require special attention as they may develop mental health issues due to the anguish caused by their parents' quarantine (Liu et al., 2020). The role of parents is crucial in the early years of adolescents, and any disturbance, such as isolation from parents, can have a long-lasting

impact on the adolescents' attachment. Separation from a parent can make a child more vulnerable and pose a risk to their emotional well-being (Dalton et al., 2020).

Bodrud-Doza et al. (2020) discovered that COVID-19-related stress affects approximately 85.60% of adolescents, leading to sleeplessness, irritability, and disruptions within the family. The primary causes of stress are fear of the virus, hindrances to education and career prospects, and financial struggles. Economic hardship, stress, and food insecurity are interconnected, generating anxiety for many individuals and disrupting formal education and job-seeking activities. Literature exploring the impact of COVID-19 on adolescent mental health shows that the disease instills fear in their minds. Fear of contracting the virus, parental economic difficulties, isolation from school and friends, loss of parents, and pressure from online classes all contribute to the negative effects of COVID-19 on adolescents' mental well-being. Consequently, COVID-19 has exacerbated conditions of anxiety, depression, and stress.

Amidst the pandemic in Bangladesh, three-quarters of adolescents were experiencing stress within their households (Baird et al., 2020). The adolescents are anxious about their studies and exams. Depression is often the result of physical and psychological stress, anxiety, frustration, negative encounters, and fear. Since schools are relying on virtual methods that require face-to-face interaction with adolescents online, detecting any changes in behavior can be challenging (Gautam et al., 2022). Consequently, parents may have to assume additional roles as teachers or counselors, especially for those adolescents who are displaying signs of depression. However, they may not be aware of sudden changes in their adolescent's behavior, which can lead to mental disturbance and an increased risk of suicide (Erbacher, 2020).

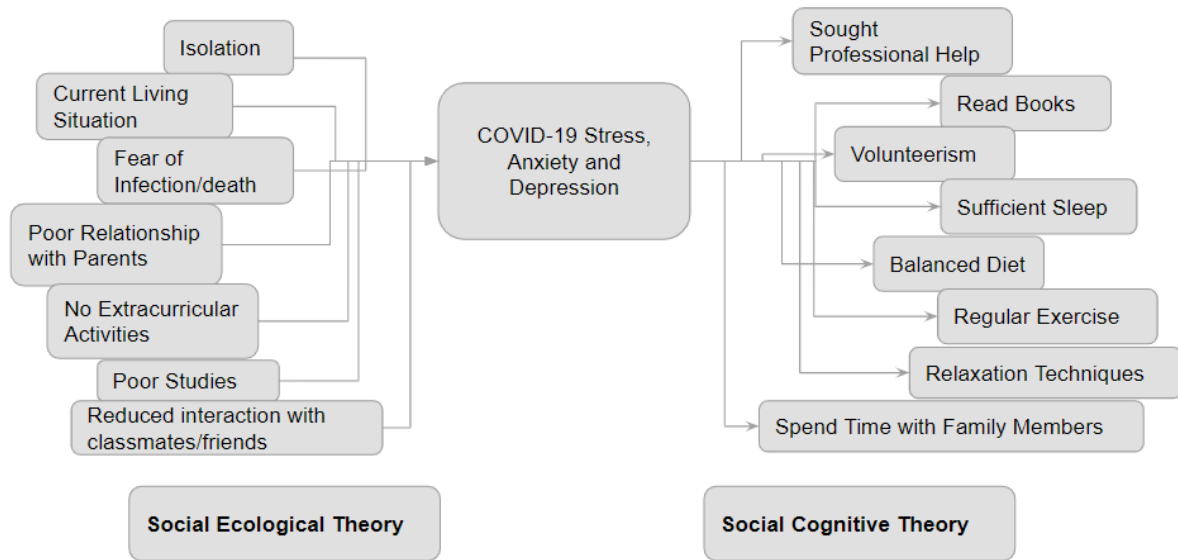
2.6 Conceptual Framework

The mental well-being of individuals is influenced by various risk factors, which can be explained by different theories such as the social ecological theory, social cognitive theory, and social stress model, among others (van Praag et al., 2009, Yen et al., 2009). For this study, the social ecological theory and the social cognitive theory were used as frameworks to understand the risk factors associated with mental well-being.

The social ecologic theory suggests that individual and environment factors are interrelated and that good health can be achieved with behavioral, economic, and social factors promoting it (Krieger, 1994; Cohen et al., 2000). For instance, individuals living in neighborhoods with low socioeconomic status and social support are likely to have worse health outcomes than those in more favorable environments. In the context of this study, socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, place of residence, education, parents' education, family income, personal income, relationship status, and frequency of contact with family and extra-curricular activities are considered as key environmental factors that can affect the mental well-being of students.

The social cognitive theory connects these socio-demographic factors with the cognitive processes that influence emotional, behavioral, and psychological development among students, such as seeking help, reading books, volunteering, getting enough sleep, maintaining a balanced diet, engaging in regular exercise, and practicing relaxation techniques (Figure. 1) (Bandura, 2004; Fisher et al., 2004). The theory emphasizes the importance of individuals having the belief that they can achieve healthy outcomes, setting goals to achieve those outcomes, and having positive expectations of those outcomes.

Conceptual Framework



Bandura, A. (2004). Health promotion by social cognitive means. *Health Education & Behavior*, 31(2), 143.

Figure 1: Theoretical hypothesis for the study based on social ecologic and cognitive theories

In this study, COVID-19 caused drastic changes in the life of a grade 10 student and factors which promote healthy cognitive behaviors were drastically reduced while they faced the new normal. Socioeconomic factors such as loss of income or jobs of parents, poor health or fear of infection/death, unsteady relationship with friends and family, and isolation caused poorer mental well-being in students.

Isolation from the real world during the lockdown was a major challenge for students as they faced the new normal. Staying at home for an unprecedented time was nerve-wrecking which could be a possible contributing to the anxiety and depression caused by COVID-19. The current living situation means the incomes of parents and the loss of jobs also is an important factors that could drive students' stress due to the uncertainty. Fear of infection from COVID, poor relationship with parents, no extracurricular activities, poor study situations, and most importantly reduced

interactions with friends and classmates are factors that can contribute to poor mental well-being due to the building of anxiety, stress, and depression.

Students can improve their cognitive behaviors by channeling their stress, anxiety, and depression through some coping mechanisms such as seeking professional help to deal with issues, making it a practice to read books on a regular basis, actively volunteering in activities through online media, eating a balanced diet, and getting sufficient sleep. Furthermore, regular exercise is another way of dealing with anxiety issues and reduces stress, and specific relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises and mindfulness could contribute to better management of mental well-being. Lastly, building a deeper level of connection with family members through open communication of issues could possibly help students deal with mental well-being issues.

Chapter 3

Methodology of the Study

3.1 Research Approach

This study adopted qualitative approach as the objective of the study is to explore the perspective and dynamics of student's mental well-being of grade 10 students amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research aims to explore and understand complex phenomena and human experiences by examining subjective meanings, perspectives, and behaviors. It focuses on capturing rich, detailed data through non-numerical information, such as interviews, observations, focus groups, and textual analysis. This type of research will help me gather detailed insights regarding the issues of mental well-being which would not be possible in terms of quantitative research.

In this study, by exploring the students' perspective on this issue, young people are identified as the most important stakeholders and their voices are empowered, making this approach appropriate. The qualitative data will be collected through focus groups and in-depth interviews due to its explorative nature (Sim and Snell, 1996). It allows the analysis of the opinions, insights, and attitudes of adolescents on the research questions, to better understand the observed patterns. My limited observation and experience suggests that students are adapting to the new normal in the current education system. Therefore, this study explores the mental well-being of students during this shift.

3.2 Research Site

To understand the dynamics of mental well-being of grade 10 students in Dhaka city, I targeted students from Bangla medium backgrounds who attend the most prominent private schools in Dhaka. One of the targeted school, referred to as school A, is a renowned all-girls educational institution located in Dhaka. The school offers education from kindergarten to higher secondary level, with a focus on academic excellence and character development. School A has a rich history of producing successful alumni, including renowned personalities in various fields such as politics, education, journalism, and sports. The school has been recognized for its outstanding academic performance and has consistently ranked among the top educational institutions in Bangladesh. School A is also well-known for its extracurricular activities, including sports, cultural events, and community service projects, which encourage the holistic development of students.

The other targeted school, referred to as school B, is a co-educational educational institution located in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. The school offers education from nursery to higher secondary level. The school is known for its academic excellence and has consistently ranked among the top educational institutions in Bangladesh. The institution places a strong emphasis on character development, with a focus on instilling the values of responsibility, respect, and empathy in its students. In addition to academic programs, South Point School and College also offers a wide range of extracurricular activities, including sports, music, drama, and community service projects. The school has a rich history of producing successful alumni in various fields such as politics, education, business, and arts. With its commitment to providing quality education and fostering the holistic development of students, School B has become one of the most prestigious educational institutions in Bangladesh.

3.3 Research Participants

Through the process of purposive sampling, I selected students who are currently in grade 10. Grade 10 students of both school A and B are some of the most academically talented and high-achieving students in Bangladesh. Both schools are known for their rigorous academic programs and have a history of producing successful alumni who have excelled in various fields such as medicine, law, engineering, business, and politics. In Bangla medium schools there are two types of Grade 10 students, defined as “new 10” and “old 10”. This refers to students who recently got promoted to grade 10 and the latter refers to students who are at the verge of completing grade 10 and will be sitting for Secondary School Completion (SSC) exams. I selected 12 “old 10” students in total from school A and B for data collection, out of which 70% were females and 30% males. They are 16 to 18 years of age approximately and they all have been attending the same school since class 1.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The two primary data collection methods used to collect data were in-depth interview and FGD.

3.5.1 Interview method

An in-depth interview effectively gathers information in detail on a specific topic beyond the surface-level answers. I conducted five in-depth interviews, out of which three were from school A and two were from school B. The in-depth interviews were conducting online through Zoom and were approximately 30-min-long.

Semi structured questions were used to interview the participants. They are organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with probing questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. The interviews helped me to collect detailed information on the mental well-being from an individual perspective. Students shared their unique experiences which helped me explore my research topic better. The information were arranged into themes.

3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion

FGD is frequently used as a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of social issues. The method aims to obtain data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a broader population. FGD is perceived to be a “cost-effective” and “promising alternative” in participatory research (Morgan, 1996) offering a platform for differing paradigms or worldviews (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

A FGD with the students of grade 10 was conducted for this study where seven students were participated. Participants from both the selected schools were involved in the thorough discussion. I intended for the discussion to have perspective from both genders as well as similar socio-economic backgrounds. As I targeted two schools, one FGD was enough to for data collection. The FGD generated a discussion among students which gave me a holistic perspective of their current situation. At the beginning of the discussion, I introduced myself, reiterated the nature and purpose of the study, and collected their consent verbally. Then I created a safe space for the participants by mentioning a few norms for our discussion so that everyone can share their perspectives and experiences without hesitation. The discussion took place for 60 minutes approximately. The discussion was recorded. I watched the discussion several times to transcribe

the data. Lastly, I organized the information in a table based on the themes which were color coded to facilitate the process.

3.6 Role of the Researcher

Even though I was a primary school teacher for two years, as a researcher, I focused not to develop any biased opinions or navigate the conversations with the participants in any particular direction. I refrained from sharing any personal opinions regarding the topic. I minimized the usage of probing questions and took the conversation forward in a generic approach. However, as a researcher, I observed and understood that creating a safe environment for the participants was very important as they shared very personal and intimate information and I was overwhelmed with their responses.

3.7 Data Analysis

I used the Miles and Huberman framework for data analysis. This framework has three phases: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion and verification (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that have been transcribed during data collection. This is done to manage the collected data and make sense of it. The second phase, data display, provides an organized, compressed assembly of information that helps in drawing conclusions. The data can be displayed in the form of a text or a diagram, chart, or matrix that provides a new way of arranging and thinking about textually embedded data. A data analyst can begin to figure systemic patterns and interrelationships when displayed in word or diagrammatic form. The third phase is drawing conclusion and verification, which means considering what the analyzed data mean and assess their implications for the

questions at hand. "The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their 'conformability' - that is, their validity" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 11). This framework also involves coding of data. Coding refers to the process of assigning colors or different themes in the collected data which helps to identify the most relevant data for the study.

In the first step of data analysis process, I collected primary data from different sources and then analyzed the data by segmenting them under different themes. I determined the themes based on the research questions so that the data could be analyzed in an organized way. I color coded the themes which helped me to select relevant data while reading through the transcribed information. The color code made ensured a smooth process to sort and organize the data. For displaying data, I used direct quotations and some charts of collated data to get an overview of the collected, relevant data. Each research question is a separate theme, which has been assigned with a specific color. The questions in the questionnaires were assigned the coded colors, therefore, making it easier to identify, filter, and align the answers with the correct themes.

3.8 Ethical Issues and Concerns

I shortlisted a group of students and approached them with a proposal to be a part of my research study. Those who agreed to participate, I emailed them a consent letter with clear instructions on how to read and sign the document. They were asked to share it with their parents or guardians if needed. I also cleared out any confusions they had before signing the document. Once I received their signed forms through email, I scheduled the online interviews at their convenient time. The meeting was recorded. After the interview, I watched the interview twice to transcribe the data. Lastly, I organized the information in a table based on the themes which were color coded to facilitate the process.

I considered four ethical issues related to the interview and FGD process:

1. Protecting the participant's information
2. Effectively informing interviewees about the nature of the study
3. Reducing risk of unanticipated harm
4. Reducing risk of exploitation

I maintained anonymity of the interviewee while sharing information in the results section. It is important to maintain anonymity so that no concerns are raised in the future due to the information shared.

Before inviting the participants to the FGD and interview, I clearly communicated the nature and purpose of my research study, and their role as a participant. A consent form was sent to the participants of both in-depth interview and FGD. They were briefed regarding the purpose of the research and only those who signed the consent forms were included in the data collection mechanism. Before the start of the interview, I verbally collected their consent as well. Furthermore, the consent form explicitly mentioned confidentiality of information and names of participants. In addition, it was clearly stated that they can choose to disengage from the study at any time. The recordings of the interviews and FGD will be accessible only to researcher and not published or used elsewhere.

As an interviewer, it was my task to obtain information while listening and encouraging the other person to speak in a safe space. One of the challenges that may arise is when personal experiences

are shared, the interviewer may not be empathetic, which may develop in unforeseen ways. Therefore, it is important to be vigilant and provide psychological support if undue stress is created. Throughout the data collection process, I remained objective to ensure minimal or no biases toward the research study. The questions were strategically framed to avoid biasness or lead the participants towards a particular direction.

As I collected data from grade 10 students, I made sure that they are not exploited in any way for personal gain as many of them are minors. I acknowledged their contributions to the success of my study by appreciating their enthusiasm and effort to work with me.

3.9 Credibility and Rigor

During my tenure as a primary school teacher in an underprivileged government primary school in Dhaka, I realized that I used to teach students who had endless issues related to society, poverty, and early marriage which hampered their education. However, when I had the privilege to work as a leadership instructor at Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC) for three years, I used to teach students of different age groups from schools and universities and I was baffled when I observed that students studying in state-of-the-art schools and universities also faced numerous issues which came as hurdles to receiving quality education. Since then, it piqued my interest to understand and learn more about issues they faced in their day to day lives which caused education to become a burden for them. When COVID impacted Bangladesh and all schools went into lock down, I chose to focus on mental well-being of grade 10 students being impacted and affected due to COVID-19.

3.10. Data Analysis Procedure

When I conducted qualitative research, my data analysis procedure followed a systematic approach. Firstly, I engaged in transcription or data preparation, converting recorded interviews or observations into written text. Then, I immersed myself in the data to become familiar with its content, gaining a holistic understanding and forming initial impressions. Next, I proceeded to coding, systematically assigned labels or codes to segments of the data that represented meaningful concepts or categories. This helped me organize the data and identify patterns. Once coding was complete, I categorized and developed themes by organizing related codes into broader categories. I thoroughly explored and analyzed the data within each category or theme, searching for patterns, contradictions, and unique perspectives. I extracted relevant quotes or excerpts to support my findings. As I analyzed, I interpreted and synthesized the data, reflected on its meaning, and developed explanations or theories. Finally, I reported my findings in a coherent manner, presenting the research questions, methodology, findings, interpretations, and conclusions. Throughout the process, I remained flexible, adapting the procedure to align with my research objectives and the nature of the data I had collected.

3.11 Limitations of the Study

A few limitations hindered the analysis of the study. The sample size was relatively small. As I focused on grade 10 Bangla medium students of specific two schools, access to large number of students was limited. Furthermore, respondents were selected on a non-probability purposive sampling due to small population and the results generated might not represent the larger

population. Even though the interviews and FGD were conducted towards the end of the lockdown, parents or guardians were hesitant for in-person interviews or group gatherings. Therefore all of the data was collected through virtual/online mediums. Moreover, some of the respondents had to back out in the last moment which caused issues with the data collection process given the time constraint. A major limitation was getting access to teachers of the renowned schools for in-depth interviews. Due to their busy schedule and the fear of COVID-19, teachers were not accessible and unwilling to participate in any sort of study.

Chapter 4

Results of the Study

4.1 Analysis of Qualitative Data

Adapting to the new normal is a unique experience for everyone. Whether it is in educational institutions or at the work place, the journey of adaption is not easy. Mental well-being is a concern for everyone, especially for students of grade 10 who are ambitious and trying to achieve their goals.

To understand the mental well-being of grade 10 students during the COVID-19 period, I divided the findings of my research into five themes which are follows:

- Perception of mental well-being of grade 10 students
- Consequences of COVID-19 on mental well-being of the students of grade 10
- Effect on future plans and aspirations of grade 10 students due to COVID 19
- Initiatives that are being taken by school authorities and parents or guardians to ensure the mental well-being of particular students
- Support systems for grade 10 students

The collected data under these themes are as follows:

4.1.1 Perception of Mental Well-being

According to one of the student interviewees:

Mental well-being is not physically related. It is affected by our environment. It is important for students because it affects a student in many ways. The school attendance and study focus are affected drastically. Moreover, when my family members are ill or

when I am very stressed, it affects me mentally and physically. I get head aches and fever. When there is study pressure from school, coaching and family it takes a mental toll on me. (Personal communication: Interview # 1, 31-3-22)

Another interviewee mentioned, “Mental well-being is the amount of happiness in my life. Physical health and mental health are two different things. If I am not happy mentally, it has an impact in my life. For instance, if I have a conflict with my parents, it has an adverse effect on my whole day as I am upset.” (Personal communication: Interview # 2, 9-4-22)

To explore their understanding of mental well-being even further, one student mentioned in the interview:

There are multiple factors such as personal, family environment, school environment. I have seen my friends who undermine themselves for not meeting societal expectations. This is not right in my perspective. Both my parents are working, and if they had not given me enough time I would have felt left out and disconnected. As we grow up, our friends change with time because some friends do not mature and remain very childish. I choose let go of such people. At school, sometimes there is unhealthy competition which takes a mental toll. Furthermore, teachers’ response towards students' needs is also very important. If my teacher is not understanding and did not give me time, it would have made me feel very bad. Within families, there is an unhealthy comparison rather than inspiration and motivation which effect mental well-being. (Personal communication: Interview # 3, 31-3-22)

A student from a different school shared, “As I am a student, there is a constant competitive mindset which occurs in me and this takes a toll on me as I feel the pressure. There is always an expectation from me and if I can't fulfill these expectations, I feel frustrated. If I can't give back to the underprivileged in anyway, I feel bad too. (Personal communication: Interview # 4, 9-4-22)

Another interviewee stated, “Firstly, it is family. If my relationship with my family is not good, it has a major impact on my mental well-being. Secondly, financial instability/uncertainty. Thirdly, too much study pressure due to multiple coaching classes and school. Fourthly, lack of motivation from family when grades are not up to the mark. Lastly, bullied at school or intolerance from teachers also has a major impact.” (Personal communication: Interview # 5, 31-3-22)

From the above data from students, we can draw a finding that the students understand that physical well-being and mental well-being are two different issues. Furthermore, they associate certain factors which effect their mental well-being such as relationship with family, constant competition with peers at school, school environment and environment at home, and the factors which are associated with happiness in their lives.

4.1.2 The consequences of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of students

I asked students several semi-structured questions during interview to understand the existing well-being of students and whether COVID-19 impacted their lives. During an interview with one student, she mentioned:

Lockdown, at home caused a lot of problems. I believe not going to school and socializing with friends adds to poor mental well-being. At home, there was no study pressure and I

was not serious or slacking which caused poor mental well-being. I don't go to school only for studies, but rather socializing with friends and playing together. It gives me lots of joy. But during pandemic, I could not do any of it which changed me as a person. I did not feel study pressure during online classes, hence I was slacking off purposefully. Even if I tried, it was not helping. I feel my mind is rusted. (Personal communication, Interview # 1, 31-3-22)

Another student mentioned:

Yes, obviously. When our institutions were closed down my daily routine as a student got disrupted and I felt a void in my life. I felt very lonely which made me feel worthless. I was scared that whether I was falling behind in my studies. Moreover, I was involved in a lot of extracurricular activities which helped develop skills but when it all stopped, I felt very low and vulnerable. (Personal communication, Interview # 3, 31-3-22)

One of the student's shared her personal experiences:

Yes, it has affected me a lot. I was a very outgoing person. During lockdown, the first few weeks felt like I was on vacation. But as it continued for a longer period of time, it changed my personality. I used to be alone at home as both my parents work. Due to my loneliness, I became very dependent on my phone and eventually got addicted to it. I was always on my phone. My parents showed concerns regarding my behavior but their interventions failed. My behavior towards my parents also changed. Whenever my parents spoke about reducing my phone usage, I used to become very angry and rude towards them. I realized this at an early stage and I reached out to my father for help from a professional. I received

counselling from a professional. But I think I changed completely from my core. I am not the same person I was two years back. (Personal communication, Interview # 2, 9-4-22)

One of the students mentioned during the interview:

It doesn't feel good when I'm aware of myself that I'm losing my mental stability, losing the concentration I had in studies, losing interests in my hobbies, being aggressive in small issues whereas in the past I used to be patient but even after all these, as I have started to take care of mental health again by getting enrolled in some courses (e.g. Courses of Life Spring Ltd) and trying to be free again with everyone by doing school works and other co-curricular activities, I do feel better now; at least better than how I felt during the lockdown and pandemic. (Personal communication, Interview # 4, 9-4-22)

Another interviewee mentioned:

Entering the adolescence period of life while this pandemic had started got me confused as to whether the mental effects were due to changes in my mind, or just the pandemic's effects. But I'm proud that I'm at a better place than I was at because the pandemic brought a lot of positives to my life. I discovered numerous amounts of hobbies, I re-discovered my religion and through trial and error, I discovered what I was good at. And that makes me feel more complete and prepared for the life ahead. (Personal communication, Interview # 5, 31-3-2022)

From the conversations with students, we can draw that during COVID 19, students faced several issues with staying at home, and not socializing with friends or family, purposefully slacking off in studies due to reduced study pressure. Another issue was the daily routine of students was

disrupted and they were not being able to participate in extracurricular activities which also affected their mental well-being. Furthermore, some students could observe a change in their personality and behaviors and they did not understand how or why this occurred which left them in confusion.

On a different note, a few students proactively took some sort of action to keep themselves engaged with different online courses to take care of their mental well-being. In contrast, one student had positive outcomes from COVID-19 lockdown where she re-discovered her religion and purpose.

To explore this theme further, I had asked whether they had taken any steps to explore their mental well-being. One of the students answered:

I can understand when I am stressed. Some of the factors which affect me was shortage of sleep. When I am upset, I tend to talk with close people. Whenever there is any misunderstanding with my friends I tend to not talk about it for a few days and during this period I am uncomfortable. But when I share it with my friends, I feel lightheaded. Also, reading books helps me get distracted and eventually de-stress. (Personal communication, Interview # 1, 31-3-2022)

Another response from a student stated:

I took the responsibility in my own hands. I wanted to get out this feeling of loneliness and void. I applied as volunteer in online campaigns and as a content writer. I utilized my time

in a productive way which helped me get out of my loneliness and helped me gain my confidence back to some extent. (Personal communication, Interview # 3, 31-3-2022)

An interviewee mentioned:

My loneliness led to depression because whenever I used to do Google search about different symptoms, the results were scary and I felt like I was spiraling down. My counselor was helpful and also my aunt who is also a mental health professional supported me to come out of the dark times. I figured out that communication is key for me. (Personal communication, Interview # 2, 9-4-22)

During the FGD conducted by Saud Hussain (2022), participants expressed what they meant by their mental well-being being not okay. Participant 1 mentioned, “Staying at home during pandemic. No friends to share our thoughts with. Affected due to loneliness.” (Focus group notes # 1, 31-3-2022)

Another participant added:

We as students are trying to figure out our life. During this time there is a good bonding time with family. But with friends it is much easier because of same age. It is easier to connect with friends for us. Due to less interaction with friends it affected us. (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 2, 31-3-2022)

Participant 3 followed by with his response. “It is difficult to share everything with family because family members take everything very emotionally and seriously. It is not a good thing or bad thing. But with friends it is easier.” (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 3, 31-3-2022). Participant 4

shared her perspective, “Due to pandemic, I believe it helped me get close with my family members so in fact my mental well-being was better as I got to spend time with my grandma and other family members.” (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 4, 31-3-2022)

During FGD, I wanted to understand how they adapted to their education regime during the pandemic and whether it affected their mental well-being.

When our schools were open, I used to think that a lot of time is wasted at school rather I would think of staying at home and studying hard. There was always a healthy competition amongst our friends. Due to lock down, the healthy competition died out. We got disconnected and our ambitions of becoming something was hindered. (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 6, 31-3-2022)

From the above conversations with students in interviews and FGDs, some of the key findings are that lack of sleep due to anxiety affected the mental well-being of students. Not being able to share or talk to close people such as school friends was detrimental for mental well-being as well. Furthermore, loneliness was a common issue among most students. However, students managed their loneliness in different ways. Some students felt depressed about it whereas one student actively participated in freelancing activities online which helped tackle this difficult situation. Another student spent most time with family members and looked at it on a positive note. Studies in general have been affected drastically as students do not find the healthy competition they used to when at school.

4.1.3 Effect on future plans and aspirations of grade 10 students due to COVID 19

I was curious how uncertainty of their future affected them. In the FGD conducted by Hussain (2022) participants engaged with the following responses:

Participant 5 stated, “I have an end goal for my plan. But now there is no end goal. So, I keep overthinking which affects my mental well-being.” (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 5, 31-3-2022)

My whole family was affected by COVID-19. At that time, my father became very ill and we became very concerned of how we will lead our lives without our father. I was very scared. Moreover, I heard from my father's friends that they enjoyed a lot and did multiple activities such as watching movies, bunking classes, eating out, etc. during their grade 10 days. But for us, the scenario is very different. This made me feel very low as we are going through a different time and we did not get to live the same experiences as they did. This made me feel very low. (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 7, 31-3-2022)

We all have plans for our life. But the pandemic has made me scared to think about new plans. What if the pandemic creates new hurdles for me? What I learned that it is good to have plans, but we should be ready for changing times and not put all our eggs in one basket. (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 5, 31-3-2022)

Participant 2 added, “When the pandemic started, the shock that I faced due to uncertainty hampered my ability to deal with challenges and overcome it.” (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 2, 31-3-2022)

Students in general felt lost during the pandemic, unsure about their future and studies. This uncertainty led to poor mental well-being. Moreover, many close family members of the students were affected due to COVID. The poor health of their family members made them scared of the uncertain future. Also, many students did not know how to deal with the shock and fear of uncertain future.

4.1.4 Initiatives taken by school authorities and parents/guardians

Under this theme, one of the student’s answer during interview was:

Our principal takes initiative to ensure students are not only burdened with studies but rather s/he takes us on picnics. My principal clearly mentioned that besides studies fun is also important for a student. My principal also mentioned we will go to picnic after the pandemic. My parents ask me to read a lot as I love to read books. They buy me books. I do not like going out much. My parents make sure to take us out every week to different place and I enjoy it a lot. My older brother also discusses about different important things with me and counsels me from time to time. (Personal communication, Interview # 1, 31-3-2022)

Another student mentioned:

My school authorities did not take any initiative to address mental well-being of students. However, my seniors at school took some initiative to help out students who were

struggling with loneliness. A community of people with a common problem made me feel that I am not alone facing this issue. Personally, my father is very concerned about my mental well-being. He understands when I feel low. He used to buy me books, encouraged me to listen to music, gardening, counseled me about my future and ongoing situation which helped me a lot. (Personal communication, Interview # 3, 31-3-2022)

An interviewee mentioned:

My father is very conscious about my mental well-being. My father always says that you study or don't study, I want you to be happy and I want you to openly share whatever is bothering you. My mother also is supportive of it. Whenever I keep my bedroom and windows shut, they reach out and ask me if everything is alright. (Personal communication, Interview # 2, 9-4-2022)

One of the students described in detail:

A few of the teachers at my school are very conscious regarding mental well-being. However, the principal is not very enthusiastic about it. The teachers have a club for the students where I can share my problems. There were times when I had major fights with my parents and I could freely discuss about it with them. Another initiative was our teacher arranged a letter box where we could write anonymously about issues which were bothering us and a professional used to help us with our issues on a personal level. My father is very conscious about my mental well-being. My father always says that you study or don't study, I want you to be happy and I want you to openly share whatever is bothering you. My mother also is supportive of it. Whenever I keep my bedroom and windows shut,

they reach out and ask me if everything is alright. (Personal communication, Interview # 4, 9-4-2022)

The responses of the FGD participants under this theme are as follows.

I left school when pandemic hit the hardest and I studied independently since then. I only got a few classes during the pandemic. Our teachers were unfocused because they were not sure of the new normal as well. Teachers could not manage class properly. Authorities and in-charge were not helping out the teachers with the new normal. About the students, there were not considerate at all for example, class timing, and extra support for students, etc. That is when I decided to leave school. (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 3, 31-3-2022)

Teachers as adults are better problem solvers than us, but they were struggling as well. They did not receive support during these challenging times. My anxiety issues increased tremendously and my teacher did not know how to deal with it because school authorities did not focus on such issues and train teachers. The government could also take some initiative to help out schools. (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 2, 31-3-2022)

The above collected data suggests that some school authorities were concerned about the mental well-being of students and took different measures to address the concern. However, some school authorities took no action at all. There were cases where different opinions among the school authorities also resulted in different measures. For instance, in one school the principal was not bothered with mental well-being issues of the students but some class teachers were gravely concerned and took some initiative to address it. Students also realized that teachers were not well

equipped to deal with such uncertainty of the pandemic and the different mental well-being issues faced by the students.

Students mentioned that they received a substantial amount of support from their parents/guardians/siblings during these difficult times. Senior members of the family took some sort of initiative to spend more time with the younger students in the family.

4.1.5 Support systems for students

To learn more about the support systems students used in order to deal with their mental well-being, a conversation was generated during the FGD through probing questions.

When I get a cut in my hand, it is visible to everyone. But the issues which are going through in my mind it is very difficult to express them to people because it is seen as a taboo. When I can't show someone that I am going through something internally, people take it lightly and they make comparisons or give us some solutions which are completely pointless. This demotivated me to share further with anyone especially teachers and school authorities. I kept it all within my mind. (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 5, 31-3-2022)

I could connect with my siblings and we shared our thoughts. My teachers did provide some solutions such as to read books or listen to some good music when we feel low, but besides that no other support was provided from our teachers. (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 6, 31-3-2022)

Participant 2 mentioned, “Sometimes we would have small groups in our class formed by our teachers, which helped us build a platform through which we had a support system for ourselves.” (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 2, 31-3-2022)

Participant 4 stated, “My teachers at school was not helpful. But at my coaching center, the teacher spoke about our mental health and asked us to express what is going through in our minds.” (Focus group notes # 1, Participant # 4, 31-3-2022)

In an interview with one of the students, she mentioned:

Personally, my father is very concerned about my mental well-being. He understands when I feel low. He used to buy me books, encouraged me to listen to music, gardening, guided me about my future and ongoing situation which helped me a lot. (Personal communication, Interview # 1, 31-3-2022)

The above data concludes the key findings of the support systems used by students during COVID 19. Students were confused and were looking for a solution for the new types of problems they were facing recently. Some teachers suggested them to read books or listen to good music when they felt low. Additionally, some teachers used to create small groups during online class to discuss any issues they were facing. However, one student mentioned that the issues which are going through their minds causing them anxiety or depression cannot be seen compared to a physical injury, which can be easily observed with the naked eye. They were unsure of how to process it and express it with their close ones. Additionally, some teachers from coaching centers were

helpful according to students. These teachers made open conversations with students regarding mental well-being. Parents in general were more actively involved in the lives of their children and helped them address issues of anxiety, isolation, loneliness, and hopelessness through various activities.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

The data in the result section of this study was divided into five themes which included; (1) the perception of mental well-being of grade 10 students; (2) the consequences of COVID-19 on mental well-being of grade 10 students; (3) effect on future plans and aspirations of grade 10 students due to COVID 19; (4) initiatives that are being taken by school authorities and parents or guardians to ensure their mental well-being; and (5) support systems for grade 10 students. One of the key reflection of this process was most students did not get the platform to express their unsaid thoughts and perspectives and this data collection process was an opportunity for them to express it. They were comfortable to share their experiences and there was minimal hesitance. The FGD was interactive and engaging and the participants shared multiple personal experiences which enriched this study. A dialogue was generated as participants agreed or opposed to each other's ideas. The in-depth interview process was comprehensive and participants shared in details.

5.1.1 Lack of awareness

The major findings reflected that most of the issues effecting mental well-being of students are not addressed properly due to lack of awareness. However, most students could identify that physical well-being and mental well-being are two separate issues. They are interrelated but mental well-being is higher degree of importance. Some students associated happiness with mental well-being. The Global Partnership for Education highlights the significance of schools in providing comprehensive education that supports the psychological and mental development of children

(Global Partnership for Education, 2021). Schools are crucial for the socialization of adolescents as they provide opportunities to meet friends, engage in play, acquire knowledge, and participate in activities. A key finding from the FGD was one of students felt that the lock down due to the pandemic caused stress and loneliness as they were detached from their school and friends. This group had a stronger connection with their friends and were more comfortable in their presence. However, due to school closures, students were unable to access these opportunities and were deprived of them. Another group of students appreciated that they were able to spend more time at home with their family members which would not have been possible without the pandemic. They spent quality time at home and also had more time to study due to time saved from commuting and other activities at school. This diversity in opinions and experiences made the study much more interesting.

The points which stood out were that most of the students had to tackle loneliness and they were not prepared for it. Almost three-fourth of adolescents were affected by household stress (Baird et al., 2020). Loneliness occurred either due to staying isolated at home alone while their parents went for work or not being able to spend time together as the participants were engrossed in social media. A study found that "there was a significant positive correlation between COVID-19 anxiety and loneliness among both student and professional participants" (Bakul & Heanoy, 2021, p. 76). The study also found that students reported higher levels of loneliness than professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the uncertainty of the pandemic raised concerns within them. They were worrisome about their future goals and aspirations. Some even mentioned that they could feel their learning capacity and quality of education being greatly affected in a negative way. Another interesting finding was the personality of one of the students changed due to the pandemic.

Isolation led to changes in her behavior. Before the pandemic, she was an outgoing, extrovert person but the lack of human interaction and socialization has changed her.

5.1.2 Factors contributing to poor mental well-being of students

Students often experience concerns about their academic studies and exams. The occurrence of depression among them can be attributed to various factors, including the physical and psychological stress associated with academic pressure, feelings of anxiety, frustration, negative encounters, and fear (Gautam et al., 2022). With the increasing use of virtual learning platforms by schools, it becomes challenging to identify any changes in behavior that may indicate distress in students, as face-to-face interactions are replaced by online engagements (Gautam et al., 2022). Consequently, parents may find themselves taking on the additional roles of teachers or counselors, particularly for adolescents who exhibit signs of depression. However, parents may be unaware of abrupt shifts in their child's behavior, which can often lead to mental turmoil and an elevated risk of suicide (Erbacher, 2020).

Home-based online classes created a digital divide. According to Haque (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the digital divide among students in Bangladesh, particularly in the context of online classes. The author notes that while online education has become a necessity during the pandemic, not all students have equal access to digital devices and internet connectivity, resulting in unequal access to education and widening existing disparities in the education system. Citing data from a UNICEF survey, Haque points out that only 40% of households in Bangladesh have internet access, and many students lack devices such as laptops, tablets, or smartphones. The lack of human connection and interaction made students disconnected from their studies.

Moreover, extra work, assignments, and submission deadlines disturbed the mental well-being of students. They are frequently affected by the sudden loss of network signals, the cost of data, and the availability of broadband.

Social media and the internet publish different kinds of news. Some are fake, some are true. Adolescents often get confused about which ones to believe and which ones do not. That disturbs their little minds. Many students restricted from meeting their parents, who were COVID-positive and isolated. Because of this reason, they felt a great deal of stress. It was tough for the students to strictly maintain the safety measures, like washing their hands and wearing masks. Students often complain to parents that they are tired of washing their hands and wearing masks. Students who lost their close ones or someone from their neighborhood felt anxious for themselves and their parents. They might be affected by COVID-19.

According to Aresfin and Shafiullah (2020), in Bangladesh, mental health and well-being has always been given little importance for students due to the demographic group generally being less vocal about their concerns. One of the students mentioned that he tried speaking about his issues with his close ones, but when there was no appropriate response, it further demotivated him to not open up about his issues with anyone. However, a few students mentioned that their parents or guardians were well aware of their child's well-being situation and they took initiative to explore different issues. Even some older siblings took the responsibility of having conversations regarding their younger siblings' mental well-being situation.

Some school authorities such as teachers did take initiative to address the mental well-being of students through different initiatives. However, it was not a systemic approach and was an exceptional case for some schools. Students felt they did not have a platform to share their thoughts and feelings. Moreover, the teachers were overwhelmed too as they were not prepared to tackle the crisis situation. Therefore, there was a lack of support system for the students which was very much needed during those times. Support systems for students is of utter importance to survive through crisis situations such as the pandemic.

5.2 Conclusion

This research is very close to my heart because, on a personal level, the current educational system and regime in Bangladesh, compared to other countries, has become burdensome for younger ones with all the mandatory coaching sessions and extra loads of work. I always had the intention of finding out what the students feel and have to say about their educational systems and connect it with the overall mental well-being of the students. The COVID-19 pandemic gave me an opportunity and purpose to do my research on how students are coping up with the new challenges in life and its impact on their mental well-being. This research is unique as the participants were specifically from grade 10 and no other similar research was conducted earlier with this particular criteria.

This study has explored the different thematic avenues of mental well-being of grade 10 students and I have presented the data through this study. During the process of my study, I learned new ways to collect qualitative data and analyze it. Moreover, this study helped me to change some of my pre-assumptions regarding their well-being during the pandemic. During the FGD and

interview, I had heart to heart conversations with the participants which helped me gain a new perspective towards the challenges they face. I realized there is much more scope of work regarding my research topic which could be implemented from a policy level to ensure a more inclusive and adaptive education system.

5.3 Recommendations of the Study

5.3.1 The need for systemic level strategies

A government level strategy is required to be mandated to address and protect the well-being of students at schools. Government can collaborate with different Non-Government or private organizations to ensure that every student's well-being is taken into consideration. Teachers, parents, and students should have access to professional counselling services funded or subsidized by the government. Schools should provide academic program-based interventions and develop innovative ways of improving mental well-being and reducing stress. Furthermore, online mental health services like tele-counseling and video counseling can be extended to provide mental health support to adolescents on a community or district level. Each school should have a psychological counselor, but this requires increased investment in mental health which can be facilitated by the government.

Online counseling should be made available for both parents and students, in addition to online classes. Teachers should also monitor students during online classes, and clear guidelines for online classes and evaluation should be established to reduce uncertainty and anxiety. Psychologists could be appointed to help students with mental health issues, and counseling centers could be constructed with government funding. To cope with stress and anxiety during the

COVID-19 crisis, it is recommended to communicate regularly with family and friends through virtual gathering programs like Zoom or Google Meet. The school administration could also partner with the government to establish a mobile mental health service application for students to receive therapy from trained professionals.

5.3.2 The role of parents and guardians

The role of parents or guardians is crucial in dealing with such a sensitive issue. Awareness amongst parents is important regarding a student's mental well-being and the underlying factors which affect it. Parents should create a safe space for children to openly communicate about different aspects of life which may affect mental well-being. Almost every student has access to social media, hence, parents should monitor what types of content are being absorbed by them. Parents should engage in indoor activities on a regular basis to improve their mental well-being and quality of life. Moreover, with students spending more time on social media, parents should monitor what content is being accessed by their children. Limiting exposure to irrelevant and harmful content could improve the mental well-being.

5.3.3 Role of the government

Creating awareness regarding a burning issue such as mental well-being is key here. Government can take certain initiatives which will be impactful on a national level. One recommendation could be to include content and strategies in the national curriculum, books, and teacher guidelines for both students and teachers. The national television channels can broadcast various programs through innovative ways to bring to light the issues of mental well-being of children through the support of experts and provide instructions on how to tackle such situations. Cartoons like

“Meena” was a huge success that raised awareness regarding different societal issues and a similar approach could be initiated.

5.3.4 The need for further research

Further research is imperative for delving into the depths of mental well-being issues encountered by students and uncovering effective methodologies to address them. While the awareness surrounding mental health in educational settings has experienced growth, there remains a substantial knowledge gap pertaining to the specific challenges that student’s encounter and the most appropriate interventions to employ. Research endeavors should encompass a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted factors that impact student mental health, encompassing elements such as academic pressures, social dynamics, cultural influences, and the accessibility of support services. Identifying the determinants of risk and early indicators is of paramount importance, enabling timely interventions and prevention strategies. Moreover, research ought to evaluate the efficacy of existing interventions while simultaneously examining pioneering approaches like online mental health resources and peer support networks. By prioritizing research endeavors in this domain, we can engender evidence-based strategies that promote positive mental well-being among students, cultivate supportive environments, and equip educators and institutions with the requisite tools to effectively address mental health concerns.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Consent Letter

Research Project Title:

Research Investigator:

Research Participants Name:

The interview will take 30 minutes of your time. We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from educational institutions require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the accompanying information sheet and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- the interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced
- you will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors
- the transcript of the interview will be analyzed by (name of the researcher) as research investigator

- access to the interview transcript will be limited to (name of the researcher) and academic colleagues and researchers with whom he might collaborate as part of the research process
- any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymised so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed
- the actual recording will be kept
- any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval

Please initial next to any of the statements that you agree with:

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

All or part of the content of your interview may be used;

- In academic papers, policy papers or news articles

By signing this form I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this study. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I have read the Information sheet;
4. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future

Printed Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix B

FGD Consent Letter

Research Project Title:

Research Investigator:

Research Participants Name:

The discussion will take 45 minutes of your time. We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from educational institutions require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the accompanying information sheet and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- the discussion will be recorded and a transcript will be produced
- you will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors
- the transcript of the discussion will be analyzed by (name of the researcher) as research investigator

- access to the discussion transcript will be limited to (name of the researcher) and academic colleagues and researchers with whom he might collaborate as part of the research process
- any summary of discussion content, or direct quotations from the discussion, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymised so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed
- the actual recording will be kept
- any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval

Please initial next to any of the statements that you agree with:

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

All or part of the content of your interview may be used;

- In academic papers, policy papers or news articles

By signing this form I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this study. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I have read the Information sheet;
4. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future

Printed Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix C

In-depth Interview Guideline

Interviewer: Saud Khandaker Hussain

Duration: 30 to 45 min

Date	Interviewee	Grade	School	Time

1. What is your understanding of mental well-being? Does mental well-being play a vital role in a student's life? If yes, how so?
2. What factors do you think contribute to mental well-being?
3. Do you think the COVID-19 pandemic has affected your mental well-being? If so, then how?
4. Following up to the previous question, how does this make you feel and why?
5. Have you taken any steps to explore your mental health and well-being? Please elaborate.
6. Does your class teacher or principal take any initiative to address mental well-being of students at school? If yes, how?
7. Do your parents/guardians take any initiative to address the mental well-being at home? If yes, how?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Appendix D

FGD Guideline

Interviewer: Saud Khandaker Hussain

Duration: 45 to 60 min

1. What are your thoughts on the importance of mental well-being of students during crisis situations such as the ongoing pandemic?
2. What does it mean that your mental well-being was not okay? (probing question)
3. How have you adapted to your education regime during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please elaborate.
4. Does this uncertainty of your future have any impact on your mental well-being? (probing question)
5. Are school authorities such as class teacher or principal aware about mental well-being of students? Please give an example.
6. Did you receive any support for your mental well-being during lockdown and online classes? How can it be incorporated systemically?