

Assessment Styles and Students' Mental Health at Bangladeshi Private Universities

By

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B.A. in English

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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 which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

The thesis titled “Assessment Styles and Students’ Mental Health at Bangladeshi Private Universities” submitted by Maimuna Shafiqul Islam (18103037) of Semester, Spring 2018, has been accepted as excellent in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English on 10th October 2022.

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Ethics Statement

This is my original work. While conducting this research, I have read several books, academic journals and articles but the findings, analysis and conclusion presented in this paper are my own. I used pseudonyms used for the purposes of maintaining anonymity of my interviewees. Regarding document analysis, it was ensured that all names – not only the post-givers, but also those who reacted and commented on the posts – were concealed in this research paper. The participants of social media consented me to take screenshots of their Facebook group posts voluntarily. I never coerced or provoked them by any means to participate in this study.

Abstract

The onset of COVID-19 has brought about drastic changes in everyone's lives, especially of the student body. Although students are seen to perform well academically during the lockdown, the social media is strewn with cries of deteriorating mental health due to the sudden shift of some private universities from offline to online medium. The purpose of this study is to officially recognize those cries to depict the relationship between online assessment and mental health so that they can work together in harmony instead of one sabotaging the other. Four private universities have participated in this study. The participant selection is done through purposive sampling so that they fit the purposes of the study. The data collection procedure involved taking screenshots of mental health issues in relation to online assessment of undergraduate students' Facebook posts of the respective university groups and conducting semi-structured interviews of undergraduate students. In total, 27 screenshots were taken and 16 interviews, conducted. Pseudonyms are used to refer to the participants. The researcher has used a conceptual framework by combining some established theoretical knowledge on depression, anxiety and burnout, drawn from official medical websites. Analysis of the data involved relating the elements to the students by transcribing the interviews including the hesitations, generating distinct codes upon reading the transcript, generating themes and subsequent themes from the codes derived. The data was then thematically analysed to relate the elements – depression, anxiety and burnout to the students based on the findings. The findings revealed that although there are few advantages such as availability of recorded lectures, majority of the participants faced great difficulties with the onset of the online semester and its coursework – the disadvantages such as isolation, alienation and rise of mental and physical health issues, such as depression and finger joint aches, outweigh the little advantage they enjoyed; and there are some

participants for whom the change made no difference, suggesting that the online assessment style have worsened students' mental health. Analyzing the data showed that particular modes of assessment made the students experience the symptoms outlined for depression, anxiety and burnout in the literature review of this study to a great extent because those assessment styles broke the principles of assessment - validity, reliability, practicality and authenticity, resulting in a negative washback. The researcher concluded that, indeed the online assessment style worsened the students' mental health – they have depression – particularly, functional depression, burnout, generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder, given that it was absent during their pre-pandemic times.

Keywords: Assessment, depression, anxiety, burnout, Bangladesh, private university, students, COVID-19, pandemic, online, social media, mental health, physical health, isolation, alienation, joint ache, validity, reliability, practicality, authenticity, washback

Dedication

To all the Private University students, especially BRAC, for striving and thriving under the enormous academic and mental pressure since the onset of COVID-19.

My love, prayers and respect are always with you.

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First of all, I am thankful to Almighty Allah for giving me the *a'ql* (intellect) to understand things and extend my knowledge with the intention to serve humanity. I am grateful to my parents who taught me to be a woman of virtues, good character and a passionate learner. I soulfully acknowledge the hard work of all the faculty members of my ENH Department whose valuable teachings moulded me into the person I am today. I am very grateful to have Lubaba Sanjana Miss in the first course of Linguistics – her simplicity in explaining concepts of linguistics fascinated me enough to choose ELT and Applied Linguistics as my major, as I realised this is what I have been meaning to study. Special thanks to Sayeed Noman Sir – his idea that topics which interest us should be written as research papers instead of mere social media posts – is an epiphany to me – one of the main reasons I penned down this thesis. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Al Amin Sir and, my supervisor, Mohammad Mahmudul Haque Sir – the 400 level courses done under you is what created the grounds for my thesis. Thanks to Seema, Anika Saba, Roohi Huda and Rukhsana Rahim Miss whose teachings about citations, references and article choice, remain unforgettable. Thanks to Maisha Tasnim and Angela, whose editing and proofreading polished my work academically. I am extremely grateful to my participants who consented a part of their valuable time to my interviews. Special thanks to all the people who helped me find participants for this study. I deeply value the hard work of all my friends, especially Shamera Siddique Toran, Jannatul Ferdous Anika, Ibrahim Muhammad and Affan Bin Abdur Rahman, who have supported and encouraged me to complete my thesis. I thank all who refused to help or sabotaged my thesis – without your negativity I would not have discovered the positivity I had within. Lastly, I would like to thank myself for managing to complete the thesis through positive self-talk, despite breaking down often.

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1. Introduction

In this study, the researcher intends to explore the relationship between assessment and mental health. The participants are undergraduate private university students. First, a background of the study is provided which includes the current state of mental health care in Bangladesh and describes the reasons why mental health issues are not widely acknowledged in Bangladesh.

1.1 Background of the Study

The virus, COVID-19, which broke out back in the year 2020, has had paradigm-shifting impacts on peoples' lives around the globe. In an attempt to stop the spread of the virus, this outbreak has been declared as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the second week of March 2020 (Xiong et al, 2020). Owing to this, a lot of countries implemented various measures such as ensuring a policy of 'No Mask, No Service'; closing public spaces including schools, universities, shops, markets, clubs; imposing limits on traveling to foreign countries, and some countries even shut down their whole transit system. Since the schools and universities had to shut down, the education sector considered alternative ways to continue their tutelage or opt for a total halt in course of study. Meanwhile, some private universities had decided to continue delivering their education through online platforms because "... all educational institutions worldwide have been closed due to lockdowns, and the students cannot meet their teachers in person" (Jiang et al., 2022, Introduction section, para. 1). Having experienced COVID-19, one of the deadliest pandemics in humanity, society is distressed as their daily routines are disrupted, negatively affecting their mental and physical health. Students are a major part of this society. Since the impact of this pandemic on the mental health of students is less investigated, especially in Bangladesh, the current information that exists is inadequate.

Mental health is a staple factor to live a sound and productive life. Nevertheless, in Bangladesh, mental health disorders are often not received as a serious public health issue nor as a field requiring ample research. Owing to the huge population, “Bangladesh faces an immense burden of illness arising from both communicable and non-communicable diseases, including mental disorders” (Hasan et al., 2021). Although Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) appeal to meet not only everyone’s physical health but also their social and mental health by 2030, the current state and face of mental health is still a major challenge in Bangladesh due to insufficient awareness and socially-induced scarcity of mental health professionals who are skilled, and where the majority of these professionals reside in the urban areas (Hasan et al., 2021; Sakib, 2021); ignorance of mental health topics at Bachelor of Medicine (MBBS) curricula since 2012 (Sakib, 2021); “lack of public mental health facilities [...] insufficient financial resource distribution and societal stigma” (Hasan et al., 2021, p.81).

Talking about the current context of mental health in Bangladesh, the researcher found that, the first national mental health survey was conducted in the years 2003 to 2005. The second one was conducted in the year 2019, which is the most recent survey. According to it, the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms of home quarantined students is 28.5%, 33.3%, and 46.92% respectively (Hasan et al., 2021). In another study, conducted in 2020, the prevalence of depression and anxiety was found to be 52.2% and 58.1% in pre-pandemic times. After the pandemic hit, the study revealed that the percentage of students experiencing mild to severe depression and anxiety is 82.4% and 87.7% (Islam et al, 2020), which is serious inflation from the pre-pandemic percentage, thus confirming the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the mental health of the Bangladeshi population, especially the student body, to a great extent.

Mental health is not widely accepted in Bangladesh due to many reasons. Firstly, when it comes to specialising in psychiatry, only a handful of professionals have multidisciplinary teamwork between them to properly resolve mental health issues in patients, and the majority of these mental health professionals reside in urban areas (Hasan et al., 2021, p. 80). Various health programs are unable to cater to this insufficiency because there is limited knowledge and negligence about mental health among the general public. For example, it was thought that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), only happens to those who were abused during wars, whereas it could happen to anyone who experienced one or a series of traumatic events (Hasan et al., 2021, p. 80). This explains why “[r]eferrals of patients with mental illness to mental health specialists by primary care physicians or other healthcare providers are near nonexistent” and its workforce in mental health, is skewed in distribution and qualification (Hasan et al., 2021, p. 80). By now, the only national mental healthcare facility is the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), and LifeSpring is a private mental healthcare facility recently gaining publicity among the population by focusing on multidisciplinary teamwork of the professionals.

The second greatest barrier to accept mental health is societal stigma and superstitious beliefs – they have a bidirectional connection. The stigma prevents people to seek help for their mental illness(es) because they are “perceived to be a consequence of possession by evil spirits, as opposed to biological or psychological mechanisms, leading to neglect and abuse of those with mental illness” (Hasan et al., 2021, p. 80). For instance, some psychological disorders such as panic attacks, schizophrenia, and psychosis are perceived to be cursed due to one’s bad deeds or being possessed by supernatural beings. The result is either seeking a cure from traditional healers such as *kabiraj*, *tantric*, or tarot card readers, or hiding the mental illness and wishing it

will go away on its own, often leading to disastrous consequences like suicide or becoming paranoid – events which could have been prevented if initially treated.

Since having a system of higher education is one of the prerequisites to having a well-developed nation, the factors which determine the academic performance of students have to be considered because academic life is stressful for them as they face constant and enormous pressure from numerous sources (Aafreen et al., 2018). In many countries, when the of universities closed down, the students' mental health deteriorated –loneliness and anxiety increased (Chaabane et al., 2021). WHO conducted studies during the pandemic, and identified the various measures that were imposed – for instance, social isolation – might increase some individuals' levels of anxiety and stress, which is defined precisely as “[a]ny form of change that creates emotional, physical, or psychological distress” (Jiang et al., 2022, Introduction Section, para. 3). Stress and academic pressure, is a major ingredient in developing depression (Akinola et al., 2019), which depletes an individual's energy and motivation to do tasks and their ability to concentrate. Students are essential in building an educated society, but if they are mentally distressed – such as suffering from depression, burnout and anxiety – it is going to affect, and probably halt, their academic performance, which is indeed a serious red flag impacting their lives.

1.2 Focus of the Study

Many studies that have confirmed the fact that COVID-19 caused an increase in depression, anxiety, and stress levels in society (World Health Organization, 2022; Salari et al., 2020). Since the literature review has indicated rare attention being paid to the relationship between assessment styles and mental health, especially among the student body, this study will reveal a notable association between assessment styles and students' mental health such as

depression, anxiety, and burnout with special focus on private universities in Bangladesh, making this study unique from others. For this purpose, three research questions have been put forward in **3.3 Research Questions**. This study examines the relationship of the variables by creating a conceptual framework from some established diagnostic symptoms, and analysing the data under various themes derived from the codes of the primary and secondary data.

2. Literature Review

Online assessment has been essential throughout the pandemic, and will most likely continue to be a necessity in future. In order to explain its styles and impacts on students' mental health, the researcher will start with the definition of assessment and gradually narrow down to its impacts and the causes of those impacts.

2.1 What is Assessment?

Assessment is one of the major parts of a teaching and learning process. It can be defined as an item of “methods and techniques [that is] used to gather information about [a student's] ability, knowledge, understanding and motivation” (Allan, 1999; Ekbatani & Pierson, 2000; Lambert & Lines, 2000; as cited in Tosuncuoglu, 2018, p. 163). It also “diagnose[s a student's] strengths and weaknesses [that are] related to classroom instruction[s], [and] provides specific feedback to students in support of their learning” (Pierce, 2002, as cited in Tosuncuoglu, 2018, p. 163). Therefore, assessment is the bar that informs both teachers and learners how much the former has taught, and the latter has learnt.

2.2 Principles of Assessment

The basic principles that all kinds of assessment ought to adhere to are authenticity, practicality, reliability, validity and washback (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010)

2.2.1 Validity

When a test genuinely measures what it intends to measure, then that test is said to adhere to the principle of validity (Hughes, 1989). Validity is roughly divided into three categories – namely, content validity, construct validity, and face validity.

Content validity, "... refers to the extent to which the items on a test ..." fairly represents the concepts the test has intended to measure (J. Salkind, 2010, np). A test has adhered to content validity "... only if it includes a proper sample of the relevant structures ..." depending on the purpose of the test (Hughes, 1989, p. 22). Arthur Hughes (1989) continues that content validity is important since the more a test adheres to it, the more accurately it will measure what it intended, resulting in a positive washback (will be discussed in 2.2.5 and in details in 2.6).

Construct validity is the degree to which a test measures the skills and abilities that the candidate is tested for. It differs from content validity in the sense that content validity, if adhered correctly, will mean that the test has measured appropriate content. For instance, a test assessing how well students have memorized a religious text and can write it from memory, cannot deduct marks if the students' grammaticality is in question; since the content is something that is deemed to be correct, the grammar mistakes should not occupy majority of the marks. This shows the test has adhered to content validity. If the same test is assessed based on how much the students are able to put the teachings in that religious text to daily lives, it means the assessment has not adhered to construct validity (Im et al., 2019).

Face validity refers to the idea that a test, at face value, measures what it claims to (Holden, 2010, [Abstract]). If this statement is true for a test so much so that its purpose is crystal clear even to naïve students, then such a test is said to have a high face validity. This validity is often needed where students are deterred from giving a test and so teachers need to find alternative ways to assess them (will be discussed in details in section 2.3.6) to reduce test anxiety (discussed in details in section 2.2.4) and negative washback (will be discussed in details in section 2.2.5).

2.2.2 Practicality

Practicality refers to the idea that a test is compatible with both the learner's and teacher's cost, time constraints, administrative ideals, evaluation procedures and materials to conduct the test (Tosuncuoglu, 2018, p. 163). For example, a test may have high validity, reliability, authenticity, and constructive washback, but it may be impractical due to logistic factors that it cannot and should not be administered. A good example in the Bangladeshi context is English speaking exams. Though speaking is one of the four core skills of language learning, it is widely neglected in the curriculum due to the lack of practicality of administering individual viva for the large population.

2.2.3 Reliability

When a test takes into consideration the factors related to the test such as students' issues about the test (stomach churns, exam anxiety etc.), the test administration and scoring process and test items – then it can be said to adhere to the principle of reliability. The scoring process includes inter-rater and intra-rater reliability. Inter-rater reliability refers to a discrepancy between the scoring by more than one evaluator or scorer for the same test, “possibly for lack of attention to scoring criteria, inexperience, inattention, or even preconceived biases” (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 21). Intra-rater reliability, on the other hand, is more common and it is a measure of how consistent a single scorer is in assessing a test.

To make a test reliable, an administration should make sure learners are provided with suitable conditions to take the test. For example, in a country where summer or winter resides most of the time, the test-conducting classroom must be equipped with a functioning air conditioner or a heater and school electricians to fix them in occurrence of unexpected incidents – for example, the A.C not working in the middle of a test. Other factors of unreliability can arise

from insufficient lighting, conditions of desks and chairs, excessively photocopied test papers which make the font or figures (if any) unreadable and too much street noise near the classroom (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 21). Some learners are more concerned about the time limit, preventing them from performing their best, which also contributes to test unreliability. For instance, if a test is timed for hours longer than the students' concentration limit, they might become exhausted and complete the rest of the test with haste, less concentration, or boredom – leading to a lot of incorrect answers, making the test unreliable to track their progress (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 22).

2.2.4 Authenticity

Authenticity, refers to the concept that the test contains items which are useful both in the classroom and the real world, meaning, "... test item types [which] fail to simulate real-world tasks ..." lack authenticity (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 28). In order to make a test authentic, it must replicate real world language, items, topics, themes and tasks. For instance, the language of the test should, rather than sounding as commands, appear to be talking to the test-taker, putting the test-taker at ease, reducing test anxiety, and locating where the student stands in their academic performance (Wallace, 2018).

Furthermore, the test questions should be contextualized, preferably related to the learners' culture, interests, and every day, non-esoteric elements (Umirova, 2020), the test items, tasks and topics should be related to the real word and go hand in hand with the context of the test - bearing in mind that this level of test-takers have either encountered or will encounter such topics. For instance, Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) papers use some common Bengali names in their questions to refer to a scenario, so that students can relate to it and answer accordingly.

2.2.5 Washback

Washback is the effect an assessment has on teaching and learning (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010), meaning, washback is the impact, a test washes back on a teacher and a learner both prior to and after testing, providing useful prompts to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of the learner(s) and highlight which part of the teaching aspect, the teacher needs to focus more to help the learners (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). The term 'backwash', is often used interchangeably with 'washback', but has a slightly different meaning. Backwash refers to "... the way a test affects teaching ..." and learning (Taylor, 2005, np). Hence, only the term 'washback' will be used.

Although washback generally happens after any test, its effects are most noticeable after a high-stakes test, which is a test that has massive ramifications for learners, for instance, passing a certain course at school, choosing a career, being eligible to receive a green card to become a legal citizen, making the choice of continuing education, and so on. There are two types of washback – positive and negative. A positive washback results when the learner achieves the desired result in a high-stakes test, and a negative, when the learner does not. This will be more elaborately discussed in section 2.6.

2.3 Types of Assessments

Although different authors have categorized different assessment types, assessment can be roughly grouped under six major types – namely, progress tests, achievement tests, placement tests, proficiency tests, aptitude tests, and alternative assessment. The reason test and assessment are used non-interchangeably here is that the first five tests are conducted to adhere to a set of objectives or goals, whereas the term assessment brings with it the connotation that it is more of a continuous procedure than a tool for deriving a result. However, both are "...systemic

processes of measuring knowledge, behavior, skill, attitudes, and beliefs according to explicit rules and benchmarks” (Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2014, p. 9-20; Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2015, p. 20-39; Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2018, p. 2).

2.3.1 Progress Test

According to Wikipedia, progress tests are “... feedback oriented educational assessment tools for the evaluation of development and sustainability of cognitive knowledge during a learning process (2021, 09:07).”

2.3.2 Achievement Test

Achievement tests are used to determine the quality of content learnt after the completion of a particular course of study. Achievement tests, in most cases, are conducted as the final assessment at the end of a semester or year at school, college or university where the grades determine the mastery of that particular course or subject so they are often high stakes tests.

2.3.3 Placement Test

Placement tests are conducted to place students into the level of study appropriate for their current intellectual and knowledge level. For instance, when categorizing a group of writing skill-deficient students into three levels of writing-focused class at a university (Level 1-3, where 1 is for beginners and 3 is for advanced learners), placement tests are used.

2.3.4 Proficiency Test

Proficiency tests are used to measure how much content a student has learnt in their course of study. Although it sounds similar to an achievement test as defined in 2.3.2, it is different because it measures the student’s overall knowledge – that is, the ability of the student to use the content in real life situations; whereas, achievement test measures whether the student

has grasped and is able to retrieve the learnt content at some level (for example, at the beginning of the course).

Proficiency tests are often standardized, and "... standardized academic language proficiency test scores [like International English Language Testing System {IELTS} and Test of English as a Foreign Language {TOEFL}] are often used for multiple purposes, including admissions of international students to degree programs ..." (Ockey & Gokturk, 2018, n.p) and general workers to measure their overall language proficiency.

2.3.5 Aptitude Test

Aptitude tests "... seeks to assess an individual's characteristics, [their] potential to achieve [and] present skills or... intellectual abilities that are, in most cases, not specifically taught in school (Nugba & Quansah, 2021, p. 44).

2.3.6 Alternative Assessment

According to Huerta-Macías, alternative assessment is the type of testing where tests differ from standardized tests in the manner that they provide an alternative to traditional tests and help alleviate the problems that come along with such testing (1995). This type of testing asks students to recall concepts from their memory and demonstrate concept application.

Alternative assessment basically offers nonintrusive elements to the classroom which traditional testing typically does not, such as performance tasks, group discussion, crib sheets, portfolios etc. where a separate class is not required to show how the skills and concepts learnt by the students are being and/or going to be implemented in real-life domains. Therefore, it provides multiple notes to track the student's progress – their strengths and weaknesses and reflects the curriculum too because it is based on real-life tasks.

Alternative assessment is necessary when a high-stakes test becomes product based rather than process based, meaning that it gives too much importance on the result of the students rather than the hard work put in by the students in order to achieve the result. In Bangladesh, there are two major high-stakes tests – namely, SSC and HSC which are equivalent to O and A levels respectively. Although a high-stakes test should not only test theoretical but also conceptual knowledge, such tests fail to meet that standard, and a rise in the suicidal rates after publication of SSC-HSC results is the proof (Khan, 2017). Students are also made to think the results determine their future, instead of the effort, hard work and practical skills that went into preparing for the exams (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018). Even the students who pass SSC-HSC carry this mindset into their undergraduate course of study, resulting in dropping off courses or spiraling into depression throughout the course. Therefore, alternative assessment can be a way to ease the tension and relax the system, because they are not high-stakes tests.

2.4 Online Assessment as a Category

The types of assessment discussed above are all, by default, offline or physical assessment. Indeed, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no need to categorize something as ‘offline’ assessment, as this was the unchallenged norm of assessment worldwide; that is not to say that the concept of online assessment was nonexistent. The use of technology has existed since the 18th century. However, it was simply known as ‘distance education’, which rapidly grew “... in the late 1990s with the advance of the online technical revolution...[and] beginning with ... the use of parcel post, to radio, then to television ... finally [led] to online education” (Kentnor, 2015, p. 22).

This paper differentiates traditional offline assessment from the ‘new norm’ of online-heavy or online-only assessment. The researcher will focus on online assessment because it is the

leading form of assessment that has been used throughout the pandemic. Even when the COVID-19 situation is under control, doubtless it is that some remnants of online assessment – and online education as a whole – will remain. Therefore, this paper explores how online assessment is influencing the academic grounds, their impact on students' mental health, some of which are unknown, in the light of principles of assessment.

2.5 Assessment in Bangladesh

The education system in Bangladesh is divided into three major levels – primary, secondary, and higher education. The primary level comprises eight years of education for both Bangla and English mediums. The secondary level continues for four years in both the mediums, but in some English medium schools, it spans three years. The higher education constitutes undergraduate, Masters, and PhD. In this paper, the researcher is focusing on only the undergraduate course of study.

The assessment in Bangladesh is generally “... interpreted as a means to evaluate the attainment of the course content knowledge of each individual student ... [and] measure what students know about the course ...” (Hassan, 2019, n.p). However, the assessment framework of Bangladeshi universities is different from its foreign counterparts – it is concentrated with theoretical information and concepts, and analytic tasks are mainly practiced in relation to the enrolled subject, making it doubtful whether actual learning has taken place or not. According to Hassan (2019), instead of being pigeonholed by their degree subject, graduates should be provided with a holistic course of study so they can be ready to do any type of work and be capable of applying their theoretical-analytical knowledge derived from their subject.

2.5.1 Public and Private – Two Types of Universities

There are two major types of universities in Bangladesh – public and private. Academic institutions that are owned by the state and funded by the government are known as public universities (Huque et al., 2021). According to (Huq & Huque, 2014), private universities are academic institutions which are funded by tuition fees and its own investments, hence the name 'private'. However, although the institutions are owned privately, they are obliged to follow the government's rules and regulations.

2.5.2 Focus on Private Universities

In this paper, the researcher is focusing on private universities because, as mentioned in 'Methodology' section **3.4 Setting**, she herself is a private university student; and secondly, the researcher has found a lack of studies being conducted on universities' assessment compared to primary and secondary education, despite the fact that universities are a crucial stepping stone for attaining maturity, broader knowledge, understanding, and real-life experiences. Moreover, the education system at private universities is less researched on and known by the general public – there are still negative views held by the general public such as easy-to-get degrees, selling certificates, little to no learning and so on, although the number of private universities have outnumbered their public counterparts (Naser, n.d.). Therefore, the researcher has identified assessment in universities, particularly, private universities as the gap in literature.

2.6 Effects of Online Assessment in General

Since the effects of today's online-heavy assessment are by no means fully conquered, in this paper, the researcher will research it. Before that, difference between the words 'effect' and 'impact' will be cleared. Effect is the outcome of an action, whereas impact is the influence an action has on something or someone (Alhayany, 2018). The researcher used the word 'effect' in the title of section 2.6, because that is the most general form of addressing how online

assessment affected students, thereby addressing the impacts of online assessment in the breakdown of this section.

2.6.1 Impacts of Online Assessment?

Before describing the impacts of online assessment, the researcher will make it clear that there are, in fact, significant impacts of online assessment, firstly because educators who were not technologically-savvy had to suddenly climb the steep learning curve to cope with the new system of teaching and education (Pillai et al., 2021).

Research has not been done specifically focusing on the area of mental health due to such changing assessment styles as seen in the COVID-19 pandemic. Theoretically, formative assessment is supported quite unanimously in the literature (Hansen & Ringdal, 2018), but the implementation was extremely sudden and not fair at times, especially considering the ever-increasing danger rate of the virus at that time. The virus still persists today, and in the context of this research study, the assessment style is no better, if not, worse, due to the scaling up of the grade scores again, despite the situation not having gone back to normalcy. By scaling up of the grade scores, the researcher intends to draw attention to the mark's scales practiced by the private universities. Since, during pandemic the scaling of grade was adjusted repeatedly and this aggression has negatively impacted students' grades, otherwise known as Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), and academic achievement (Alam et al., 2022).

2.6.2 Lack of Existing Research on Mental Health Impacts

As seen from the literature above, the researcher can confirm that, indeed, there are impacts of online assessment on mental health just as much as on physical health, perhaps even more, and there is a lack of existing research on the former. The researcher has identified three

main reasons for such impacts. The foremost reason is, the mental health domain is taken as taboo. People regard it as non-compos mentis and equivalent to losing sanity (Wu et al., 2017). Perhaps this has to do with the counselling services or the fact that before, about 10 years back, people only took veritable insane people to a psychologist, and not those not having crossed the threshold to clear insanity. A 2001 research article, for example, report that most cases of bipolar disorder was misdiagnosed as major depressive disorder which was a poor prognosis because it exacerbated suicidal tendencies and manic episodes in people who were initially treatable (Ayano et al, 2021; Bowden, 2001). Moreover, there have been tales of thousands of insane people being locked up in mental hospitals and when their numbers increased, they were transferred to jails and prisons (Okasha, 2004). Even though today more than one in every ten people suffer from a mental illness (SingleCare Team, 2021), this issue is still taken as a taboo, an issue which is concerning to psychologists. The saddest part of this is, even health professionals other than those who care for patients' mental health, do not consider mental health to be a valid medical field, let alone in research and further studies (Vistorte et al., 2018). They have a desire to fix the symptoms of a person suffering from mental health by force and denial rather than accepting the problem as psychological. There should be a line as to which extent problems should be deemed psychological, but this does not mean all psychological issues are non-existent.

The second reason arises from the first reason. The effects of assessment are not fully conquered in offline classes, let alone online classes, which is doubly isolating – one, from each classmate to the other and from the teacher to the student, and second, the assessment does not require direct interaction with the test-takers as it is mediated through an electronic device. Hence, the connection is robotic (Greenan, 2021).

The third reason may not be as strong but there is much clarity to it. Many universities have come forward to help students overcome their mental health barriers, and their considerations are well appreciated. However, the researcher and probably many others have experienced significant delays when they reached out to the counselling service. For instance, in a study, it was shown that, it took about six weeks for a counselling service to contact a student who had asked for counselling service at the university. Some reported that the emotional support was lacking in the university's counselling service, so they never wanted to go there again (Younis, 2014). This shows a significant neglect even by those in the mental health post, and shows, the concerned people are understaffed and/or overworked, both of which point to the immense need for more research on mental health.

Therefore, the researcher has identified a significant lack of existing research on mental health impacts as the literature gap.

2.7 Types of Mental Health

Mental health is defined as “a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioral adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, a capacity to establish constructive relationships and cope with the ordinary demands and stresses of life” (American Psychiatric Association [APA], n.d). In addition to this definition, the World Health Organization [WHO], (2004) had added that the well-being has to be such that “...the individual realizes [their] own abilities ... and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (as cited in Galderisi et al., 2015, n.p).

There are numerous types of mental health issues; however, the researcher decided to narrow down to the three most commonly talked about mental disorders – depression, burnout, and anxiety – and shed light on how they are exacerbated by the shift to online assessment.

2.7.1 Depression

Depression is a “medical illness that negatively affects how [an individual] feel[s], the way [they] think and ... act” (APA, 2021). If any individual has the following symptoms for at least two weeks and those symptoms have caused significant distress in their daily lives, then they are said to have depression. The symptoms can vary from low to mild to severe. According to (APA, 2021) the symptoms are:

- Feeling sad or having a depressed mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Changes in appetite — weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue
- Increase in purposeless physical activity (e.g., inability to sit still, pacing, handwringing) or slowed movements or speech (these actions must be severe enough to be observable by others)
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide

However, depression is different from sadness because the latter is an emotion that affects individuals during their stressful or somber times, a normal reaction to difficult times such as the loss of a loved one, which usually passes with time; but depression causes a person to become pessimistic about life in general. A person feeling sad over the death of a loved one will grieve for the deceased but a person with depression will continue feeling sad to the point where they might long to join the deceased person soon (Fitzgerald, 2019).

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) lists several factors that can contribute to an individual's depression. It can happen to anyone regardless of the ideality of their situations. The figure below outlines the risk factors of depression.

Biochemistry	Differences in certain chemicals in the brain may contribute to symptoms of depression.
Genetics	Depression can run in families. For example, if one identical twin has depression, the other has a 70 percent chance of having the illness sometime in life.
Personality	People with low self-esteem, who are easily overwhelmed by stress, or who are generally pessimistic appear to be more likely to experience depression.
Environmental Factors	Continuous exposure to violence, neglect, abuse or poverty may make some people more vulnerable to depression.

Figure 2.7: Risk factors of Depression – diagram adopted from (APA, 2021)

There are several types of depression, but the researcher is going to focus on two particular types: major depression and functional depression. The following subsections elaborate these types of depression.

2.7.1.1 Major Depressive Disorder. Major depressive disorder is a severe form of normal depression. In order to be diagnosed with it, an individual needs to have at least five of the following symptoms for more than two weeks, according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5)* as cited in a YouTube video titled “What is Major Depressive Disorder?” (2015) in the timestamp 00:28 to 03:26. The individual needs to have:

- a depressed mood and anhedonia, which, in more common words, translates to a loss of pleasure and interest in things
- a significant disturbance in appetite such as eating too much or too little
- a significant disturbance in sleep such as and hypersomnia or insomnia
- a notable change in movement such as becoming more fidgety or retarded than usual
- fatigued for nearly everyday
- excessive feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt even for no apparent reason
- feeling that the individual alone is the root cause of all problems and negativity
- diminished ability to think, concentrate or decide such as watching and re-watching a video clip but being unable to make sense out of it
- constantly thinking that ending one’s life is the key to solving all problems in life

2.7.1.2 Functional Depression. When individuals continue having major depressive disorder and cannot get the help they need, they either commit suicide or develop a type of depression known as functional depression. This is not an actual diagnosis but it can be treated as one, because, if put in simpler words, it means functioning while having depression, that is,

doing all the routine work that needs to be done in order to function everyday, such as getting up for study, eating, sleeping etc. However, on the inside, due to depression, these individuals struggle to get the help that they need because they are 'functioning' and not falling all apart (Morton, 2017, 00:40-00:50).

Therefore, in this case of depression, individuals look perfectly fine on the outside – for instance, they may still show up for work and submit assignments within the deadline. However, they do this because they cannot afford to lose something they are working hard for (Morton, 2017), for example, in case of students, it is their CGPA. Indeed, functional depression is something akin to “hanging onto life by a spider web” (Morton, 2017, 01:26).

2.7.2 Burnout

If this stage of mental health is left untreated, then it leads to burnout. Burnout is defined as “a state of mental and physical exhaustion caused by one's professional life” (Morton, 2019, 00:57-01:01). Its symptoms can mimic depression and look like it is a result of both depression and chronic stress, but it is more than that. It was not actually called a diagnosis until in 1974, Dr. Herbert Freudenberger, a psychologist, “...noticed his volunteers at a free clinic for drug addicts in New York City” (Morton, 2019, 01: 06-02:31) become easily exhausted at work even if it was a simple task and become irritable, unable to complete work, unable to accept feedback and think about new ways to approach an issue, when they were doing high stress jobs.

Although Dr. Herbert Freudenberger has described burnout as “... the consequences of severe stress and high ideals in 'helping' professions ...” (Depression: What is burnout?, 2020) it can happen to anyone whose amount of hard work does not equal the reward they get. For instance, students can become burnt-out if they work hard to attain good grades in courses and

perhaps an increase in CGPA, only to find out that even after completing two full semesters, the CGPA only increased by 0.01.

Previously, the *World Health Organization* (WHO) recognised burnout as an “occupational phenomenon” only. In a chapter of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), in its 11th revision, burnout was identified only as a mere reason for which people might need to contact a health service. It was conceptualised as:

“... a syndrome ... resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed ... [and it] refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life. It is characterized by three dimensions [– namely,] feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job; reduced professional efficacy” (WHO, 2019).

However, recently, WHO has recognised burnout as a mental illness (De Luce, 2019).

2.7.3 Anxiety

Anxiety is an inevitable part of life because everyone faces problems one time or the other. Occasional anxiety (also commonly known as stress) is expected and even required since it motivates an individual to function in their daily life. However, when stress accumulates in a person’s life so much that it becomes a cause for worry, then it is said to be toxic because in most cases, anxiety disorders stem from here and overwhelms the individual’s system.

According to an article titled “Anxiety Disorders” in the *National Institute of Mental Health* (NIMH), in order to be diagnosed as having an anxiety disorder, an individual has to have anxiety such that it “... does not go away and [worsen] over time. The symptoms can interfere

with daily activities such as job performance, school work, and relationships” (2018, n.p.). There are many types of anxiety disorders – however, the researcher is going to focus on Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and panic disorder since she wants to explore the matter in detail.

2.7.3.1 Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). Individuals who have Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), are anxious about non-anxiety inducing situations, so much so that it interferes with their daily lives, work, social interactions and essentially everything, even “... relatively benign situations” (*MedCircle*, 2021, third paragraph). Relaxing and calming themselves down is a challenge to them. Regarding the symptoms of, GAD, these can be physical, emotional, and psychological. The physical symptoms of GAD are “fatigue, headaches and migraines, rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms and ‘feeling hot’ constantly, numbness or tingling, gastrointestinal distress and an elevated blood pressure” (*MedCircle*, 2021, fourth paragraph). The emotional and psychological symptoms are listed below as quoted from the article “Anxiety Disorders” (2018, fourth paragraph):

- Feeling restless, wound-up, or on-edge
- Being easily fatigued
- Having difficulty concentrating; mind going blank
- Being irritable
- Having muscle tension
- Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
- Having sleep problems, such as difficulty falling or staying asleep, restlessness, or unsatisfying sleep

When an individual is exposed to prolonged stress-inducing situations such as abusive relationships or a constant need to work harder than usual to keep up good grades, they are likely to develop GAD, where they not only worry about worrisome events such as exams, but also the routines they follow every day to achieve their desired goals. Hence, what differentiates GAD from normal worry is that such people tend to worry about anything and everything which crosses the boundaries of normal worry.

2.7.3.2 Panic Disorder. While the word 'panic' is used without actually referencing to its meaning per se, its common usage is somewhat correct, because this disorder results from experiencing much panic attacks to the point that puts the individual in a constant fear of experiencing them again. A panic attack "... refers to a brief, intense episode of elevated anxiety..." (*MedCircle*, 2021, eighth paragraph) or "... sudden periods of intense fear that come on quickly and reach their peak within minutes ..." (*NIMH*, 2018, fifth paragraph). Such attacks occur suddenly or are brought about through an interaction with something, someone, a situation, or a combination of them all. Panic attacks cause significant psychological distress to the individual.

The symptoms of a panic attack can mimic those of a heart attack and stroke, as while experiencing it the individual can feel a sense of their chest tightening as if their breathing is becoming shortened, a blurred vision, dizziness, a racing heartbeat, and some people are even reported to feel as though they are generally choking or are being choked to death (*MedCircle*, 2021). As a result, individuals with this disorder tend to avoid coming into contact with anything that triggers such onsets even if it means making a significant change in their routine or leaving something important behind them because they always catastrophize, simply translated - a

feeling of impending doom, meaning, individuals continuously think about panic attacks thus experiencing more panic attacks in the process.

While a typical attack may last for five to ten minutes, some may last for hours exhausting people through recurrent attacks. According to the article “10 Types of Anxiety,” “[w]hile there [is not] a specific cause for panic attacks, risk factors can include having a preexisting history of anxiety, experiencing heightened levels of stress, and substance abuse” (*MedCircle*, 2021).

2.8 Relationship between Assessment and Mental Health

A lot of research has been done about this relationship at the kindergarten, school and college level but not much at the university level until the pandemic hit. This statement requires a citation but the researcher is unable to find any, making the relationship between assessment at the university level and its students' mental health, significant enough to be looked into and an even stronger literature gap.

The major forms of assessment in universities are assignments, quizzes otherwise known as class tests, exams and viva. The assignments and quizzes span throughout the semester. The exams are mostly conducted twice – midterm and final. The viva is conducted immediately after conducting each of the exams to rule out chances of plagiarism (Pearce & Lee, 2009).

When the frequency and number of assessments taken per course in a university increase, just like any other educational institution, students face academic stress such as exam anxiety (Mines, 2014). A study conducted by Bluman et al. (2011) concluded, although daily assessing did not cause any major harm to the students' productivity in a course, but it failed to prove that it enhanced students' performance either. During the pandemic, universities posed a common theory - frequent assessing will keep the students involved in the course (Reisel, 2013). The

benefits and drawbacks of this were summarised by Richard O. Mines in his article *The Impact of Testing Frequency and Final Exams on Student Performance*. The author wrote,

Some advantages promoted by this approach include less material covered between quizzes, leads to less procrastination, better class preparation, and the ability to provide students with fast feedback. The down side to frequent testing includes less class time for covering other topics, potential damage to student morale by increasing student anxiety, more time required for making up and grading quizzes, less effort given to studying by students since frequent quizzes are typically weighted lower in the final grade determination... (2014, p. 2)

Even though private universities in Bangladesh conduct assessments other than exams, students' focus eventually falls on end-of-course exams, due to mark distribution, time constraints and exams being a problematic method of assessment. The researcher failed to find literature that talks about why the first two reasons makes students focus on end of term exams hence those reasons are identified as literature gap and will be discussed in **5. Analysis**.

End-of-term exams carries the maximum percentage of the assessment framework. If a student has not performed well in the assessments strewn along in the course such as the assignments and quizzes, the end-of-term exams becomes their final resort to gain maximum marks to pass the course, making such exams problematic. The problem with university exams is, students attend university due to many incentives and exams do not quote unquote adhere to them. For instance, exams require, "...memorising fast and quickly forgetting material rather than developing long-term skills and sustaining knowledge... [and the process of learning is mistaken] with a bizarre contest of against-the-clock knowledge regurgitation" (Sánchez, 2018). End-of-term exams promotes focus-on-end attitude in students leaving out the constant hard

work they put in throughout the semester. It also tends to make students take each assessment strewn along in the course less seriously because the end of term exams will add the maximum marks to pass the course anyways. The result is procrastination, exam anxiety, academic depression, panic before, during or after exams. A positive correlation between exam stress and anxiety on a student's mental health has been found (Arusha & Biswas, 2020), hence, the assessment increase during the pandemic speaks volumes about students' mental health. They are stressed due to a threat they cannot see with their own eyes – the virus. Despite this, universities' final mode of assessment are exams because they are easy to organise and grade than projects (Sánchez, 2018). Each student is graded individually in an exam, making the assessment process seem fair and reliable. However, the problem with such grading is that it merely represents the knowledge that students can remember on spot and not the overall understanding.

Since assessments, especially exams, are often high stakes, that is, they determine the students' overall grade in a course, the slightest variation in marks can make a student earn or lose their scholarship and/or CGPA they have been working hard to maintain over the semesters or years - it makes students anxious (Saucier et al., 2022) because the stress is doubled – a pressure to perform well in exams at hand and maintain the desired CGPA. Students fear losing CGPA more than earning it because earning it takes semesters, but losing it can be as simple as on the basis of a final exam in a course (Ibid). In addition, “[t]he added pressure of the testing situation and the potential high stakes of the exam may cause some students to systematically underperform” (Ibid) and add in to their general struggles with anxiety (Zunhammer et al., 2013) or cause them to experience varying levels of exam anxiety (Zeidner, 2010). This proves that there is indeed a relationship between assessment and mental health and debunks the

misconception about exams that attending them prepares students for to confront their day-to-day stress in real life.

3. Methodology

In this section, the researcher has provided a breakdown of the research methodology by stating the purpose of the study, describing the research design and questions, the setting, participants of the study and a list of them, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis. All are treated under separate sub-headings for clarity.

3.1 The Purpose of the Study

Although online learning and assessment is a commonly accepted platform at private universities to continue education, students are *mentally* dissatisfied with this platform as it worsened their mental well-being. Surprisingly, students have been performing well in their courses but the media – especially, social media – has been flooded with posts mostly about how the students are negatively affected by this sudden shift. This research is thus, an attempt to bring those silent cries to an officially recognized attention in the scholarly field.

One reason for doing this research is a personal one. The researcher is herself a private university student and has gone through significant depression and anxiety episodes due to the tremendous load brought forth by online assessment. The issue was to such an extent that she could not resolve the problems for weeks on end. Fortunately, she was able to persevere and survive the semesters up until now, but she also knows she, and undoubtedly many others, could have done much better had it not been for the mental health issues spawned by the new online assessment system. Moreover, her being a current student, the researcher can share authentic thoughts and relate to the participants who are going through such a difficult time.

The researcher is of the view that if, at this stage, mental health impacts are addressed regarding online education, then in the near future when the world becomes more advanced,

education and technology can work in harmony and instead of one sabotaging the other. As the world currently stabilizes from the pandemic, it can be hoped that lessons are being learnt from the millions of lives lost and of *minds* subject to tortuous proportions due to inhuman pressure. Indeed, education can and should be better tweaked to fit students' learning and their overall health.

3.2 Research Design

This research is a qualitative study using content and interview analysis. The content is from social media, precisely, Facebook because in these platforms, students authentically express their innermost and unfiltered feelings by way of venting. The researcher did not take a quantitative approach as she wanted to go beyond mere identification of mental health problems and dissect the psychological impacts of online assessment on students – their experiences, feelings and problems.

3.3 Research Questions

1. To what extent, if at all, are Bangladeshi private university students affected by depression due to online assessment during COVID-19?
2. To what extent, if at all, do Bangladeshi private university students have burnout due to online assessment during COVID-19?
3. To what extent, if at all, do Bangladeshi private university students have anxiety due to online assessment during COVID-19?

3.4 Setting

The setting chosen for this research is private university. The researcher did not choose public university to limit the research scope to manageable proportions and since, she herself

studies at a private university, understanding the issues leading up to this will be not be as foreign as it would have been if it were a totally new environment. Thirdly, as mentioned in the literature review, the education system at private universities is less researched on and known by the general public. Ergo, the researcher attempted to showcase how the shift to the online platform system affected the education system at private universities through an academic dissertation.

3.5 Participants of the Study

This research has targeted four Bangladeshi private university undergraduate students. In total, 16 students (4 males and 12 females) have participated in this study, of which eight are from Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, and the rest are from other parts of Bangladesh such as Tangail, Bogura, Chattogram, Gazipur, Feni. All the students are doing their education online as their private university has shifted to online medium.

Participant selection was done through purposive sampling, which “is 'used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information' (Kelly, 2010, p. 317; as cited in Campbell et al., 2020) and not convenience sampling because “[a] convenience sample is the one that is drawn from a source that is conveniently accessible to the researcher” (Andrade, 2020). The researcher consciously selected participants that fit the purposes of her study even if they were not conveniently accessible to her because of the pandemic situation. Only undergraduate students are chosen because studying for an Honours degree is the first step to higher education after finishing high school, and the first stage of tertiary education.

3.6 List of the Participants

The principles of this section are strictly maintained. The researcher detailed to the participants what her thesis is about - the topic and research questions. Participants were assured their personal and sensitive information will not be disclosed. Before starting the interview, the participants were asked thrice to make sure they consent to participate in the interview and whether they allow the session to be recorded. Only the researcher has access to the recordings. After the thesis is over and graded, all recordings are to be deleted.

Furthermore, pseudonyms are used to refer to the participants for anonymous purposes. Since the researcher has analysed social media posts, consent has been taken before studying the contents. Writers of those posts are kept confidential. The list of the participants is outlined in the table below:

Name of participants (pseudonyms)	Name of university
1. Mash	University A
2. Faith	
3. Afira	
4. Seher	
5. Tahia	
6. Masamune	
7. Aff	
8. Zizi	University B
9. Medha	
10. Dilahk	
11. Paw	University C
12. Feriha	
13. Nouf	
14. Maha	
15. Tyler	University D
16. Sidra	

*The names of boys are coloured yellow and girls are coloured blue.

3.7 Data Collection

As mentioned in the section **3.2 Research Design**, the researcher carried out qualitative research by extracting Facebook group posts for document analysis and conducting semi-structured interviews.

3.7.1 Facebook Group Post Screenshots

The first data collection procedure involved taking Facebook group post screenshots of mental health issues related to online assessment of undergraduate students from the four respective universities. Names of the post-givers are concealed via the simple cropping function and basic photo editing skills which the researcher managed. Screenshots were taken using the software *Lightshot* which allows the computer user to select the portion of the screen, with high precision, to be captured in a photo. In total, 27 screenshots were taken, some of whose coding are shown in the Appendix.

3.7.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

It took two months for the researcher to take all the interviews. The interviews were taken through Google Meet because it is convenient for the researcher as it allows the researcher to record the interview and use it for further reference. The interviews lasted for approximately 10-12 minutes and some of the interviewees consented to show their face. The face of the interviewer – that is, of the researcher – remained always in display.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews so that she could take interviews with ease, and be flexible - tweaking the interview questions with the flow of the interviewee. The interview time was decided by consulting with the interviewees, and certain challenges abound from this since the researcher often had chores and distractions at her home. In other words, home was not an ideal situation for conducting the interviews because, although the researcher set aside time for the interview, the pandemic made everything online-based, so

having semi structured questions made the data collection process flexible enough to make up for the non-face-to-face interview sessions.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis consists of two main steps: analysis of 27 Facebook group posts (see **3.8.1 Facebook Group Post Screenshots**) about how online assessment during the COVID-19 period affected mental health and analysis of the interviews in relation to the conceptual framework of the study (see **3.9.1 Conceptual Framework**).

3.8.1 Conceptual Framework

The researcher has used a conceptual framework by combining some established theoretical knowledge on depression, anxiety, and burnout. The symptoms of the mental health illnesses or disorders are taken from official medical websites. The symptoms, as outlined in the literature review, are taken from *World Health Organization (WHO)*, *American Psychiatric Association (APA)* and *MedCircle*. Added to these theoretical sources of knowledge is the researcher's own step of document analysis – which, in this case, consists of 27 Facebook group posts relevant to the topic.

Illustrated below is a diagram showing the conceptual framework of this study:

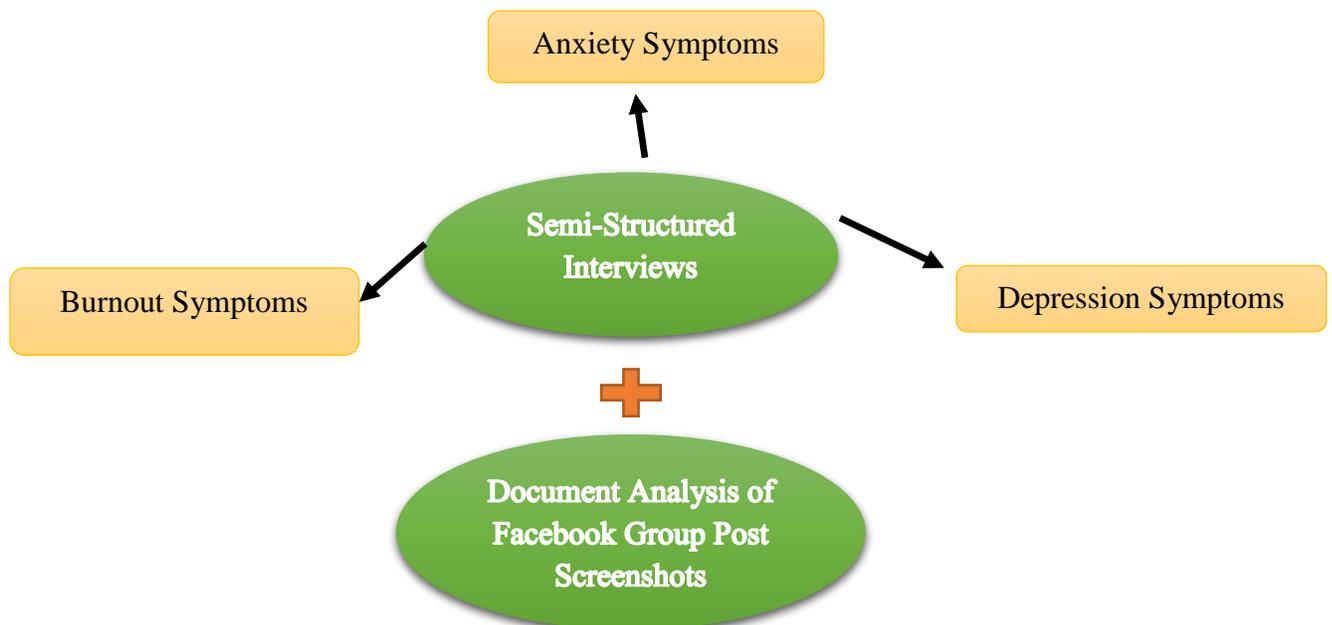


Diagram 3.9: Conceptual Framework of the Study

3.8.2 Document Analysis

The 27 screenshots collected (see *3.8.1 Facebook Group Post Screenshots*) were read and analyzed several times so that codes can be extracted from them, subsequently generating themes. No challenges were faced in this portion of the study.

3.8.3 Semi-Structured Interviews Analysis

The researcher analysed qualitative data by first transcribing the interviews, then generating codes and themes out of the transcriptions. The code generation will be described after explaining the steps of data analysis. Even during the interviews, the researcher took salient notes of similar issues quoted by participants. Not all participants' transcripts needed translation, but the required were not transcribed verbatim. Transcription was not done verbatim - only relevant answers were noted, meaning, backchannels and false starts are excluded.

After transcribing, the researcher took nearly one month presenting the data analysis. She thematically analysed the data by representing the themes, generated from codes, as subheadings to relate the elements – depression, anxiety and burnout to the students based on the findings. The notes – both during the interview and upon listening to the interview again and reading the transcript – were grouped under distinct codes, which were then analysed to generate the themes.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms are used to refer to the interviewees. They were also required to give informed consent beforehand. Although everyone consented to being recorded, they were given the freedom to turn off their cameras during the interview sessions, which many of them utilized. Regarding document analysis, it was ensured that all names – not

only the post-givers, but also those who reacted and commented on the posts are concealed in this research paper.

4. Findings

The researcher presented the findings under headings and subheadings with the name of themes which are generated from codes derived from the interviews and screenshots. The headings are the main themes. The subheadings are subsequent themes following the main themes.

Although the findings revealed almost everything about online assessment was disadvantageous, the researcher allocated themes to manageable coursework and advantages of online because some of the interviewees talked about it and subtle advantages. Furthermore, though the mental and physical health issues come under the main theme 'Disadvantages of online assessment, the researcher treated the mental health issues as main theme because they are the main focus of this research hence and are profound enough to be treated as a main theme.

The diagram below shows the connection between the main themes and the sub-themes:

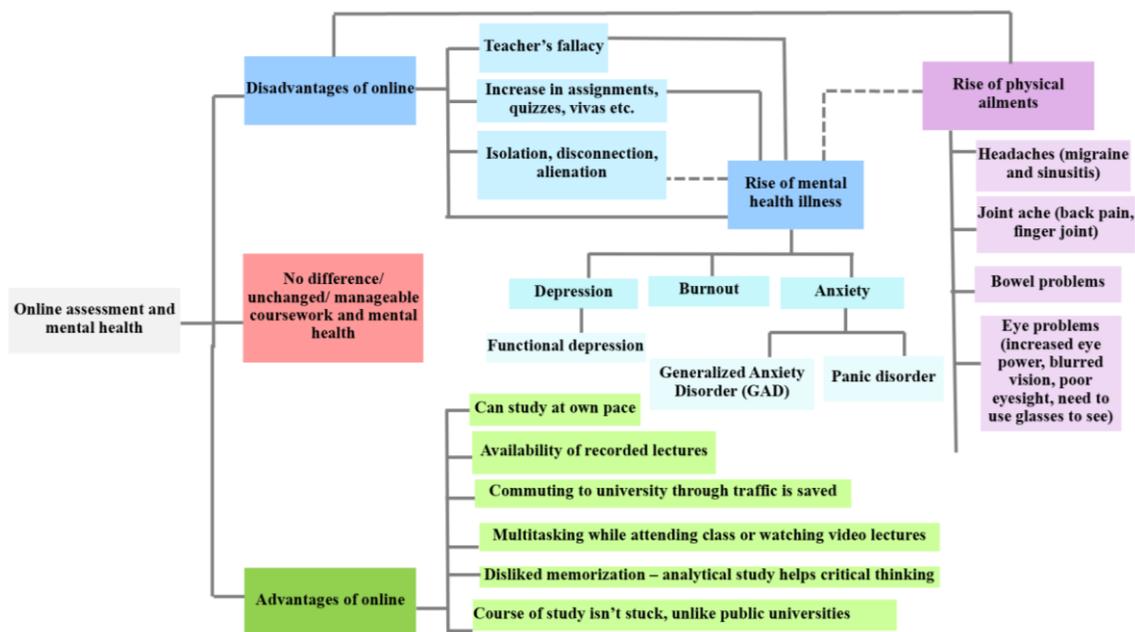


Diagram 4. Connection between themes and sub-themes

Key	Meaning
-----	Bidirectional cause (left to right and vice-versa)
-----	Unidirectional cause from left to right

4.1 Disadvantages of Online Assessment

4.1.1 Teacher's Fallacy

The interviewees all agreed that they have faced the teacher's fallacy of thinking that being 24/7 means free 24/7, thereby writing assignments and exams should not be a difficult task. For example, according to Maha from University C, though a full day till midnight is given as time limit for an exam, it is not enough to complete the exam because, in addition to reading the question and writing the answer, they are also doing housework, other tasks - bathing, praying or taking care of or rushing family members to the hospital since it was a pandemic time. Zizi, Tahia, Paw and Seher reported feeling confused whether they should eat or study of which studying eventually won because, whether they are free or not, they must finish the coursework within the date and time the teacher has allocated. Sidra from University D, specifically feels her "whole world revolves around studying" and that she needs to stop "eating-drinking in order to study".

Most participants said their course teachers told them, had they started writing the assignments and paper right on the day they were given, majority of their coursework would not have piled up, leaving more time to complete tasks other than studying. However, as pointed out by Seher and Afira from University A, they do not have just "one course to adhere to". They have three to four courses. When one course assigns a coursework to be done within a certain date, all other courses follow suit - the deadlines often overlap with one another. It feels like "has

to be done even if that means coming out of my grave” according to Dilahk from University B. Another fallacy - teachers think mental health issues are excuses not to do coursework. For example, Sidra recalled, despite informing teachers about her struggle with severe depression they brushed it off to the point where studying became impossible for her to continue and she had to drop out for a while, losing her full scholarship and CGPA.

4.1.2 Increase in Assignments

Due to the sudden online shift, the mode of assessments changed, particularly an “increase in every sort of assessment”; assessment majorly became assignments and the increase in assignments than quizzes became disadvantageous for students. For instance, to ensure learners deserve the grades, teachers gave “seamless assignments” according to Sidra “which are tough to manage”. She also reported feeling concerned all day about the assignments to the point when, once she forgot to eat all day and needed family intervention to remind her of eating. Maha, from University C, commented, the assigned assessments are mostly sudden and unplanned, making her feel she is “crisis learning rather than alternative learning”. She also faced hardships as the teachers fixed strict time limits for quizzes without taking internet and technical issues into consideration - students were blamed, their marks deducted based on internet issues. She also added that since the onset of online, the assessments requiring speaking and presentation (speaking tasks), became assignments (writing tasks), adding in to the already piled up assignments; so “questions, rather than assessment became more creative”.

Only creativity noted with assessments is groupworks which Aff and Tyler hated. Tyler experienced groupwork as “danger” to students as “one member does all of the work but everyone gets good grades which they do not deserve”. Once Tyler had to do two of his group members’ tasks as they refused, though he had three other deadlines to meet on that very same

day. Aff believes the claims that groupwork helps develop leadership and communicating qualities among students is unsupported and does not work in real life. According to him, in real life, groupwork is as described by Tyler. Tyler also added, although sometimes groupwork is marked individually, if one member gives a bad presentation, does not do their part correctly, it makes “the entire topic of the group less explained since the parts talked about by group members are connected”; leading to overall bad performance of the group. A hardworking group member then has immense pressure to do well in other assignments, which is disadvantageous because groupworks carry the most marks. Most of his CGPA fell this way.

Tahia, Zizi and Sidra also resonates with this disadvantage – since, practical courses became theoretical and assignment-based, they feel unaccomplished and devoid of authentic learning. Afira said there are more viva than class tests and a screenshot from University A revealed, teachers initially told students that viva will be taken rather than exams to reduce students' pressure. Instead, it turned out to be more torturous than an actual exam because they were taken immediately after exams or before and after an exam. Some students became nervous due to fear of public speaking or exhausted from exams which was misinterpreted as cheating and plagiarism by the teachers. A screenshot of University B revealed, some students did give fluent answers but teachers did not believe them. Instead, they were promised another series of assignments to ensure they did not plagiarize. When students of University A reported this to the authorities, they were told - viva is not considered as an exam. Other policies taken to reduce exam pressure was pre-pone of exam deadlines two weeks before the actual date, on a sudden notice, in the midst of already piled up assignments, as revealed by a screenshot of University A. The effects of these incidents on students' mental health are discussed in more details in the section **4.2 Rise of Mental Health Illness and Physical Health Issues**. Faith, Sidra and Tahia

consider assignments before exams “unethical and confusing” as they face a dilemma whether to submit the assignments or study for finals. According to Sidra, learners “face more pressure towards finals because many books to learn in one semester, not in one year, unlike public universities”. Faith said, the surge of assignments before final exams feels like “chugging down lectures and concepts”. Tahia specifically mentioned that the content validity of the exams is not maintained – the exams had “out-of-syllabus content and terribly difficult questions”.

Some courses require the student to handwrite their assignments, take pictures, convert to PDFs and submit in a single document which is impossible for the Sidra, Nouf, Paw, Seher and many others, since they “do not do just one course” and have “three to four other courses to attend to just like the teachers”. Seher specified, she was struck by COVID-19 thrice so she could do maximum one assignment per day. As a result, she missed many deadlines but also could not afford to drop the semester because she did not want to lose her CGPA and waste the money she paid as course fees. A similar issue happened with Aff; he was twice struck by COVID-19, spent days in the ICU, almost died and majority of his family and relatives was affected and died from the virus. The interviewee fell behind many deadlines and constantly battled suicidal ideations all throughout.

Afira commented, analytical questions are more troublesome because less time is given to understand them and write answers, sometimes forcing her to submit incomplete answer scripts or leave answering some questions though she knew the answer - affecting her grades a lot. Tyler reported, the word limit limited the freedom of writing and making him feel anxious that time is running, but cannot write. It makes using unfair means tempting such as plagiarizing information from web sources. Coding of a screenshot revealed that some students of University A, did resort to unethical means to finish assignments within deadlines as the number of

assignments was huge, students wanted to save their grades and not waste their parents' money when money needed for COVID-19 treatment is used to pay course fees. Though Tyler understands the teachers' idea of ensuring proper grading by giving many assignments, according to his experience, better options were available to assess students as, in this way, a high chance of average marking prevails, seriously undermining hard-working students. A screenshot of university B shows this as the main reason for mass dropouts, drop in CGPA, increased depression and suicide risk among students.

Another screenshot of University A revealed, students wished they had studied in public university because those students are not facing assignments pressure. The main reason they cited was, inconsistency in marking the assignments – in one semester, the students, on receiving good grades, had CGPA surge, followed by a change in grading policy in the next semester and assignments with harder questions, causing CGPA plunge so much so that “maybe retaking the course would not be enough to pass it or bring back the CGPA lost” according to Aff. This resulted in mass burnout, depression and suicidal ideation in students.

The internet and technical issues coupled with the increase in assignments put a toll on the students' physical and mental health, leading to isolation, disconnection and alienation (which is treated as a separate sub-heading in **4.1.3 Isolation, Disconnection and Alienation**). Some students lack a computer, permanent Wi-Fi at home so, they needed to buy gigabytes a lot to continue classes and submit assignments. A screenshot of University A revealed, this as problematic for students, as most of them, like Afira, left their hostels and rented apartments and went to hometown to live with their families, where poor weather and internet connectivity resides - the area is frequently raided by Boishakhi storms. The assignment-surge in every course made the students feel “each course is done from a different university all together”, resonating

Maha who commented there is lack of synchrony between teachers in giving assignments. In a screenshot of University A, a student talks about his shocking health; too many assignments worsened it. He shifted from a public university to live with his family and improve his health but instead became sicker than before – he was going in and out of consciousness. His medical reports confirmed that the ailments he is facing is a result of mental pressure from academics.

Sidra writes her assignments using her phone. Once she had “seven deadlines to meet a day and all the answers got deleted right before submitting” but none of her course teachers believed nor considered this, leading Seher to think they are “running for deadlines rather than learning”. Paw confused between whether she has “actually learnt anything or studied more than actually needed”, said, she even takes her phone to the washroom to miss a second, since submitting assignment on time is more important than answering nature’s call.

4.1.3 Isolation, Disconnection and Alienation

Almost all participants agreed, they were happy and relieved at first because they disliked the daily commute to university amid the traffic. Their happiness soon waned when faced with online classes (see ***4.3.3 Commuting to University through Traffic is Saved***). According to Mash and Faith, the online classes made them feel robotic. Faith loved observing life around while travelling to the university campus so she felt isolated. Tahia has obsessive-compulsive thoughts and behaviours, which she used to control by keeping herself busy and changing environments often. When her family members died of COVID-19, isolating her in lockdown, assessments aggravated her repetitive thoughts and behaviours. Therefore, Faith, Mash, Tahia, Afira and Seher feels fidgety because they cannot see students, teachers, or both in their physical environment; Afira and Seher particularly feels isolated and alienated from their university since they “learn from Sir Google and Ms. YouTube more, better or both than from teachers”, making

them demotivated to learn and mentally detached from coursework. A screenshot of University A also revealed that students having mass alienation because they feel like “assets” as they faced more academic pressure than promised after paying course fees for the semester.

Most of the participants felt something they, more or less, called as *double isolation*. Sidra feels doubly isolated because lockdown cut off her interaction with friends - only way she could communicate is during classes which shows people as “black squares” or “black boxes rather than a friend sitting beside who’s also learning” as quoted by Faith. She could have kept their camera on but since no one else does, they feel isolating. It seems to them and many others such as Maha, Afira, Paw, Masamune, Mash, Faith that everyone wants the other person to turn on their camera, resulting in no one doing it hence the isolation. Nouf reasoned, muting-unmuting in order to speak in the class makes her feel doubly isolated - she appears to participate less than her classmates since they “are more adept at muting and unmuting”. She feels as though she is “stuck in the middle of a sick disunited rat race with everyone competing to survive with their own opinions” like Tyler, which led to his poor preparation for exams and onset of depressive symptoms. Tahia, Seher and Maha voiced the same; the first two formers, because they cannot “talk by eye contact” and the latter, because the classroom environment is missing so there is nothing concrete to distract her from responsibilities at home, being the breadwinner. Lack of classroom environment created an emotional gap with online class teachers, hence the double isolation. Sidra commented during the interview, when she was prescribed glasses she felt doubly isolating because getting “another two sets of screens for each eye to see through that computer screen to the teacher” made her feel “far and disconnected” from her teachers, classmates, social media friends or all of them. Tyler stressed, inability of online platforms to

make people feel they are meeting face-to-face shows why learning mode does not trigger, boiling down to the fact that missing classroom environment led to disconnection.

Afira said, due to lack of face-to-face faculty interaction, the topic taught “does not sit in [her] brain” hence she is cannot write much in exams on the respective topics. The online classes felt “digitally present but mentally and physically absent” because inability to see students and teacher in the physical environment distracted and disconnected her from class. Faith, Sidra, Mash, Zizi and Dilahk also agreed to this. It was “very fidgety” feeling for Faith and Maha, whose “doing housework becomes inevitable”. Even if home distractions are absent, she has “the ability to open another tab in addition to the tab with online classes going on” and “knowledge of using other apps” like Faith, concentrating in the class is extremely difficult. Afira and Mash used to keep their camera on during class but since nobody else did, they felt isolated, alienated, and stopped doing it.

When asked about isolation, participants faced “asynchronous learning” coined by Mash, who thinks teachers are responsible for making lessons interesting. She dislikes online learning because she cannot ask spontaneous questions that arise while watching the lecture as she cannot “add comments in like YouTube” or “talk with eyes about having a doubt”. Many others as Dilahk commented their concentration “goes downhill” as the course proceeds because “the opportunities to move around in the environment and engage in different activities are very limited”. They are always in the same background context – home, so they cannot put their minds into thinking they have attended a class and the next moment, they are doing a homework because all of it is done in their study room. Even if they move around and choose a different place at home to study, it is still home, not a classroom. As put differently by Mash and Afira, physically-present people needed around to “stimulate the mind” but the “preaching” of *social*

distancing by World Health Organization (WHO) put them in an “uncomfortable and vulnerable position”. They said WHO should have rephrased their message as “physical distancing rather than social distancing” because by saying the latter, “people actually became socially isolated leaving us mentally blank”. Faith feels distant from studies as she is “not studying, only running for deadlines” hence learning “feels inauthentic” as revealed by couple of screenshots of all four universities considered in this interview. Tahia feels the same as during offline, she always cleared her doubts from one course teacher or another, but in online, teachers of the same course refused to help just because they are of a different section, which she particularly felt “isolating, disconnected and alienating” from course teachers and her university – she became less engaging in class, academic performance deteriorated and persistency in studies eroded due to inability to clear any doubts she has from teachers, else classmates get irritated and “snowballing of assignments, quizzes, exams, viva and deadlines”.

4.1.4 Rise of Mental and Physical Health Issues

Since this theme is one of the branches of disadvantages of online, it is included as a sub-section. However, as this sub-section is a core of the research questions, it will be treated as a main theme. The researcher did not choose to treat mental and physical health issues separately because they are interconnected and bidirectional – one causes the other.

4.2 Rise of Mental and Physical Health Issues

When participants were asked about their experience with online assessments – quizzes, exams and viva, almost all participants responded having experienced a significant degree of depression, burnout and anxiety symptoms. Students even created a poll to empathize with other students those ailments are not an excuse – they genuinely exist. The options of the poll were eyes getting blurry, ill-tempered, neck pain, back pain, finger-waist joint pain, headache

(migraine and/or sinusitis), insomnia, concentration difficulties and feeling worthless. There are about 200-300 votes in each poll option.

4.2.1 Depression

Mash and Faith loved being at home firstly because they disliked early morning waking and commuting to university through traffic, but as the online days proceeded, they became “depressed”. Dilahk, though an introvert, directly mentioned about depression too for this very same reason. Tahia is an active person but her obsessive-compulsive actions worsened due to lockdown because feeling isolated returned her depression during quarantine.

According to Masamune, the fault of the online medium giving scope to multi-tasking is the main culprit behind his difficulty in concentrating on one thing at a time, be it an assignment or a basic need such as eating breakfast. He feels “on edge to finish tasks”. Aff struggles with bouts of loneliness lasting for more than two weeks. He went abroad for Honours but could not make it there. On return, COVID-19 started and he lost old friends to a different semester leaving him lonely and disconnected. When online classes started, Sidra went into complete shock with the boost of assignments, exams and viva. She recalls always pacing around, handwringing and speaking slowly when there were three to four deadlines to meet a day and “sat for hours at the table and struggling to start reading”. Even if she did, she would often read and re-read and still not understand what is being read, in essence getting a reader’s block. She recalls this as feeling “as if English words became Chinese or I forgot how to process language”. When asked assignment writing experience, Aff commented he used to be “an avid reader” but ever since assignments mushroomed, he suddenly found himself devoid of “dopamine surge” from reading. He is “completing assignments because it needs to be done” and “popping a pill to bed and

fighting insomnia” b to wake up the next day for online classes and complete another series of assignments.

All participants, except Feriha, experienced frustration because they are unable to complete coursework before it piles up. Maha specifically felt “motivation has gone to grave” because of her instances with various assessments as outlined above in the section **4.1.2 Increase in Assignments** mainly due to lack of synchrony between teachers while giving assignments and exams. Although she informed her teachers when two or three exams fell on the same date and/or time, teachers refused to consider; rather, she survived an instance where, she submitted two more assignments to prove that she is not plagiarizing because she gave an exam at a time different from her classmates as she had two exams at the same time.

A screenshot of University A and D revealed, faculties made fun of students' illness physical and/or mental, to make the class interesting, students felt their self-respect violated. They also gave assignments “playfully” but marked harshly, putting students through loops of assignments, reasoning this is necessary to promote student learning and discourage plagiarism. In screenshots of University A and C, students blamed teachers for inhuman grading and incompetent teaching such as under-explanation of concepts. Afira felt frustrated because she is “unable even if able” to meet the deadlines of assignments as she and Tahia have loudly-speaking family members, hence cannot study till everyone is asleep. In normal times, they used to go to university and study in the library like Paw, or to a café but due to lockdown they are stuck with stubborn family members who sometimes refuse to consider their stance at home and teachers who pay no heed to their ongoing problems.

Masamune is disillusioned due to unfair assessment and due to the fact that he is unable to discuss concepts with teachers and classmates face to face. When asked about this to Faith,

she replied feeling that her “brain is literally worn away by loads of words and information to be processed and written in MS-Word every single day” which she cited as the main reason for her diminished motivation. Dilahk said his “memory eroded and memorization skills are lost” due to online coursework. According to him and Maha, online itself is isolating since the classroom environment is missing. He feels as though he is “sentenced to rigorous imprisonment” of which the only difference is that “in jail, people are criminals and they do sweat-dripping works, which for us is assignments, quizzes, exams and viva” and has experienced decreasing sleep, appetite and a general will to live ever since his university started online classes and giving assignments within short notice. Tahia, Maha and Faith also resonated with this saying that “it requires Herculean effort to switch on study mode and write the introduction”. Sidra even has a doctor’s report clinically proven that she has depression due to dealing with constant stress of too much academic pressure. Several others, such as Mash, said studying is “uninteresting” since whatever learnt “does not sit in the brain, rather it rushes and flows over the brain till it meets a deadline”. Afira said it requires “superhuman efforts to study” as there are massive amount of course readings, huge discrepancy in time allotted to answering questions in exams – far less time is given than required hence she became “demotivated to the core” after giving several disastrous mid-term exams.

Studying felt unworthy when learning mode changed from pen and paper to computer and keyboard for Nouf and Paw as they cannot skim and scan soft copies. In Faith’s words, her feeling of accomplishment has diminished because she “cannot hold a book and turn the pages to read, count how many pages by touching each page”. Maha specifically added to this that since in a PDF, “all pages look the same, it’s the same screen you view a page in” and that “in a printed article, all the pages would be stapled and you can see how much you read by the

thickness of the stapled pages” which is missing in a soft copy, hence according to Nouf “vast reading is irritating”.

When asked about sleep and appetite changes, almost all participants except Feriha, and Medha reported a drastic change – their days became for sleeping and nights, for studying. For instance, Faith said she cannot sleep naturally and need “a lot of ASMRs in order to fall asleep. Aff said he is battling insomnia ever since the online semesters started as “the constant screentime and repeated usage of gray matter to do assignments messed up” his circadian rhythm and “ate [his] melatonin”; he takes medication to sleep. Dilahk faced similar problems and although his voice was breaking up while answering this question, he refused to elaborate. Masamune was calm but said he “pushes through sleepy eyes” throughout the night and goes to bed after Fajr prayers. Others such as Sidra, Afira, Tahia and Seher said their appetite worsened to the point that they eat twice a day only and whenever they eat, it makes them “sick to the stomach” and “wish they were robots who can work seamlessly as eating is a distraction”. Tahia specifically said she now hates, not dislikes, homemade food as she ate it a lot during lockdown and prefers processed foods as they “take less time to eat and leaves more time to do the coursework” though she gets gastric issues on consuming processed foods. Seher has contracted COVID-19 thrice and one of the reasons for this as pointed out by her doctor is lack of sleep due to academic pressure – she recalls taking medicines that “old people take for their downhill immunity”.

Almost all participants reported feeling guilty though they needed rest and that continued for days. Mash reported feeling guilty and mentally and physically tired because “assignments and research papers require too much critical thinking”. Tiredness and procrastination have become an everyday issue for Faith due to “overworking”. She is unable to unwind by indulging

in hobbies such as face and body art and this has affected her concentration in studies to a great extent, so much so that she decided to “take a gap year of 2 years to do research without attaching to any institution” to regain her mental strength to join a Masters program. When asked about the main reasons for her irritation at simple tasks she said it is due to “staring at black screen, black squares, reading pdf”. She also does not feel any sense of accomplishment as compared to a hard copy because she cannot flip the pages to see how much she has read so it appears to her that she is “staring at the same page every time” and “the words are dancing while scrolling the pdf”.

Furthermore, being unable to “physically highlight” adds in to the lack of feeling accomplished. Tahia, for example, feels guilty from tiredness which leads to oversleeping and more guilt. Even after sleeping a lot, she has “unrefreshed sleep” like Paw, “often jolts up from sleep at the thought of assignments, exams, viva or all” and “works hard to the point of burnout”. Maha feels “guilty for feeling guilty” as she is unable to be a passionate bookwork and writer as she once was. Some others such as Afira, Masamune, Zizi, Sidra and Aff commented that tiredness should be their “right to feel” since they are working so hard and that “guilt is for burden givers” hence if faculties always expect them to “be on track” it is practically not possible. A point pointed out by Afira regarding this is that the lack of motivation arose from the way the teachers “lead” them throughout the online semester. She believes “no matter the students’ age, teachers should always motivate them” because “it is their inconsideration to blame for the students’ disinterest in a course”. A screenshot of University A and B also confirmed to this point.

Fading concentration and memory is another major issue faced by the participants. For instance, when asked whether they have noted difficulty in concentration and the reasons behind

it, almost all participants attributed it to the increase in coursework especially assignments, exams and viva. Paw and Seher commented that even rewinding and careful listening does not help her grasp concepts making it harder to reach deadlines and Seher specifically recalls rewatching “10 videos by mistake”. Maha recalls “reading and re-reading, watching and re-watching and still not know what is being said”. She also feels worthless as the reading materials provided to do her coursework is sometimes not up to the mark due to their “terrible audio-video quality” but she has to pay fees for this to her university, even when “there are higher quality lecture content available on YouTube by different content creators”. She believes it is unfair that those sources are not getting paid for the same reason her course teachers are getting paid for though they are more deserving of the amount paid to the university. This is “alienating” to her. According to Sidra, assignments make her feel “weighed down” as it takes longer time to watch shorter videos because of the need to pause videos many times to take notes and process the information, which given the COVID-19 situation is not easy. She feels “hollow” as the learning process is no more enjoyable to her and it is “all about meeting deadlines”. In a frustrated tone she asked the interviewer, which is the researcher herself that, whether the “main purpose to attend university and do higher studies was to join a job and work under immense pressure and meet lots of deadlines or to practice open thinking?” She says she is “now forced to think it’s the former reason (translated)”.

Dilakh does not feel accomplishment because he is unable to memorize as online learning is entirely analytical – the question scripts require analytical responses and the tests and exams do not have much variation in tasks. Sidra has her irritability at the peak whenever the number of assignments are at their peak and says it makes her feel “engulfing”. Nouf is irritated at simple

daily tasks since the assignments started and it takes her “Herculean effort to get out of bed to meet deadlines”.

4.2.1.1 Functional Depression. Participants have pointed out many reasons why they continued to function despite having their own share of mental and physical health issues, but they all, more or less, mentioned a last string as the sole point to their functioning such as being unable to drop out thinking about their CGPA and grades as a screenshot of University A has revealed; feeling liable to study since they, paid a huge amount of money to their universities and they do not want to waste it (which could happen if they drop out) despite or without it being need for COVID-19 treatment; worry about being stigmatised by the society for dropping out and becoming doubly alienated one from their university and one from the society and they keep comforting themselves that this phase will pass even though it is not at the moment, thus adding in to their despair. For instance, the last string left for Tahia to continue studying despite having so much mental health issues is the fact that she has paid a huge sum to the university as course fees, despite it being needed to treat her family and relatives struck with COVID-19 virus, as they could not afford to stop her education. Several other participants also reported to continue their education amidst the misery of online assessment for this very same reason.

Mash said she made healthier choices such as joining the gym during the pandemic but that did not help resolve her feelings of disconnection and alienation that arose from doing online classes and coursework. She got admitted to university because she accepted the society's belief that higher education is necessary for a better life but the opposite happened. She became more mentally unstable due to the proliferation of assignments and deadline than acquiring life skills and comments that the last string that kept her still studying despite the “coarse online semester” is because she has agreed to a belief system where finishing higher education is a must.

Likewise, almost all participants have been noted that they appear to be functioning but deep down they are putting off doing tasks that are related to coursework, such as trying and completing assignments, and even those that are not related to coursework, such as practicing self-care because they feel overwhelmed and demotivated to do so. According to them, the latter arose from the former. For instance, Afira says she doubts whether she has depression or not since she is still functioning. Nouf may be showing up in online classes on time but she is frustrated as she cannot complete her coursework before it piles up despite wanting to.

4.2.2 Burnout

Afira said the excessive word limit given to write in a term paper in each course makes her feel lose interest in studying altogether. She is exhausted before even starting to study for her exams and battles a significant loss in confidence that she will ever be able to reach her goals – be it mustering up the courage to write the introduction of a term paper or worse, holding her CGPA by working hard enough to submit the term papers on time. According to her, interest depends on the way a course is taught – some courses require sensible effort but some “require superhuman effort”; teachers are the main sources for her lack of motivation and disinterest to study despite wanting to, as she believes no matter the student’s age, teachers should always motivate because just as “university students should learn to take responsibilities” for themselves, likewise university teachers “should have regard for grown-up students and not force so many assignments”. She says she feels like she is always running against deadlines and is “clueless, irritated and helpless” about handling coursework and stress as the efforts she is putting in is outweighing the results she is getting, in essence, they are unbalanced – there is more effort than the result hence she feels “what’s the point”, distracted and has the urge to put

off coursework-related work and once, followed through the urge, ending in feeling worse – a decreased satisfaction in progress and a fading sense of accomplishment.

Faith has difficulty concentrating at study and accomplishing simple tasks. She says it feels “weird” that even though she knows there will be some pressure before midterm and final term exams as she has experienced them in the pre-pandemic times but still whenever the exams season started during the online semesters, it becomes increasingly difficult for her to perform study-related tasks given that she has maintained the same amount of effort, if not more, all throughout the semester. She says she feels agitated at study because “it takes energy to feel positive feelings and accomplished” even after her tasks and exams are over and this stress has spilled into her home life making her less creative in her hobbies which is adding in to the overall stress, so she is considering a gap year of two years after she finishes her undergraduate in order to regain the mental strength, she thinks she needs to higher study.

Maha said that the prolonged online semesters made her exhausted no matter the amount of sleep she gets and diminished her motivation to start assignments to which Paw, Sidra, Tyler and Faith agreed too. The main reason they pointed out for these is the fact that not enough time is given to study a topic thoroughly before teaching a new topic, leading to coursework pile up and missing deadlines despite putting in “Herculean effort”. Another participant, Seher, said that this issue about coursework pile up despite putting in effort manifested in her in the form of headaches, sore muscle aches and extreme forgetfulness to the point where she rewatched 10 long videos by mistake. She only realised she had studied them before when she was flipping the pages of her notebook backwards hoping to feel accomplished that she has studied so much.

The manifestation of the participants' problems in the form of physical ailments is elaborated in the sections **4.2.4**, **4.2.5**, **4.2.6** and **4.2.7**.

4.2.3 Anxiety

Interview question number seven was specifically about whether or not participants feel anxious and to what extent. To this all participants more or less answered positive – their answers show that there is a positive correlation between their anxiety and academic stress of assignments, exams, viva and deadlines.

Tahia struggles with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) since childhood. But she got diagnosed with it in college. The complications of this disorder are that little disturbances cause a lot of anxiety which is why the onset of online semester during lockdown was particularly hard on her – she is always fidgety due to “loudly speaking and working family members moving around at home” and requires time to “switch on study mode”. She said that she needs “pin drop silence” in order to concentrate hence she always has to prepare her family members before giving any quizzes, exams or writing any assignments [see **4.2.3.1 Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)**] and works best when she is “totally alone with” her thoughts which she says “would not have happened if it were offline” because there would have been a change in environment such as going from one class to another, “upstairs, downstairs or in another building”. Having OCD make her think obsessively about watching videos, taking notes or both. This is especially problematic when she is attending online classes as she cannot listen to the teacher and take notes at the same time as her “brain is stuck with one kind of task”. Ergo she watches the recorded lectures but a slight disturbance causes a “full blown anxiety and loss of overall concentration” resulting in a tendency to rewind and/or rewatch video lectures multiple times.

Other participants such as Tyler, Paw, Sidra experiences anxiety because long sequence of assignments, quizzes and exams are given in each course which has to be completed everyday

that cannot be compromised with their health or with their everyday tasks and job which some of them started to make ends meet during the pandemic. Seher worries about the sequence of assignments and too much worry leads her to panic. Tyler became overwhelmed, tried to sound positive despite breaking down several times during the interview and in one occasion, he even ran into an anxiety attack when asked about his depressive and anxiety symptoms. He cleared it afterwards that it is not due to the researcher's interview questions or gestures, it is due to the fact that the interview questions are very relatable to his "painful situations". Paw said that her fear of irritating teachers with too many questions distracts her from paying full attention to the online class – on one hand she wants to listen to the teacher; on the other, she also wants to clear any doubts that arises but she also does not want to receive a backlash from other classmates as some of them wants to get over with the class as fast as possible so that they can study for another quiz, meet the coursework deadlines or take rest. She also says that sometimes she becomes paralysed by fear of unintentional plagiarism – due to this she often delays starting or finishing her assignments, resulting in a rush on the day of submission.

Sidra said that the online specifically made it difficult to reach out for counsellors because even if someone, does reach out for one, they are unable to talk to their counsellor freely. For instance, she fears that while she speaks to the counsellor about her problems her home people will hear it and feel bad. If there is a particular issue about her house people that she wants to fix to manage her studies better, she cannot vent about it to the counselor because she fears her family members might come to her room anytime – if she forbids them to, they become suspicious and had she the stance to talk about things with a mental health professional she would not have reached out to one in the first place. She said she could have taken

psychologist's help from hospitals and clinics but that is not possible because "physically ill people themselves cannot get proper treatment or ICU, let alone mentally ill".

Masamune seemed very calm during the interview. However, he also admitted that his concentration is fading due to multitasking tendency which arose from the idea that time is running and if he does not multi-task, he will have to rush for deadlines, affecting his grades and losing his scholarship. He said that "the online platforms Zoom, Google Meet provide scope for being distracted despite being interested in studies" because he feels he knows more than the teacher and can learn the same from the appointed reading material. Since, he is a slow reader, he becomes overtly anxious while reading and sometimes gets severe reader's block because he "fears – less time, so many readings". Paw experiences the same too. She has several experiences of mistakenly watching the same lecture. She also became more time conscious and cannot concentrate after watching for a set amount of time and loses concentration at a faster rate when panicky. Since she is a slow typist, she is anxious for two reasons – plagiarism and finishing the exam on time because the guilt of not answering a question despite knowing the answer to it is not more than being able to submit the answers already answered in full.

Masamune is not the only one to have a multi-tasking tendency – Maha also has the urge to open different tabs and read and watch many materials at the same time in order to meet her deadlines as soon as possible and rest, though that stays as a wish. She and Mash feels anxious at the sight of new assignments and says they feel like "mountain over shoulders". Mash specifically said "assignments are scarier than exams" like Tyler, because according to her, assignments mean "writing information that stands out" which is not always possible because of "online study exhaustion" and pressure to complete assignments of other courses. She believes outstanding information was not expected during offline exams; firstly, because the students

gave exams by pen and paper and handwritten information cannot be checked for plagiarism and; secondly, since everyone learnt from the same reference, it is very natural if two to three sentences match between the students. In online, although materials are specified, most students are consulting web sources such as Google to write better or different answers so “matching here means plagiarism”.

Others such as Seher, Dilahk and Afira said that they struggle with starting the assignment and they did not have this problem in the offline times. Due to this, participants such as Tyler, Tahia, Paw, Sidra, Maha and several others report feeling anxious, often times having anxiety attacks, when they sit with their coursework with the aim of completion. They have the tendency to avoid coursework which they did not have before, in the pre-pandemic times and one particular participant, Faith said that she always becomes overwhelmed to the point of fever when she sits with her coursework, permanently “went into anxious mode” and cannot unwind or feel relief even after semester or exams are over.

The only source of relief the participants have, though in negligible amounts, is when they finish and submit an assignment, quiz or exam. For example, Maha said that completing coursework “feels like being promoted in a game level”. She happily ticks off or crosses out “huge lists of to-dos”. In this case, even the calmest participant, Feriha who said her coursework is manageable and she has no problem doing them in online, has positive “bodily reactions” if she is able to complete and submit coursework on time “otherwise panic”. She said that online assignments and class tests are not “anxiety-provoking until it comes to exams” as she fears net disturbance and technical problems might delete her answer script before she can submit and this thought often makes her catastrophize. Tyler said that he “used to feel” somatic reactions upon task completion during offline but now in online semesters, he regularly gets writer’s and

reader's block and even coughs when in too much tension. He is also unable to "turn on learning mode" as he feels very displaced and "cannot replace classroom with home" to study, hence feels very anxious and hyperactive while studying. In addition, the short time given to learn a material properly before moving on to the next made him feel "miles away from studies" hence the anxiety and worry all day like Sidra (see **4.2.3.1 Generalized Anxiety Disorder [GAD]**).

Another problem participants face is classroom participation. Masamune says it is "more nerve-wracking during online learning as raising digital hand is conspicuous". Maha said she worries about interruption from her mother about issues which is not socially acceptable. For instance, queer theories cannot be talked about at home because "mom would think is that what is taught in these four years of Bachelors?". This fear of her became true in most cases. Hence, she is unable to talk openly while adding in information in the online classes, leading to mistakes out of nervousness. She also feels alienated and fears the things that she cannot control such as preventing background noise from family members, hence she passes most of her classes in "constant state of tension and fear with no outlet" because "faculties and classmates seem to have a quiet place at home to do classes and I have none". Due to this very reason, Tyler said he has a hard time controlling his heightened anxiety before all online classes because unlike exams, the classes go on for unlimited time although the class routine specifies a time for the class.

4.2.3.1 Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). Tahia used to worry about having pin drop silence during study occasionally during offline but now, in online she worries about it all day and this worry has spilled into her every day life – she now worries about anything and everything so most of her panic attack triggers come from this (see **4.2.3.2 Panic Disorder**). Struggling with rewatching videos, she also has the urge to do things over and over again

thinking that there will be a change in her physical environment which is not possible because it was lockdown that time. Home environment was unsuitable for learning and getting distracted from the intrusive thoughts that disrupted her learning, eventually leading to panic and dissociation (see **4.2.3.2 Panic Disorder**). She said the sudden increase in assignments and coursework made her feels so much compulsive that “not once, but there were many times” she checked the button so much that she broke the keyboard button. She also constantly worries and has a “fear of anxiety” about becoming overtly anxious and not having people in the physical environment to help her calm down which she is concerned about all day long.

Another participant, Seher, reported that she had severe anxiety and either fainted or had writer's and reader's block like Maha on almost all exam days. She was also unable to recover from her COVID-19 illness fully because of her poor mental health and academic stress. Faith said that her anxiety was initiated by academic stress especially deadlines. She becomes frequently distracted due to anxiety and procrastinates due to overworking. She used to unwind before by doing face arts but too many deadlines have “stole the time to unwind”. Sidra, like Tyler, said that she too feels distant from studies making her concern about assignments all day so much so that her routine revolves around it. Maha says that the “occasional anxiety” she had before exams had “grown into general anxiety running in the background” during exams and other coursework because she fears whether the time given will be sufficient or not as she not only gives the exam during that allocated time, she also has other inevitable tasks around the home and her online job which she started during the pandemic to support her families' household and medical finances. Afira and several others such as Paw, Maha, have reported that they read and re-reads the reading materials, watches and re-watches video lectures but still

cannot make sense of what is being said. Therefore, their occasional worry about studies has now become an everyday worry about each and everything. Pinak Sarkar

4.2.3.2 Panic Disorder. When asked about panic attacks, most participants answered they did on several occasions, except for Masamune, Zizi and Medha. The symptoms they reported are mostly sweaty palms, having “an impending sense of doom”, palpitations, racing heart despite trying in vain to stay calm and an intense fear of the panic attack happening again after it has resided – a fear which comes true in most cases. The participants, with panic attack occasions, except Tahia, also added that they did not have an issue with anxiety, let alone having several panic attacks; it all started when “courses, course teachers, assignments, quizzes, exams, viva and deadlines started to race against each other as to who can give the most pressure”. The little anxiety they had before exams were “normal and occasional”.

For example, Mash reported having panic attacks just before exams and on one occasion it simple became out of control – she was sweating severely, had racing heartbeat and vomited out of panic. The constant fear and anxiety that family members will intervene and make noise during an exam, assignment or quiz gives Tahia panic attacks so much so that now it is a disorder. Her panic attacks present in the form of sweaty palms, she cries excessively and uncontrollably, “it always feels like a heart attack and feels like the flesh do not belong to my body, hands and feet are not real”, severe palpitations and shivering. She also gets panic attacks from all day worry about coursework. According to her and Maha, “exams are more nerve-racking than assignments” because they have a specified time limit during which students not only sit down and write answers to the exam questions, they also have other courses’ tasks inevitable tasks such as housework or job and human needs to meet.

Maha also said that she feels like she is either “breathing too much or is just breathless” while she has her panic attacks and the fear of it repeating again leads to the attack “actually happening again”. As for Tahia, she said her palpitations worsened during lockdown and the course of online classes. She needed to fall apart completely in front of her parents and teachers before getting the desired psychological help – a “doctor’s mandate” was necessary for her parents and teachers to understand that OCD is a real problem. She had once fully recovered from her psychological problems but it has been “dissolved completely firstly due to lockdown – the inability to head out of home, secondly due to death of family members of COVID-19 and the little saneness also left with the snowballing of assignments, exams, quizzes, viva, deadlines”. Her OCD leads to loops of panic attacks which reinforces her compulsive behaviours and obsessive thoughts. The worst part as she claimed is “faculties do not believe in OCD since the symptoms are diverse before and after each panic attack and may not repeat the next time it happens. Aff resonated likewise and same goes for Sidra. She always panics when it comes to giving exams. Her symptoms mimic Tahia’s such as the panic attack seems like a heart attack and Maha’s feelings of hyperventilation. Once it happens, she fears it will happen again – a fear which comes true. Her sister somewhat tried to minimize the intensity of her panic attack by lightly tapping on her shoulders, but it was not much useful in the long run.

4.2.4 Headaches

All participants except Masamune, Medha and Feriha reported to having headaches, migraines and sinuses and a screenshot of University C reported having severe migraine issues and cluster headache for the first time during the course of online semesters. Some of them have verified the cause from their doctors who attributed this to the excess screentime and advised them to leave online classes till offline classes resume.

Another screenshot of University A revealed that since students had needed to stare at phone for six to seven hours straight for quiz, midterm, assignments, final exams and viva, they threw up several times during the exams, had severe migraine lasting up to three days though they kept their devices with lowest brightness to cope with the academic assessment pressure. Some commented that they took powerful painkillers to get rid of their headaches which did not work, instead their skin felt like burning and turned red due to all the balms used to lower the migraine.

4.2.5 Joint Aches

Almost all participants except Feriha, Masamune, and Medha had various joint aches such as of the neck, back, hip, waist and even fingers joints due to writing notes while studying, excess typing of assignments, quizzes and exams, for sitting and staring at the computer, mobile or laptop to study for abnormally long hours (minimum 19 hours and maximum three to four days a row), making them feel sick most of the time.

4.2.6 Bowel Problems

Tahia has bowel problems and palpitations. It was restricted to the times when she gave her exams but during online semester, it overflowed into every part of her life – before starting an assignment, after finishing her assignment, in the middle of a quiz, even while taking her time to relax. A screenshot of University A and D revealed that the way exams and assignments were taken such as giving back-to-back deadlines, announcing an exam before the assignment series is over cause mass insomnia and weight reduction in the students, for which the only reason as verified by the students' physicians is thriving to study in online semesters. Another screenshot of University A revealed that student(s) developed low pressure (90/60) and some lost balance and fell on floor, after their faculty made a sudden announcement that their final exams have

been postponed by 10 days, in the midst of already existing series of assignments, given that those assignments will not be cancelled or reduced in any way.

4.2.7 Eye Problems

Almost all participants reported having one or more types of eye problems due to excess screentime and lack of adequate sleep at night. Maha said she “cannot see without glasses” and often has continuous tears flowing from her eyes, making them blurry while watching videos. Faith reported of dry eyes so much so that they become dry and itch even if she had applied the doctor’s recommended number of eye drops. She, Medha, Sidra, Tyler and Seher is said to have worsening eye power despite putting all of their doctor’s words into action. Seher had it worse as she was thrice positive with the virus which is why her eye power and vision became worse with study pressure.

Other screenshots of University A and B revealed that the back-to-back deadlines forced the students to resort to studying all day, staring at the computer, watching lectures that most of their eye power increased significantly, eye swelled up to the point that many were unable to attend final exams. Some of them, particularly of University A said that they got eye allergy from staring at the computer screen, the video lectures appeared blurry after every one to two minutes and one of their eyes swelled up due to excess screentime and caused blindness.

4.3 Advantages of Online Assessment

Although participants majorly talked about disadvantages, they did not deny that there were no advantages. There were but very subtle. Therefore, those subtle advantages are included in this section.

4.3.1 Ability to Study at Own Pace

Some participants loved online due to this very reason. For instance, Feriha said online is suitable for her as a medium for study because “the study is personalised” and for Nouf, it is “flexible learning”. Faith and Mash said they felt “cozy” at first because they were able to study at their own pace as they needed not to commute to the university through traffic every day (see **4.3.3 Commuting to University through Traffic Is Saved**) and recorded lectures and reading materials are given in a learning platform (see **4.3.2 Availability of Recorded Lectures**). However, except for Feriha, Medha and Aff, this advantage soon tuned into a disadvantage (see **4.1 Disadvantages of Online Assessment**). Due to this advantage, Mash said she had the chance to make healthier choices in the pandemic – she joined a gym initially but had to drop out later due to increase in assignments and too many deadlines to meet, thus accelerating her feelings of disconnection and alienation.

4.3.2 Availability of Recorded Lectures

Afira said the advantage of online is that recorded lectures are available and reading materials are specified which was also present during offline semesters but this specifically made online “little sane” because had this facility not been present as revealed by a screenshot of University D, then students would have been more devastated. However, as she and many others such as Faith, commented that it would have been further better if the syllabus of each course is reduced because too much content in the syllabus means too many reading materials to read and recorded lectures to watch which became overwhelming owing to the “snowballing of deadlines” and the pandemic situation.

4.3.3 Commuting to University through Traffic Is Saved

Faith and Mash liked online at first because the daily commute to the university through traffic is saved. They were happy that they were able to utilise that time in study and other tasks.

But later they, felt unhappy. Faith reasoned that she missed the route to the university and observing everyday life on the way to university. This made her feel alienated and due to this she was unable to “turn on classroom feels and study” because the classroom environment was missing. Mash felt disconnected for the same reason as Faith.

Nouf and Masamune quoted the same as Faith and Mash. Nouf said she was happy because she was able to join classes on time since “it is just tapping join on a screen” rather than moving through traffic and she “can move around in own room” or “answer nature’s call” while being digitally present in the class. Masamune reasoned that he was happy because he did not have to wake up in the morning and get dressed to university for the early morning classes.

4.3.4 Ability to Multitask while Attending Class or Watching Video Lectures

Although the interviewees majorly talked about the problems they faced, they could not help but mention the ability to multi-task while attending class or watching lectures. Masamune specifically said that the fact that he could do physical exercises while watching video lectures helped him stay fit and sound during the hectic pandemic and online semesters. For other participants, such as Nouf, the ability to multi-task was about answering nature’s call while being digitally present in the class, for Paw it was about attending guests and looking after sick relatives while listening to video lectures.

While this can be seen as an attempt to not let coursework pile up (as many participants had to omit answering nature’s call or meeting basic needs for the sake of attending online classes and meeting deadlines) and stay fit amid the stressful COVID-19 situation, the researcher has opted to note this as an advantage, as participants did not deny this fact as an advantage, rather they commented it to be minimal.

4.3.5 Critical Thinking Enhanced through Analytical Study

Except Dilahk, all participants have agreed to the fact that quizzes, assignments, exams and vivas taken during online have enhanced their critical thinking as it prompted them to think analytically to answer the questions. Maha specifically mentioned that, in the pre-pandemic times, during the offline exams, she had to write instantaneous answers which were applied from “memorized theories of the course”, so according to her, that “was not a reflective of proper learning”. During the pandemic when study shifted to online, this was not the case as according to her, the answers now reflect an understanding of the theories learnt and “it is not just mere retrieved information from the memory”. But she also thinks this maybe disadvantageous for some as they may plagiarize to answer the questions perfectly. This was the case for Dilahk. He did not plagiarize but he did talk about the fact that he had a hard time with analysis as he is a “memorization-freak from the start”. Maha also said that creative writing provokes writing creative answers, which creates a zeal to learn a material deeply and a tendency to watch more educational videos like Paw.

Shift to online is a “revolutionary change” to Aff as recent jobs require computer usage and enough knowledge about computer applications and software that help writing or other forms of office work. He disliked offline because creativity was absent – creativity in learning such as learning plainly from notes taken by pen and paper, “heard from the sage on stage” which has changed in online. Like Maha, he also appreciates the positive scope for learning more from external sources, mainly due to incompetent video lectures. Learning from many sources, reading the same concept from different types of material made him skilled in writing analytical pieces. Online medium increased his scope for asking teachers for clarifying concepts, for instance, through e-mails, which further enhanced his creativity because there is a difference between speaking formally and writing formal language and email writing is “doing the latter yet

sounding like spoken to teachers and sometimes spoken language when seen in written form *looks rude*".

Tyler said that the creativity and analytical thinking he used to do his coursework helped him improve himself. He gained confidence to do difficult tasks and dealt with pressure he never knew he had the strength to. He and Paw both agree that the coursework created an incentive in them to work harder. Sidra said that the open-book exams released her from the burden of memorization so that she is able to think critically and that, through critical thinking for writing answers to exam questions, she learnt to be more responsible in her daily life by keeping back-up files of her coursework. Tahia commented that the critical thinking encouraged her to submit original answers in quizzes, assignments and exams. Paw also resonated with this saying that being careful about plagiarism encouraged her to study more and write creative answers since plagiarism is detected in typical answers.

4.3.6 Able to Continue Course of Study

All participants have agreed to the fact that being in a private university gave them the scope to continue their higher education despite the pandemic. For instance, Sidra specifically mentioned that one of the advantages of being in a private university and continuing online study is that her course of study is not stuck unlike public universities which is beneficial because it taught her vital time management skills and making good use of the time at home.

4.4 No Difference – Unchanged and Manageable Coursework

Although majority of the participants faced great difficulties with the onset of the online semester and its coursework, there are some participants for whom the change made no difference. This no difference may be as a whole for example for Feriha, Medha, Zizi and

Masamune or in some parts of online semester such as for Mash and Aff. Hence, the researcher decided to include this section.

Considering the case for Zizi, her family members are open-minded in the sense that she can talk about her mental health with them if she struggles with it, hence having this as a prerequisite, the change in online made subtle changes in her life such as waking up in the morning on time. She mentioned several times in the interview that she is “the queen of procrastination”, does not work “until deadlines knock”, annoyed if results of her coursework are bad even if she is the one who has not put in effort.

Others such as Aff, Feriha and Medha said that the change in online is an advantage for them because they are introverts so they have no problem in studying the course content – it is interesting enough and the classes feel “personalised” as they are able to attend it from the comfort of their own homes (see section *4.3.1 Ability to Study at Own Pace*). Same goes for Masamune – he prefers the change in mode of learning from pen and paper to computer and keyboard and is able to write spontaneously in his coursework. Medha does not feel fidgety when she sits down to study or when deadlines “creep up” and has unchanged sleep and appetite. In short, she is not affected badly by the shift to online. She is considerate about health and re-watches video lectures to be relieved rather than “fretting over it”. She also understands the teachers’ point of view for giving more assignments than offline which she cannot manage well but submits on time.

Aff loves online learning. He said that although he occasionally feels bored due to the monotonous schedule, he had to follow during online semester but he is able to maintain his attention despite it. He believes it is the teacher’s responsibility for making assignments and other coursework manageable and that students should not feel guilty nor be blamed for this.

Feriha was upset at first when her learning shifted to online as she changed her department at that time. She later overcame it and managed successfully because she realised that she can study at her own pace as she is an introvert, which she believes is helpful and crucial for her to adapt to her new department.

5. Analysis

5.1 Effects of Online Assessment on Levels of Depression

The participants are found to have depression due to the assessments and less variety of assessments conducted during online learning. Coupled with being isolated, feeling alienated and disconnected to follow pandemic protocols and complete deadlines of coursework, inability to separate work and personal life, a significant increase in online assessments, such as timed exams and quizzes, assignments to be written after reading materials within a short period of time, and a focus on few, particular modes of assessment made the students experience the symptoms outlined in *2.7.1 Depression* in the literature review of this study. This proves that participants indeed have depression.

5.1.1 Being Isolated

One of the first things that happened with the onset of lockdown is isolation. Isolation had a negative psychological effect on the student's mind, body, and soul because humans are social beings and need human connection in order to stay sane (Mak et al., 2022). The onset of online semesters further made students feel isolated because they cannot see their teachers and classmates around in the physical environment. Although a feeling of connectedness was attempted to be established through Zoom call and Google Meet sessions, almost all participants reported feeling "digitally present but mentally and physically absent" (Afira, personal communication, February 2020).

Gradually, such feelings of isolation doubled because students initially agreed to attend the online semester in order to continue their education; "...for many students, online learning is only a formality and not a real substitute for regular teaching...based on the principle of 'work it

out yourself' [hence] [s]tudents are not acquiring real, long-lasting knowledge" (Milosievski et al., 2020). However, later they received more academic pressure than advertised as revealed in the screenshots and by the interviewees, leaving them studying and writing assignments, giving exams and quizzes all day in their rooms and homes. As for the course teacher for whom they are working hard to please and give good marks on their assignment, they are not around to notice their hard work unlike in a physical class. This led students to feel disconnected from their course teachers and classmates as the only medium they could connect is emails and social media. Some participants mentioned feeling "doubly isolated" and less satisfied with the support they received from their faculties (Alnusairat et al., 2020) because during offline they were able to clear their doubts through one faculty or another. But during online, they noticed faculties refusing to "explain a concept because they are not my section teacher though they teach the same course" (Tahia, personal communication, February 2020).

5.1.2 Work and Personal Life Separation

There is a lack of a suitable environment – no classroom environment. Since students are isolated in their own rooms and cannot go out, most of them feel disconnected and alienated from their university. In addition, the COVID-19 protocols broadcasted the concept of 'social distancing' which meant avoiding social gatherings to prevent the spread of the virus (Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020). However, the meaning of this guideline turned out to be entirely different for the students who experienced it as being disconnected and cut off from their friends and family (Morton, 2020, 01:35 – 01: 47), hence later on the term was rephrased as 'physical distancing', but its usage was not popularised in countries such as America, England, India and so on (Okabe-Miyamoto et al., 2021). The introduction of assessment load during online

semesters only exacerbated this disconnection in students because they carried out their work – in this case it is studying – and personal life in the same space – their homes.

Previously, students commuted to the university in order to attend the classes and lectures, and hence there was a mindful focus and “... a sense of belonging ...” (Weale & Adams, 2021) – their brains associated that university classrooms as the place to be in study mode and acquire information. This concept is known as place dependence which,

...refers to the ability of a place to satisfy needs and goals, or the extent to which the physical characteristics of the place provide the appropriate resources for one's preferred activities [such as studying and brainstorming, thus becoming] ... dependent on places when their features are congruent with our goals ...; [this] includes feelings of having roots in a place, fitting in, or connecting with others. Indeed, the need to belong appears to be one of the fundamental psychological needs, and ties to a place can help us satisfy it. Places provide belonging when they symbolize one's social group, or offer a venue [such as the classroom] conducive to meeting up with others. (Scannell & Gifford, 2014, p. 275-288)

However, during online semesters, students took rest and studied in the same place, such as their bedroom. Ergo, their brain came to associate the bedroom with productivity, work, and study, rather than for unwinding, taking rest, and sleeping – making it harder to fall asleep, causing sleep disorders and an inability to brush off the day's thoughts about what to study the next day (Pinto, 2017). Students cannot compartmentalize because they cannot walk or commute home from university. They cannot change their place. Even if they do, they are moving around in the same place – their homes, which is problematic because studying in different locations aids learning and recalling concepts from memory (Fowler et al., 2017). Over time, students

became familiarised with their homes so much so that they became robotic and felt robotic followed by a loss of purpose in life (Baratta, 2013).

Previously, they studied to achieve a tertiary certificate, but now that focus has been reduced to a mere deadline that is not giving them the pleasure they enrolled for. The only reason they continue to function is that they cannot afford to drop out, which matches the criteria for functional depression as outlined in **2.7.1.2 Functional Depression**. This is discussed more elaborately in the section **5.2. Effects of Online Assessment on Levels of Burnout**. It can be argued whether students did separate their study and non-academic spaces before in pre-COVID-19 times or not, and how the online setting is any different. The online setting is different because students are now at home 24/7 due to the pandemic. They are no more coming home to rest and study; they are already at home. Therefore, they are unable to switch on their study mode, as the place people work has a psychological effect on them. For a successful online learning and teaching, classes, pedagogy, technology, course content simply cannot be changed from face-to-face to an online medium – they need to be adapted (Aristovnik et al., 2021). Students have long identified the classroom or the route to university as their place of work and study. Suddenly, that being changed to their home setting is a difficult change to cope with.

This has led them to have depression because they cannot unwind at home, or sleep in their bed because they have associated their bedroom with a place to work and not to sleep, and they have spent months online trying to stay up against tiredness and sleepiness to meet their deadlines using electronic devices such as computers and laptops. Almost all participants except Feriha, Medha and Masamune reported feeling a significant disruption in their sleeping and eating pattern, some said they have the urge to reach out for oily foods or starve themselves whenever they cannot function as they planned and their day-to-day activities such as getting up

from the bed, eating healthy meals, sitting at a particular time to study has just become “mundane, monotonous and useless”.

This proves that students have been affected by depression due to online assessment styles to a great extent and thus answers the first research question.

5.1.3 Timed Exams, Quizzes, and Assignments to be Written Within Short Period of Time

One of the major discoveries behind depression is the fact that students had to give exams and quizzes which lacked construct, face, and sometimes content validity. The exams that students had to give mostly contained too many analytical questions within a short period of time, making it disadvantageous for students to complete the exams on time.

Furthermore, extra time to submit the answer script was not taken into consideration, making students rush to either finish all the questions somehow or submit the answer script leaving some questions unanswered. This led to a growing number of students feeling sad, infuriated, and demotivated to work hard because they know that teachers only mark what they see in the answer script, and what happened behind the scenes such as not answering some questions despite knowing the answer due to lack of time is not the teacher's concern per se. Hence, this added to them feeling lonely and doubly isolated – one from the lockdown and one from being in sole charge of one's grade by completing the required coursework. This shows that the assessments conducted as timed exams and quizzes during online learning lacked a major principle of assessment – reliability, as it did not take into consideration the learners' issues, which in this case are fear and anxiety about losing marks due to not submitting on time, and insufficient time provided to complete all questions of the exam paper and submit, hence making the assessment unreliable to track learners' progress.

Time to complete the exam paper should be such that there is enough time to complete all questions and submit, as sometimes while submitting technical issues can arise – such as the computer making sure whether the person submitting is not a robot, and requiring a CAPTCHA test which may take up precious time. Therefore, this also shows that the assessment conducted also lacks another major principle of assessment – that is, practicality, and the online assessments being carried out in the name of continuing education are truly crisis learning rather than alternative learning as simply changing from offline – pen and paper – to online – computer and keyboard – does not mean that alternative learning has been implemented successfully, meaning that the learning ongoing is crisis learning rather than proper online learning. Crisis learning is characterised by a “...disaffection with the online classes stem[ing] from the fact that the content offered was never designed within the framework of a distance course but instead tried to make up for the absence of face-to-face classes with virtual classes without sufficient preparation” (Baltà-Salvador et al., 2021). The result of this is mass dropouts and a high tendency to commit suicide or think about it for most of the day, night or both as revealed by the screenshots of all the universities, especially University A and C. Although thankfully, none of the participants talked about committing suicide, the fact that they thought about it, itself shows how dire their situation is because in a study published by *Anadolu Agency*, it was reported that “Bangladesh reported 70% more deaths from suicide than COVID-19 [and] [s]uicides claimed 14,436 lives between March last year and February 2021, compared to 8,462 COVID-19-related deaths during that time” (2021) and the majority of the lives are of university students (Rasheduzzaman et al., 2022).

5.1.4 Unsuitable Home Environment

The home environment was not practical too because the majority of the students used to live in Dhaka in order to attend the university. Since the government prescribed lockdown measures, most of them left their place of residence in Dhaka such as those living in hostels, and went to live with their families in villages or hometowns where the internet connectivity is not as strong and well-developed as in Dhaka. Since the lockdown has restrained students to study in libraries or study halls and forced all members of a family to share their house space at the same time, it worsened the conditions of a student's workplace with increasing distractions of round-the-home tasks and noise of the family members (Driessen et al., 2020). Many students could not afford a computer and had to study from their phones to keep up with the online assessment and the classes; hence, internet issues became a huge problem (Aristovnik et al., 2020) because many people experienced financial restraints during the pandemic. People were searching and spending fortunes on ICUs – therefore, spending money on internet and Wi-Fi issues became a luxury, as revealed in the findings of this study. Students reported having a drastic difficulty in concentration and getting involved in unnecessary physical activities such as pacing around in their rooms or handwringing without a definite cause. So, it can be said that the criteria for a test to be practical – materials to conduct an assessment – computer, Wi-Fi, keyboard, laptop – was unavailable; hence, online assessment as a whole that was taken can be termed as impractical, especially for those with internet and financial issues.

According to the researcher, just because education shifted to the online medium, it does not warrant online assessment without the established principles of validity, reliability, authenticity, practicality, and washback. Those principles still apply and the way online assessment has been going on does not seem to follow these principles because as revealed by this research and many others, students reported feeling dissatisfied with the quality of online

teaching mainly due to the frequency and timing of the assessments, the quality of the courses and of the online classes (Ibrahim et al., 2013).

5.1.5 Limited Variety of Assessments

The back-to-back deadlines and monotonous assessment styles urged the students to have the maximum screentime possible, making them isolated from their friends and family. By naming it 'monotonous', the researcher meant that the types of assessment found to assess the students are primarily exams where the students write an answer to the questions, sometimes backed by references within a word limit, quizzes which come in the form of MCQs, assignments which require the students to read articles, watch lecture videos and pen their opinions or reflection of what they understood, and, finally, vivas which require the learner to recall instant information from their memory, which is sometimes conducted right after the student has attended a major exam such as midterm or final exam to rule out plagiarism. Not to mention, even among these exams, the most common type is the assignment, thus making online assessment more monotonous.

Based on the interviews taken and the findings outlined, it can be seen that this style of assessment is disadvantageous to the students because an abnormal amount of the same type of assessment is prescribed from every course, with very close deadlines which sometimes overlapped with one another. In the previous subsection ***5.1.2 Work and Personal Life Separation***, it can already be seen that students are demotivated to study, have decreased productivity because they are unable to unwind and rest after their study hours have ended, which is, technically, the whole day owing to the online classes. Although the online classes are carried out within a specific time limit, the need to learn the concepts, and complete the assignments, exams, and quizzes, if any, after the class, takes away the share of the time left to

unwind and engage in the non-academic tasks – thereby, doubly isolating the students from their friends and family. The findings revealed that students cannot even have proper lunchtime with their family because they are busy attending classes, exams, or writing an assignment to be submitted within a few days or a few hours.

Furthermore, everyone has a time period beyond which they cannot keep their concentration – they need to take time off, in order to recharge their memory and allow the material learnt to sit in their brain because “[t]he brain gradually stops registering a sight, sound or feeling if that stimulus remains constant over time...[because the] body becomes ‘habituated’ to the feeling and the stimulus no longer registers in any meaningful way in the brain...[making the] ability to focus...[decline] significantly over the course of the task (Ariga & Lleras, 2011, p. 440). Students are not an exception to this. However, owing to the close proximity in all the assessments conducted the whole semester of all three or four courses a student takes, it is very likely that they had to concentrate and analyze all throughout the semester, leaving no room to take their mind off studies, thus eroding their brain away and causing depression.

If it is pointed out why students did not do the assignments beforehand or as soon as it was given – this is because there is less variety in assessment. All courses assessed their students in the form of exams, assignments, quizzes, and viva – when there are many other ways to assess. Moreover, they assessed students more than they would normally do during offline learning. Even if every course takes one type of assessment more, for instance, three more assignments per course, in addition to the existing assessment framework, it is enough to make the students demotivated and lose interest. Hereby, the findings reveal that students feel “worthless” and cannot determine the point of continuing because despite putting in the effort, they cannot keep up with the sheer number of assignments.

According to the researcher, and as confirmed by the participants, this happened due to a reason pointed out by Jasmin Lee Cori in her book *The Emotionally Absent Mother – A Guide to Self–Healing and Getting the Love You Missed*. Cori says people suffer when their mothers do not behave with them as they had wanted on an emotional level because people “[protect an] image of [their] mother inside [...] by denying anything that might unsettle it, and [keep] protecting [themselves] from the disappointment, anger, and pain that [they have] kept out of consciousness” (Introduction section, para. 4). Although the writer does not shed any light on how assessment causes depression, the researcher is going to use her reason to explain why students keep getting hurt despite taking into account that the online medium is as much new to them as it is for the teachers, if not more, and no matter how much they work hard, there will always be imperfections because they have idealized a notion about how online education is supposed to take place as revealed by the screenshots and the interviews. Time and again, they hoped the lockdown will shift soon and everything will return to its usual offline self, which unfortunately it did not. This constant mismatch of their expectations and reality, despite knowing, and inability to do anything about the situation – led the students to believe they are the root cause of all problems and negativity. They felt if only they worked a little harder, things might change for the better, thus putting too much focus on the end result such as meeting the deadlines. They developed a diminished ability to use their wise mind to think through, and so they missed out on being mindful about the process of attending to the assessment to achieve the grade – for instance, brainstorming, analysing, journaling before writing, and matching external references to their similar thought processes. A study conducted by Khalil et al. concluded that such issues is a barrier to proper knowledge acquisition in online classes (2020). In short, students developed depression because there was a lack of radical acceptance of the situation,

mindfulness of the effort given to achieve grades, the constant pressure to perform well due to the huge amount of tuition fees paid in such a financially problematic situation, and do well in a test.

This type of assessment only focuses on the end result and not the process – making it an achievement test. Hence, students' focus is shifted on how well they are able to achieve in the results. Considering that strict marking is done and there is a lack of synchrony between teachers while giving the assignments, students are demotivated because they are focusing on the end result. This is because achievement test is used by teachers as an accountability mechanism to produce student achievement resulting in a test-based accountability which is not as reliable because "...it creates incentives to raise scores per se, not to improve achievement" (Koretz, 2002, p. 767).

Participants reported that this attitude of the assessment has affected their CGPA. Some lost their scholarship on the basis of one or few marks or learnt a lot from the course but failed to get their desired grades which is a big stressor in addition to the zeal to perform well. They lost hope and found it increasingly difficult to have the incentive and motivation to work hard. Instead, they struggled with increased suicidal ideations. In a screenshot of University A and D, the researcher found that students started to prioritize religious prayers over studies despite the workload at one point because according to them, the pressure of university course load is insurmountable that they feel it is better to die; in the screenshot they talked about graves and suicide, making it clear that they are having mass suicidal ideations which is a symptom of depression as outlined in the literature review and a serious call for concern.

So, another principle of assessment is violated – washback. As the tests have an overall negative impact on teaching and learning, negative washback is a result.

5.2 Effects of Online Assessment on Levels of Burnout

The participants are found to have burnout due to uncertainty, study-life imbalance, extremes of one type of activity leading to total physical and mental exhaustion, isolation and disconnection from friends and family, and chronic cynicism about their study-place and dysfunctional study-place and dynamics, thereby matching the criteria for burnout as outlined in the literature review of this study in **2.7.2 Burnout**. Therefore, their response validates a part of the second research question's quest – if students have burnout or not. In the following subsections, the extent to which students have burnout which is – major – is evaluated.

5.2.1 Uncertainty

When private universities decided to continue their education system online and shifted their mode of teaching and learning from classrooms to Zoom call sessions, the main reason students responded positively and decided to follow suit is because university life is an important part of their life and they did not want to waste the years generally allocated to complete undergraduate studies. When people are uncertain about their future, they become stressed, which activates their limbic system; people make "... quick safety-focused and emotion-based decisions ... [rather than] balanced and reasonable thoughts..." while making decisions (Morton, 2020, 2:16-2:41). Since the students were uncertain when, and whether at all, lockdown will be lifted and the situation will be normalized, they decided to continue studying online as they feared that, by the time lockdown is lifted, all the years allocated for university life or at least to complete undergraduate studies will be wasted in idleness.

On the other hand, if they continue to study, though the online medium is foreign and unfamiliar, they can, at least for the time being, not be in a long state of inactivity and can divert their mind away from the negative news being broadcasted at that time. According to them, this

will give them a chance to look forward to something meaningful every day, thereby regulating their mental health and preventing it from falling apart completely.

But when those students became involved in the process of studying online, they realised that studying in an online medium has become increasingly troublesome and hectic compared to their pre-pandemic state or offline education. In spite of this, students opted to continue rather than dropping out due to several reasons, firstly as mentioned above, and secondly, because they were willing to put the money paid to the university as semester fees into good use – that is, to preserve their grades and scholarship.

5.2.2 Study-Life Imbalance

Out of this willingness and in an attempt to preserve grades, when students put their time and energy into studying, they soon found that no matter how much they study, they are always rushing to meet and finish the deadlines as noted from the screenshots. Assessment is marked very harshly and despite working day in and day out, they cannot get an ounce of rest and unwind, completely violating the reasons why they decided to continue in the first place – looking forward to something meaningful every day during the pandemic. The constant deadline-load and sole analytical assignments to be penned down after studying an exhausting amount of reading materials, though pinpointed, from every course made students work harder and harder each day to pay off their semester fees by achieving a good result that will maintain their CGPA. Although burnout is seen as a job-related phenomenon, students are not exempted from it since they can “...be seen as employees from a psychological perspective...[b]ecause, they are engaged in structured, coercive activities such as attending classes, completing assignments and are directed toward specific goals like passing exams” (Bresó et al., 2007, as cited in Atalayin et al., 2015). Going by this, when students made achieving a good result their prime focus, they

missed out on the fact that they cannot give their best in every assignment, exam, quiz, or viva they take part in and it is very much possible if they miss a grade by a few marks.

The lack of synchrony between teachers while assigning assessments and each teacher expecting students to start attending to their coursework as soon as it is assigned also reflects how they have missed out the fact that just as they have other courses to teach in, students have deadlines of courses to meet other than theirs (see *5.2.4 Dysfunctional Study-Place and Dynamics*). In short, a high tendency for perfectionism is noted on both sides. Since this study focuses on students, the researcher is not going to elaborate on how perfectionism has affected teachers. However, the matter of how this perfectionist take of teachers while assigning assessments led to students' burnout is relevant.

Perfectionism is a staple reason for procrastination. The presence of procrastination "...can be a sign or outcome of burnout" as opined by Sarah Greenberg, a licensed psychotherapist in her conversation with Fast Company (Shi, 2020). It can be argued that students faced burnout from procrastinating and not doing their coursework on time as soon as it was assigned. However, the findings debunked this theory as the students initially did not procrastinate – they worked hard and met deadlines. Rather, they fell into the trap of procrastination when semester after semester, assessments were snowballed, learning concepts chugged down without being given a chance to study them intensively. Ergo, the main reason students tended to procrastinate is because the little rest they wanted to take to refresh their minds was not working anymore due to the lockdown. Since the deadline-load was not easing despite working hard since the beginning of the semester, taking some time off from the desk felt like a wastage of time, leading to their limbic system never deactivating.

This particularly shows that the principles of assessment – practicality and washback – are violated because the assessment was for the students, and owing to burnout, students felt alienated from their coursework and the university, thereby making the results of the assessment impractical and depersonalized to each student. Hence, even though the assessment content could in fact be authentic in practical on its own and theoretically have beneficial washback, it was unable to practically gauge the students as many of them suffered from burnout, and negative washback ensued.

5.2.3 Extremes of One Type of Activity

Owing to this, students dedicated the lion's share of their day to studying, writing assignments, giving timed exams, quizzes and viva, and somewhat fitted in their essential basic needs of everyday life such as eating, answering nature's call, praying, and a most important need of the beginning years of the pandemic – spending time with family members and loved ones.

Students claimed to only indulge in and look forward to one type of activity the whole day – meeting academic deadlines and finishing the coursework that has piled up despite putting in more effort than they truly did during offline education. It can be argued that analytical questions did challenge students in the pre-pandemic times, hence why it became such a huge problem when it was slightly increased in assignments and when more assignments with such questions were given during online times. The reason is that, although the given assessments attempted to measure how much the students are able to grasp the concepts learnt in a course and apply them in real life, its overtly analytical demand demotivated students because they were already in a state of mental deterioration and reduced thinking ability owing to the potential death and sufferings of friends and family during COVID-19, coupled with their own mental

health issues. Depression already gave students negative beliefs about themselves. A student's beliefs about themselves are an important factor to determine how they regulate themselves and every task; therefore, in order to improve students' academic achievement, their burnout should be curbed because a high level of academic procrastination is associated with poor academic performance (Balkis, 2013).

Hence, when assessments required them to analyze concepts and all assessments primarily became analytical, they did keep up with the change at first but they were unable to cope with the change for long. Though they continued studying to divert their minds from negativity and cynicism, instead they became caught up in academic stress rooted in a desire to preserve grades, resulting in negative washback. The negative washback from not being able to cope with academic pressure led students to have burnout to a great extent. Therefore, this shows that the reliability principle of assessment is violated because the administrators – in this case, it is the assessors – did not make sure that their learners are provided with suitable conditions to attend to the assessments.

Student academic performance not only depends on student behaviours and tweaking their study habits to the medium of their classes, factors such as quality of teaching, communication with teachers, learning environments also matter. Since, the university administrators influence all of these factors, hence it cannot be overlooked. It can be argued that since education was taking place online and every student attended it from their own homes, it is not the lookout of the administrator about each of the learners' living conditions. The researcher agrees but a point to be noted is that “[a]dministrators play significant roles that can enhance the academic performance of students... [such as] ... assessment policy, examination policy...grading policy plays a role in motivating students to work and perform better”

(Mawudeku & Ankumah, 2021). The researcher henceforth points out that, although it may not be the assessors' lookout, in such a stressful situation like the pandemic, it would have been fair to reduce course content and the assessments conducted such as the exams, quizzes, viva, and assignments or introduce alternative assessments as discussed in *5.1.5 Limited Variety of Assessments*.

For instance, instead of assigning an end-of-term paper at the end of a course with a huge word limit and maximum marks or arranging a final exam carrying a lion's share of the course's assessment framework followed by a viva, low-stakes assessments can be taken via class performances by the teacher verifying whether through asking particular students directly or through their class performance and participation – that is, whether the students are grasping the topics or not (Masamune, personal communication, February, 2020). Instead of hour-long final exams, alternative assessments can be taken during the class such as journaling, portfolios, or assigning a creative project (for more suggestions see **6.3 Recommendations**) and dividing the mark equally between each assessment rather than packing the course with exhaustive pages of concept analysis that reifies students as Marxists would say. Karger (1981)'s study found the following:

In Marxian terms, burnout is the objectification of the social worker's means of production; his skills of human interaction become a market commodity. The transformation of those skills into merely a means of production results in the distancing of a social worker from the client. This in turn results in the reification of the client relationship into an inanimate commodity. It is this reification, which alienates the worker from the authentic expression of his skills, that fits within the reported symptoms of burnout. (p. 275)

Although, Karger (1981) do not talk about students per say, since students can be seen as employees (see *5.2.2 Study-Life Imbalance*), they can be said to have been reified by their education. As a result of being reified, students began to judge themselves on the basis of their grades, lost trust in the process that led them to earn the grades they received so far, and focused on the end result – that is, at the end of the day, the number of deadlines met is the real victory as opposed to the hard work put in to achieve that victory because that cannot be seen by their course teachers. Rather, the only thing the course teachers will only see is whether they have submitted the assigned work. In short, the effort and its corresponding results become unbalanced – the enormous effort is boiled down to a number on the marksheet that determines grades and perhaps CGPA and scholarship. The outcome is an outbreak of mass burnout as revealed in *4.2.2 Burnout* – “Herculean effort” required to do simple tasks with decreased concentration and chronic fatigue for which no amount of rest is enough.

5.2.4 Dysfunctional Study-Place and Dynamics

The lack of synchrony between teachers while conducting assessments is another major cause of burnout in students. Such assessments demand too much content to be learnt in a single semester, outweighing the maximum effort that students can give. As pointed out by Sidra and many other participants as well as in the screenshots, students feel cynical about their online study because one year of study is “crammed into mere three to four months” and before they can grasp the course properly, midterm exams “is already over” and before final exams “everyone is already too much exhausted to study” (personal communication, February, 2020). Students are confused between choosing to study or meeting basic needs. In other words, limited time constraints with excessive pressure leads students to not have the time to do anything which is exacerbated by the impotent marks distribution system of the course as well as of the

scholarship system. When asked why they feel pressure as the course proceeds towards finals, participants mentioned two reasons – the inconsistency of percentage of each assessment in the assessment framework of a course and inconsistency in the grading policy. Most participants reasoned that the short assessments, even the mid term exams, carry only 10-20 marks and is tested based on a few chapters but the final exams carry more marks or the maximum marks of the assessment framework in addition to testing knowledge on the full syllabus. Furthermore, despite earning the highest GPA in all courses of a particular semester, the CGPA increases by only 0.01 point every semester making it very demotivating to continue working hard because immediate increase in scholarship or CGPA is not noted as reported by the participants – signaling a discrepancy between students' aim for a CGPA and the CGPA they actually get on their grade sheet. This is problematic because the frequency of the deadlines always increase to seven to eight a day, each course demanding three to four analytical assignments to be submitted within a time which is “divinely mandated”, taking into account the fact that students are exhausted from the assignments prior to the mandated assignments and the last string motivating them to work is the zeal to pay off their physical symptoms rooting from typing assignments, make good use of the semester fees, maintaining a good CGPA, attaining a scholarship or all of them which match the symptoms of functional depression as outlined in the literature review of this study **2.7.1.2 Functional Depression**. Since students can be seen as employees of education, the fact that they want to pay off their physical symptoms such as joint ache especially in the fingers and wrists, eye problems, headaches especially migraine and sinusitis, can also be seen as employees wanting to get their hard labour paid off by earning a good salary which in this case is a fair CGPA on the grade sheet of a student.

In addition to this, the participants shed light on the teacher's fallacy which is students being at home 24/7 means they are free 24/7. Students have expressed decreased satisfaction with the support they received from teachers and with the method of assessment and the online classes that they attended in comparison with traditional classroom learning (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020). They further expressed concern about teachers' tendency to disbelieve students and refusal to consider when students present their shortcomings such as being unable to meet a deadline due to severe depression following the death of a loved one. These fallacies lead to students feeling doubly isolated, disconnected, and, worst of all, alienated from their university which match the symptoms of burnout as outlines in the literature review of this study **2.7.2**

Burnout.

5.3 Effects of Online Assessment on Levels of Anxiety

The participants are found to have anxiety due to distractions at home – even during benign situations, sequence of assessments, confusion during online class, fear and worry, and fading concentration due to disruptive memory, thereby matching the criteria for anxiety as outlined in the literature review of this study in **2.7.3 Anxiety**. Therefore, their response validates a part of the third research question's quest – if students have anxiety or not. In the following subsections, the extent to which students have anxiety which is – major – is evaluated.

5.3.1 Distractions – Lack of Pin Drop Silence Leads to Full Blown Anxiety

The first and foremost issue students experienced when they started attending online classes, is distraction – be it a thought, a feeling or an experience, because most universities in Bangladesh never felt the need to take classes online at the undergraduate level. It was a new experience for the students (Sarkar et al., 2021). The universities started to as it was the only option available to them and all education systems worldwide were doing it as well (Sarkar et al.,

2021, as cited in Bao, 2020; Kapasia et al., 2020). Being unintentionally delved in a new experience, students found themselves always getting distracted with the question of why a situation has arrived which they were not prepared for (Gopal et al., 2021).

Primarily, students come to the university for vast learning, that is, to learn in depth about topics that they are passionate about, to conduct researches that will help advance knowledge for greater purposes, gain skills to land in a job with good salary and to develop lifetime skills to thrive in both academic (Sharma, 2015) and personal life and their notions of a university is that, this institution stands to train students to evaluate knowledge from a wider and broader range of perspectives. Students came to the university not only to get a general understanding of a topic, but also to get the maximum, meaning, as much understanding and knowledge as possible of their chosen subject (Ibid). However, as participants claimed, during the pandemic, they learnt a topic so less, that they doubt whether they truly learnt anything or not. The deadlines have been so close to each other that all they thought about was to meet those deadlines. Even the prime focus of learning a concept was to submit an assignment, in essence, meet a deadline (Maha et al, personal communication, February 2020). In essence, during the pandemic, assessments primarily became achievement tests rather than focusing on the process of learning, in Bangladeshi private universities. It made students learn large amounts of material to get maximum understanding of a topic without giving a chance for the learnt material to “sit in the brain” (Faith, personal communication, February, 2020) which went against the conventional rules of learning because at the end of learning, the assessments taken were seamless – without a gap, from all the courses students had taken. Each participant took four courses every semester. This kind of active learning without a gap caused students to feel very anxious (Cooper et al., 2018); participants reported feeling constantly on-edge, irritated, “mind going in all directions”,

experiencing muscle tension, “tight forehead...as if something clumped the upper part of the head” (Seher et al., personal communication, February, 2020). They worry about not only worrisome events such as exams but also seemingly benign issues such as whether they will be able to stay asleep if they take rest, follow through the routine as they want, even whether they should sleep when sleepy. These symptoms match the symptoms outlined for GAD in literature review in the section **2.7.3.1 Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)** thus confirming participants to have it.

Given this and the-then pandemic situation whose main theme was a threat to life, when students were faced with the task of learning new concepts without comprehending what has been already learnt and with seamless assessments, they required pin drop silence to study which if unmet or disturbed to the slightest extent, causes episodes of full-blown anxiety in them as revealed in the interviews because their mind is already preoccupied with disturbing thoughts leaving little room to think analytically. Anxiety causes individuals to face this because when people

“...are threatened either physically or emotionally, [needless of the fact that they are] ... truly at risk or not, [they] just have to believe that [they] are, [for instance they] ... think someone [or something] could attack [them], or if the situation at hand seems to be requiring more resources than [they] have, [people] can be pushed into fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. Now...this state causes [people's] amygdala, the fire alarm in our brain, and our entire limbic system to sound this alarm. This change in our brain focuses our body on survival, [shutting down] ... the planning and more organized part of our brain, otherwise known as our prefrontal cortex, [causing people] ... to feel on edge, act impulsively, and even

feel overwhelmed emotionally. It [is] supposed to be short-lived in order to save us from that perceived threat and then go away. But for many of us, it can last for much, much longer [such as pandemic anxiety]" (Morton, 2021).

This is exactly what happened when COVID-19 lasted longer than participants expected, as revealed by the interviews, the participants were shocked to realise that the lockdown is getting prolonged and "scared to watch the television, in fear of spotting another false date to which the lockdown will be postponed" (Tahia, personal communication, February 2020). Moreover, the 'resources' mentioned in the quote above refers to the coping skills, tools and techniques a person uses to manage themselves psychologically depending on the situation and amount of emotional charge (Morton, 2021). The participants reported realising how difficult it is to manage and study in the online medium owing to the "university's mismanagement of deadlines assigned for the assessments" (Maha, personal communication, February 2020).

The findings reveal that students, were obsessive about watching lecture videos, attending the online class lecture and taking notes and always thought about it. In essence, their brain is stuck with one kind of task and their whole routine revolved around thinking they have to study and meet a deadline and studying consistently to meet that deadline and achieve a fair grade. As a result, students report feeling never able to calm down and relax. They feel anxious even in relatively benign situations, leaving them with physical health issues such as migraines, eye problems, that became chronic as the semester proceeded because "...when emotional items are irrelevant to a given task, they compete for brain resources, causing increased RTs [reaction times]" (Junior et al., 2013).

5.3.2 Sequence of Assessments Is Overwhelming

According to the participants, assessment is a trouble, a “mountain over shoulders” that needs to be removed just like corona. The students perceived finishing the assessments as equivalent to getting rid of them which shows that they have juxtaposed the COVID-19 virus and their assessment by perceiving both of them as threat. Students have perceived assessment as threat because anything that disrupts the natural way things flow and causes damage is known as threat (Battistelli & Galantino, 2018). In this regard, the snowballing of assessments and their sequence has overwhelmed students to the point where they worry about it all day, hence in their minds, assessment is also perceived as a threat. This explains why students were never able to be in peace with assessments because anything that is perceived as threat to the mind, that takes up the memory space in mind and prevents an individual from thinking about things other than that worrisome thought or prevent from unwinding cannot be made peace with as “...viewing unpleasant stimuli activates the defense system and prompts defensive reactions” (Junior et al., 2013 as cited in Bradley et al., 2001; Azevedo et al., 2005).

The interviews revealed that the students constantly talked about the fact that their routine revolves around their academics. They are decidedly concerned about doing their assessments that they forgot to eat at their expected food hours such as breakfast, lunch and dinner. The strict time they had for their quizzes, exams and assignments made them fall into a dilemma whether to eat and affected their food choices to a great extent because as they claimed, the time given to complete the assessments was not enough. Although teachers gave some time to submit the assignment on the learning platform such as Google Classroom or Google Form to make sure the person submitting is human or not they fail to consider the fact that “...during online testing, the student may lose the internet connection...[and] get graded based on the number of questions answered and recorded in the system before the connection was lost...”

(Milosievski et al., 2020), despite having a backup internet connection because some students had to retract to their hometowns "...to avoid the hassle of surviving alone in the midst of this pandemic. Some private universities do have students who come from a privileged background, but a majority of the students ... hail from low-to-middle income families, whose guardians live paycheque to paycheque (Ahmed, 2020). Such hometowns are prone to natural disasters such as Boishakhi storms – as revealed by some of the screenshots, have disturbed internet connection due to plantation or do not have proper internet services at all. As a result, students still struggled to submit on time, firstly because they were panicking and secondly because even though technical issues can be minimised, they cannot be prevented from causing damage (Zhang et al., 2020) and sometimes, the damage is caused at a critical time such as during submission of an assignment within a specified time. This shows that a major principle of assessment, reliability, is violated because the fear and anxiety about not being able to submit on time is exceeding the normal level of worry and stress.

Furthermore, since the majority of practical tasks became theoretical and the speaking tasks became writing tasks, students feel their learning has become inauthentic and this also proves that one of the principles of assessment, authenticity, has been violated. Students reasoned that it feels inauthentic because many of them will enter the job sector upon graduation where practical skills need to be shown in order to get the expected job and theoretical knowledge is of little use if its application is not known and practiced. This is the participants' long term worry which arose from an underlying short term worry – the addition of the practical and speaking tasks as written, in the form of assignments, in addition to the already piled up assignments have added a significant amount of stress to their pre-hyperactivated limbic system, making the students feel on edge that worsens with time, fatigued, irritated, a difficulty in

concentrating and a worry that lingers around not only their academic aspects but also into their day-to-day benign situations.

This feelings of inauthenticity and alienation from university in students are accelerated by the fact that some courses, in an attempt to use alternative assessment methods turned to assigning students groupwork, which students heavily detested. Every single participant said that they “hate” groupwork because in groupworks, “one person does all or most of the work but the mark is shared by every one which is unfair” (Tyler, personal communication, February 2020) because no one wills to communicate – one person or another is always busy (Aff, personal communication, February 2020). Due to this, the participants reported having difficult in concentrating in certain courses which involve groupwork into their assessment framework, feeling extremely nervous and getting sweaty palms which, they claimed they used to get before big exams but during the pandemic, with the inclusion of more written tasks and groupwork, they now have the symptoms “all over the life” (Faith, personal communication, February 2020).

Another alternative assessment introduced was viva. Although viva is “...a valid and novel method of assessing learning outcomes such as application of deep learning, application of theory to practice, and problem-solving skills ... [and enables] dialectic communication between the examiner and student and provid[es] invaluable experience for career interviews...” (Pearce & Lee, 2009), the participants voiced otherwise. Taking viva after exams such as mid-term, finals or both has put an immense fear and “terror” in students because their fear of speaking is misunderstood as plagiarism by faculty members as revealed by screenshots of the universities. The screenshots also showed that despite giving fluent answers in viva, a series of assignments were assigned post-viva in order to “validate the viva answers”. Often such assignments had “out of syllabus questions” (Tahia, personal communication, February 2020) and were given before

exams which all participants found “unethical” as they became “confused whether to study for assignments or exams”. Faith, one of the participants, specifically depicted this as “like chugging down alcohol”. When students brought the topic to the authorities, they were told that viva is not an exam putting students at dilemma as to what an exam truly means, as according to them questions which assess course content, be it orally or written, is an exam (Tahia, personal communication, February 2020). Terror is defined by *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as “a state of intense or overwhelming fear” (2022) which relates to a symptom of panic disorder as mentioned in the section **2.7.3.2 Panic Disorder**. Terror is classified in case of heightened anxiety, meaning panic, therefore, students can be said to experience anxiety to a great extent. In this case, face validity of viva can be said to be violated because the assessment is not measuring what it claimed to – the knowledge of the students’ course content; and of the assignments conducted post-viva, content validity, since it failed to fairly represent the concepts the test, in this case it is assignments, has intended to measure - resulting in a negative washback.

Therefore, as summarised by one of the participants, “questions, rather than assessment, became more creative and that is the main problem” (Maha, personal communication, February 2020).

5.3.3 Confusion during Online Class – To Clear Doubts or Risk Backlash from Classmates

When students attend online classes with such a worrisome mind, they can only do one thing at a time – either listen to the teacher giving the lecture or let the lecture run in the background and take notes, unlike offline times. One of the problems online classes had with them is lacking paralinguistic features. Both teachers and students “[w]hen communicating in an online class ... are limited to using text ... to help [them] get [their] point across... [and lack] the benefit of using body language to help [them] communicate... [information to] students”

(DeWaard et al., 2016). There is always an invisible pressure to keep on speaking with no momentary pause and face gestures, making it very difficult to understand course content and communicate effectively. This has been marked by participants as one of the main reasons why they feel heightened anxiety in the form of sweaty palms, racing heartbeat and “million thoughts per minute” before they attend the online class. This hampers their ability to understand the lecture in the class so they resort to learning it from their universities’ learning platform where recorded class lectures are available or web sources, they think is relevant (Seher, personal communication February 2020) – leaving a lesser room to study and meet a deadline.

Another reason they detest and have confusion about is speaking up in the class. The fact that they worry about such a simple act which is considered normal and taken for granted in offline classes shows how terrible the experience of online has been for them. Nur et al. (2021), identified two factors – internal and external – as to why students have this anxiety. The internal factors will be discussed in **5.3.4 Fear and worry**. Among the external factors are lack of preparation because students are “completing assignments before and after the online classes” (Tyler et al., personal communication, February 2020), afraid of friends and classmates showing disrespect such as mocking in social media platforms, laughing at them secretly since no one turns on their camera classes (Afira, personal communication, February 2020) and overall embarrassment which arose from lack of preparation and friends and classmates. All participants said that their major suffering is being confused whether to clear any doubts raised during the class or not because when they raise their *digital hand* to add in information, the teachers are interrupted in their speech rather than meeting the eyes of the student and instantly understanding they want to add in information, all eyes of fellow classmates falls on the respective student, an eerie silence lingers in the digital classroom and the respective student has to talk without

momentary pauses because it sounds awkward and looks like they are having network problems, making normal speech very awkward because in Bangladesh, students turning on their camera is a rare incident (University A, screenshot, March 2020).

5.3.4 Fear and Worry

One concept that participants frequently mentioned throughout their interview in many ways is fear. Students have fear for a variety of reasons all of which, as they claimed, derived from the growing number of assessments they had to complete semester after semester. They fear that their family members will overhear their conversation with counsellors if they seek help for their mental health struggles (Sidra, personal communication, February 2020) because it is treated poorly as a health struggle in Bangladesh (Hasan et al., 2021).

Furthermore, since students are not in their usual classroom environment, they are well aware that of the fact that their family members are not used to listening to talks about controversial topics and they cannot avoid such family members even if they want to as they are living in the same house (Sidra, personal communication, February 2020). In a recent study, it was proved that “[s]tudents who perceived that their family members supported their e-learning, experienced high levels of learning engagement because they thought they could consciously abide by the norms of learning behavior and felt they had the capacity to devote themselves to learning” (Gao et al., 2021). The reason for this great impact is “...parents are most concerned about how much students have learned and whether they have listened carefully” (Gao et al., 2021) and the support of family members can promote students’ emotional experiences, be it positive or negative, while learning (Nalavany & Carawan, 2011). Therefore, it can be said that fear of non-cooperative family members intervening when the respective student gained a chance to talk in the digital classroom and thinking weird of them and their learning material is also a

major reason why students cannot concentrate in the online classes properly, thereby cannot cope with the assessment pressure because they feel disconnected and alienated from classmates as they think no one else is having busy place at home as them as revealed by almost all of the participants.

5.3.5 Fading Concentration due to Disruptive Memory

Owing to the enormous assessment pressure and being unable to listen to the online class lectures with a clear mind, students have a tendency to multi-task in an attempt to complete the assigned tasks and meet the deadlines as soon as possible. Since, their main goal is to finish the assessments, in essence, get rid of them to have a peace of mind, they get reader's and writer's block because excessive stress, negativity in the classroom and fear of being criticized by classmates, teacher and family members is a major contributor to such blocks (Bastug et al., 2017) because as noted by majority of the participants, doing assessments in online means writing outstanding information, that does not match with any other pupil in that class which is not always possible because all students learn from the same reading material (Mash, personal communication, February 2020).

Hence, students cannot think critically because they have been long exposed to traumatic events of the COVID-19 era – they are constantly fearing for their life and of the life of their family and loved ones. This constant exposure caused them to become hypervigilant which is a state of increased anxiety where a person constantly scans their surroundings both visually and psychologically for potential threats (Kimble et al., 2010). In this case, students are 'scanning' their environment for two issues – coronavirus and deadlines as revealed in the findings, ergo they can be said to go into a state of hypervigilance which is a by-product of excessive anxiety and "...can cause significant distress, impair functioning by reducing the attentional resources to

focus on the task at hand..." thus explaining the reason why students tend to be fidgety during studying and multi-task (Yoon & Weierich, 2017).

Students are unable to keep anything in their memory and reported of fading concentration due to too many deadlines and according to the researcher this happened because their limbic system has become hyperactive from being active all the time since the online semesters started. They experienced panic attacks too much, though they reported not having it before during the pre-pandemic times. Most of their symptoms occurred when they were interacting with their assessments such as submitting a midterm answer script. One particular participant, Tahia, mentioned that she panicked so much that she broke a button in her keyboard by repeatedly pressing submission option and making sure she has actually submitted the script. Several others have reported dry eyes and finger joint ache from excessive screentime because they were unable to think clearly and turning eyes away from the screen made them anxious and lose concentration. In a study conducted by Yoon & Weierich (2017), it was found that

[i]n hypervigilant states, people show impaired habituation of the affective response to information encountered in daily life, and they remain in a tonic alert and ready state even in the absence of threat. Behaviorally, this state is characterized by heightened attention to the environment, including visual scanning behavior, and heightened physiological readiness to act. Because novel information is affectively salient, by virtue of constituting potential threat, novel information initially activates the brain regions involved in the affective response and anchored by the amygdala... However, with repeated presentation of stimuli, this alerting response quickly habituates in healthy people... This normative reduction in amygdala response to familiar affective

information is impaired in hypervigilant and other stress-related states. (Introduction, 2nd para)

This explains why students were unable to relax and continued to function in a heightened state of fear and worry about their day-to-day affairs as well as their academic issues such as completing assessments on time and meeting deadlines. It also makes clear about the reasons they experienced panic enough times to have it as a disorder – their hypervigilance has increased and went into a state of permanent anxiety because they are unable to unwind for a long time. They have reached point where if any other stimuli failed to fall in their line of thinking about how a particular task has to be completed, it throws them off track entirely “like a speeding car with failed brakes meeting a speed-breaker or a turn in the road” (Aff, personal communication, February, 2020). Anxiety made them lose energy which would not have happened if they had a focused mind because when the mind is clear and free of worry, the energy put out is used to do the tasks that are important, which in this case, is studying to pass a course with in-depth knowledge and application. Since, the latter focused state of mind is missing and students “forgot what normal state of mind even means” (Faith et al., personal communication, February, 2020), the slightest disturbance in marks and grades makes them go into a full-blown anxiety, and if this repeats and heightens too much then it is known as panic disorder, characterised by disoriented thinking, rapid heart rate, a sense of losing control even if there is no immediate danger, palpitations, feeling hot or chills and, or suffocation, which all match with the symptoms as outlined in **2.7.3.2 Panic Disorder**.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Concluding Remarks

Students are the stakeholders of the universities – they are like customers. Just like any other institution has to ensure proper treatment of its customers and look after them, a university is also bound to think and act in a way that is beneficial to its customers, which in this case, it is students. Good academic performance is a staple way to measure the degree of a university's adherence to its students and the key to understanding that it is done correctly, is assessment – to be more precise, the style in which assessment is conducted in a given situation because an assessment, however appropriate it may be for an institution, if it is not administered in the proper manner, it will affect the student's mental health. There will always be students who detest exams and other forms of assessments. It is not possible to create an assessment plan that will work for all students. However, if the majority of students are not benefitted from the assessments conducted in a classroom or educational institution, then that particular type of assessment or its style has to be changed.

This study intended to research whether and to what extent, Bangladeshi private university students are affected by depression, burnout and anxiety due to online assessment styles during COVID-19. The key findings reveal that although there are some advantages of online assessment, the disadvantages outweigh the advantages because there are several instances of direct mention of symptoms that directly match with the symptoms of depression, burnout and anxiety as outlined in the literature review. Analyzing the findings it is found that indeed the participants have depression, burnout and anxiety to a great extent particularly functional depression, burnout, GAD and panic disorder from the haphazard assessment styles making the researcher come to the conclusion that students' mental health is indeed worsened by

the assessment styles as none of the participants suffered from such mental health problems before the pandemic – it all started when the online medium education arose during the pandemic. The analysis also shows that the principles of assessments are violated hence the relationship between assessment and mental health is confirmed too because had there been no relation between the two, breaking of the principles would not have had such a profound negative impact on the students' mental health.

Relevance and significance of this findings is that it will help to formulate future assessment criteria, prepare universities better if another pandemic arises and education needs to be shifted online again (see **6.3 Recommendations**).

6.2 Limitations of the Study

There are three limitations of this study. Firstly, only 16 participants participated in this study of which four are males and the rest are females. The male participants were also more hesitant to speak regarding their mental health struggles and required more comforting and reassuring than their female counterparts. There can be many reasons, however, according to the researcher, the main reason for the first limitation is the fact that males are expected to be strong speaking about their emotions and feelings is considered as being of a weak, less heroic personality, although mental health does not discriminate anyone based on their gender.

Secondly, since the researcher is from an ELT and Applied Linguistics background, it is a request of the researcher, this study be used as grounds by mental health professionals or any researcher from psychology field to conduct further study on the effects of assessment styles on the mental health of students with particular focus on the universities in Bangladesh, both public and private, as the researcher keenly felt the vast literature gap in this area.

Thirdly, only four universities are studied and not more because the study was conducted during complete lockdown when commuting to places without absolute necessity was forbidden and maintaining social distancing more than physical distancing was the priority. It was not possible to reach participants of other universities to participate without the help of close friends of the researcher, let alone convince them and communicating through can only be done so much.

6.3 Recommendations

Although recommendations are not a staple of this study, since participants have expressed their views on how they want online medium to be conducted, the researcher is going to mention them under this section. One such recommendation is already mentioned in **5.2.3 *Extremes of One Type of Activity*** by the participant Masamune. Another participant, Sidra, has suggested that while conducting online medium, it would have been helpful if an overview of the course is given at the beginning of semester including not only topics to be learned but also estimated time and effort needed to complete tasks in course, a reduced syllabus that only includes topics that are a must to be learnt, students' main ideas in answer be prioritized no matter the answer's length and the assessments be conducted in a way that do not make them 'look' like assessments lest a bad assessment changes the trajectory of a learner's life. Aff and Tyler recommended online mediums to drop groupwork as though everyone is graded individually, the mastermind is one student who fixes the role of the rest of the team but is graded just like the rest, if unfortunate enough, less. Mash and Maha suggested a mix-match of various assessments which are carefully planned in synchrony with other courses so that no three assessment deadlines fall on the same date seamlessly.

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8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview questions (IQs)	Background information	Overall perspective	RQ1: Online assessment causing depression	RQ2: Online assessment causing burnout	RQ3: Online assessment causing anxiety
Background					
1. Please tell me your name and which university you came from.	✓				
2. Please tell me about your educational background – are you from Bangla medium, English medium, English version, or Madrasah?	✓				
3. What was your choice of discipline in college – Arts, Commerce, Science, or a combination among them?	✓				
4. Please tell me which semester or year you belong to at your university.	✓				
5. Please share your thoughts about your online coursework system during COVID-19. How has your mental wellbeing been during this time? Can you please talk about some advantages and		✓			

disadvantages of the online shift in relation to your mental health?					
6. Please explain the differences you find between doing assignments and exams offline and during COVID-19 (online). Were there any changes in the mode of your learning – pen and paper to computer and keyboard? Please share your feelings about it.		✓			
Depression					
7. Do you find yourself becoming more jumpy or slower than usual when you sit down to study? Why?			✓		
8. Do you feel disinterested to study because it seems it is not worth it to you? Or do you feel you have studied more than you actually need? Does this loss of pleasure stem from your coursework?			✓		
9. Could you please share if the condition of your appetite and sleep have changed since the online classes started?			✓		
10. Did you feel guilty for feeling tired though you			✓		

needed rest and that continued for days?					
11. Did you ever feel that your concentration is fading over the course of online classes? For example, you have read and re-read or watched and re-watched or you have been about 45 minutes into a lecture recording and you suddenly remembered that you have already watched that video?			✓		
12. Do you feel accomplishment or any bodily rection after you complete a task, assignment etc.? If so, please explain. If not, please share any particular issue about coursework that brought this change in feeling.			✓		
Burnout					
13. What would you cite as the main reason for feeling irritated at simple tasks and being unable to complete them or being distant from your studies, even if you care about it? Have you personally faced this?				✓	
14. How many quizzes, assignments,				✓	

<p>viva, exams etc. were taken during offline semesters, and did they increase/decrease during online semesters? What do you feel about managing them? Are they too much or do you feel they are alright?</p>					
<p>15. How consistent are you as a student? Please share with me if you have experienced your coursework piling up even if you put hard work into your grades.</p>				<p>✓</p>	
<p>Anxiety</p>					
<p>16. Could you please share it with me how anxious you feel when you sit down with your assignments, class tests, exams etc. Is anything different about it during offline and now (online)? Why do you think that is the case?</p>					<p>✓</p>
<p>17. What is your stance on meeting deadlines, speaking up in the class, not being able to see peers during online classes? Explain your feeling – are you scared or worried about it? How much is the worry? Does</p>					<p>✓</p>

your concern stay all day?					
18. Have you ever experienced panic attacks related to your coursework? Please share it with me in details.					

8.2 Appendix B: Sample Coding

8.2.1 Codes and their meanings

Codes	Meanings
[C]	Cry
[---]	Deadening silence
[W]	Wide eyed and/or mocking
[S]	Sad face
[E]	Evil laugh
[H]	Hastened tone
[h]	Hesitating slow voice
[N/L]	Nervous laughter

8.2.2 Sample Coding of Individual Interviews

Question No.	Interview questions	Direct quotes	Preliminary quotes
1	Please tell me your name and which university you came from.	Maha University C	Maha University C
2	Please tell me about your educational background – are you from Bangla medium, English medium, English version, or Madrasah?	Bangla medium	Bangla medium
3	What was your choice of discipline in college – Arts, Commerce, Science, or a combination among them?	Commerce	Commerce
4	Please tell me which semester or year you belong to at your university.	10 th semester	10 th semester
5	Please share your thoughts about your online coursework system during COVID-19. How has your mental wellbeing been during this time? Can you please talk about some advantages and disadvantages of the online shift in relation to your mental health?	<p>When online classes started, I was not mentally prepared. I thought I would drop out but eventually didn't. I decided to forge my way through online.</p> <p>The problems are that teachers were not technologically advanced. Suddenly, due to lockdown, the concept of how much Bangladesh have grown digitally became someone's positive opinion. The fact became clear that despite introducing ICT as a core subject in schools and colleges, many students still do not know how to use MS-Word. Many teachers still think having a smartphone means being able to post pictures, spread negative news about</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mentally unprepared with the onset of online: wanted to drop out but decided to continue - Technologically backdated teachers - Bangladesh truly digitalized in education? - Students unable to use MS-word in university despite learning ICT in schools and colleges - Teachers: smartphone is for Facebook ONLY - Flagrant students behaving inappropriately with teachers

		<p>various topics like the government, the country's services and so on and scroll Facebook better and not more than that. Suddenly, we learn how 'educated' we made our generation to be that they laugh at elderly teachers for trying to cope with this digital generation. Some don't even know how to speak politely with teachers at the university.</p> <p>So, when this technologically backdated teachers took on the role of teaching in online, things got pretty worse for me to handle. Teachers gave lectures on Messenger calls. The mids, the finals, and the continuous assessments were taken in a very haphazard manner. We had to write them, take pictures, make it into a PDF single document and give it to teachers in Messenger.</p> <p>Online assessment was mostly assignments and quizzes, and sometimes, presentations. There was fixed time for quizzes and that was a problem because the teachers were so strict. They were not that much technologically advanced but they expected us to be. It's okay I agree that it's natural for them to expect it from us but what about technical issues like internet connection, electricity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Class lectures delivered using Messenger call - Unplanned assessments were taken (crisis learning rather than alternative learning) - Picture, PDF, single document, submit to teachers in Messenger = online hassle - Assignments + quizzes + occasional presentation = online assessment - Strict fixed time for quizzes without taking internet and technical issues into consideration - Students blamed and mark deduction based on internet, electricity, technical issues - Feelings: frustrating and reduced motivation - Classroom environment missing, hence continuing classes tough because distraction from family members occurs - Literary theories like queer theories are embarrassing to discuss in front of family members
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		<p>problems? Teachers assumed that these are also a part of being technologically advanced and if there's an electricity problem or net issues, we are to blame. A lot of my marks got deducted on the very basis of this. It's really frustrating to withstand. I agree that part of the perks of being a developed country is to have good network and internet everywhere, but that does not mean a problem cannot arise. We are advanced. This country IS a lot advanced than what it was about 20 years ago or let's be closer, 5-10 years ago. But it still does not make problems inevitable. I simply lost motivation for the mark deduction issues.</p> <p>Doing classes needs environment, I mean the classroom environment. In online this is very difficult. Studying continually is very tough. For example, I'm doing my classes, let's say speaking to the teacher, and suddenly a family member can barge in. English Literature has a lot of controversial issues like queer theories which are uncomfortable to talk about in the presence of family members because they do not know the reason, we are talking about it. They don't know we are analyzing its symbolism or allegorical meaning, so they, especially</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being at home makes housework inevitable - Lack of emotional connection with teachers - Advantages: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Availability of recorded lectures 2. Able to postpone sick students' quizzes - Disadvantages: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All students are not free at the same time, so arranging a quiz that suits everyone is tough
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		<p>mom, thinks we study nonsense and bad topics in university.</p> <p>Then I have to get up and go to work in my home because it's sometimes more urgent than attending class, you just cannot deny and do classes. But there is no emotional connection with teachers. So, the advantages are that recorded lectures can be listened to and sick students' quizzes can be postponed. Disadvantages are that we need to give quizzes based on all students' time preference because all students are not free at the same time.</p>	
<p>6</p>	<p>Please explain the differences you find between doing assignments and exams offline and during COVID-19 (online). Were there any changes in the mode of your learning – pen and paper to computer and keyboard? Please share your feelings about it.</p>	<p>In on-spot classes, during the exams, we had to memorize theories then apply them as per the questions require us. So, those answer scripts contained answers on-spot, whatever I learnt and remembered which does not reflect learning in general.</p> <p>However, in online, we UNDERSTAND theories then answer the questions. So, this is a good aspect. We can read our notes, think and do the given assignments. But in case of some students, plagiarism increased because they copy-paste information from the net.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pen and paper changed to computer and keyboard - Offline exams: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Instantaneous answers applied from memorized theories 2. Not reflective of proper learning - Online exams: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Answers reflect understanding of theories, not a mere retrieved information from memory 2. Disadvantageous for some students:

		The advantages here are that the creative questions lead us to think and write, analyze, learning creativity and in-depth knowledge, give opinions. I feel like researcher, so much confident than before. I was pen-paper before and now computer-keyboard.	<p>increased plagiarized information</p> <p>3. Creative questions provoke writing creative answers and deep learning, hence reinforcing confidence and making students feel like researchers</p>
7	Do you find yourself becoming more jumpy or slower than usual when you sit down to study? Why?	Of course, when I sit down to study, I feel so jumpy. Because I do not have a father, uhh, he passed away recently. I'm the eldest so I've to take care of the family such as paying bills, taking care of guests and family members, buying groceries etc. I don't feel this offline because the classroom is my own environment, somewhere away from all these, where I can focus on my study. But home has too much distractions, where it does not feel like class; hence, I cannot concentrate even if I want.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feel fidgety when studying because of the need to take care of family being the eldest - Classroom environment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Helps focus on study 2. Distracts from home environment and the responsibilities that come along with being at home
8	Do you feel disinterested to study because it seems it is not worth it to you? Or do you feel you have studied more than you actually need? Does this loss of pleasure stem from your coursework?	Disinterested, yes, because of the shift to computer-keyboard. I do not like to study from video lectures, PDFs etc. because it feels like one way studying – just listening to the teacher[S]. I don't like it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disinterested to study because shifted to computer and keyboard - Dislikes unidirectional study because cannot

		<p>I like the classroom interaction. Teachers will lecture, I will listen, nod, occasionally take notes and ask questions, but online, this is not possible to ask teacher as many questions you want. You need to give everyone a chance to talk to teacher. So yeah, my loss of pleasure has stemmed from coursework. I've a lot of work to do – class, tuition, teaching – all online. Got eye problems, now I cannot see a single thing without specs, let alone read.</p>	<p>input anything new to teacher's speech</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likes the traditional form of learning with teacher as sage on stage and discuss information - Classroom interaction missing in online - Need to choose important questions to ask teacher due to being unable to ask all questions she might have - Need to give everyone a chance to talk to teacher - Lost motivation to study due to coursework - Physical health issues: eyesight problems – cannot see without glasses
9	<p>Could you please share if the condition of your appetite and sleep have changed since the online classes started?</p>	<p>No changes here.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sleep and appetite unchanged
10	<p>Did you feel guilty for feeling tired though you needed rest and that continued for days?</p>	<p>Yes of course. I feel a lot guilty for feeling guilty. I sit down to study but cannot study or read or write. I sit with assignments, I ... I ... I know the points; I know what to write but cannot write and I don't even know why I cannot write.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feels guilty for feeling guilty - Sits for studies but in vain - Writer's and reader's block - Heightened emotion noted in response - Upset because of being unable to be a passionate

		I also get reader's block. I haven't touched books a while now and I feel really guilty about it that I'm not the reader that I believed myself to be, but even after this epiphany I still cannot pick up a book and read. I don't know what's wrong.	bookworm anymore despite wanting to
11	Did you ever feel that your concentration is fading over the course of online classes? For example, you have read and re-read or watched and re-watched or you have been about 45 minutes into a lecture recording and you suddenly remembered that you have already watched that video?	<p>Yes, yes, all that you mentioned in your question happens to me. While watching lecture videos, I always have the urge to open a new tab like YouTube.</p> <p>My concentration is fading because other than the video on my app, I can use so many other apps. Then, I can listen to the same topic the teacher is saying on YouTube from better listeners such as native people of that topic.</p> <p>I feel worthless like why do I have to pay six figures for something that I can get on YouTube as well. Why do I have to listen to that from the teacher's mouth? I don't only learn from lectures of teacher's mouth, so why am I paying the teacher ONLY? Why am I not paying all the other YouTubers whose videos I'm watching for thorough learning? It feels unfair.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreed to points mentioned in question - Urge to open a different tab apart from lecture video tabs: distraction - Ability to use other apps is major cause of distraction and fading concentration - Higher quality lecture video content available on YouTube by different content creators - Feels worthless for paying fees that can be learnt from other websites such as YouTube - Feels unfair that other sources not getting paid for the same reason that teachers are getting paid for
12	Do you feel accomplishment or any bodily reaction after you complete a task,	Yes, I feel relaxed. I feel like a mountain is removed from my	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relaxed - Mountain off shoulders

	<p>assignment etc.? If so, please explain. If not, please share any particular issue about coursework that brought this change in feeling.</p>	<p>shoulders. You know, games have many levels. When I complete an assignment, I feel like I promoted in the game level LOL. I tick off my to-dos or sometimes I cross out tasks that I've completed with utter happiness!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feels like being promoted in a game level - Happily ticks off or crosses out to-dos
<p>13</p>	<p>What would you cite as the main reason for feeling irritated at simple tasks and being unable to complete them or being distant from your studies, even if you care about it? Have you personally faced this?</p>	<p>I want to submit simple tasks but I cannot because of net issues and technical problems. This irritates me as well as the teacher. The main reason for this is I was used to taking notes by pen and paper on spot in the offline class and that changed to computer and keyboard into an online class setting where I'm attending it from home with hell lotta distractions.</p> <p>I feel anxious to speak up like what would other students think of me. Sometimes the whole class time ends with the teacher answering my questions so much that the other students get irritated.</p> <p>Now, I do not talk as much in the class. There have been times that the whole class time ended without me speaking a word and the teacher nudging me to talk but I'm not out of fear and anxiety of receiving a backlash and irritation from fellow classmates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internet and technical issues – an obstacle to getting simple tasks done - Change in learning mode and environment with distractions led to irritation - Afraid of speaking up in class lest other students get irritated Class time wears away clearing doubts resulting in irritation: both learner and teacher (this can be for 2 reasons: class time is not enough to clear doubts and give lecture AND consultation time is unavailable or available but since majority of students didn't use the service, teachers did not bother to be free around those times) - Negative reactions from teachers and fellow learners discouraged

		<p>Nothing feels like own in online, everything is like aliens.</p>	<p>engaging student to the point that even teacher's nudge to speak up in class does not work anymore</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alienation
<p>14</p>	<p>How many quizzes, assignments, viva, exams etc. were taken during offline semesters, and did they increase/decrease during online semesters? What do you feel about managing them? Are they too much or do you feel they are alright?</p>	<p>In online, the assignments increased. The writing tasks in the form of assignments increased. The speaking tasks decreased because of the need to unmute oneself to talk which is not possible because everyone is not or may not be at home sitting in front of the computer and doing classes. Like think about it. Basha ta toh ar shajher maya na, eta ekta kormokhetro o (translation: The home is no more a place to only come home in the evening after a long day at work; rather, it's also a work place now.) So, some people might be jogging, doing housework, are outside in their car but present in the class. Digitally. As a result, class participation decreased drastically. The class is now less interactive.</p> <p>Plus, the continuous assessment decreased because as I said, it's all writing tasks now. The group presentations and performances don't happen now. The creativity in assessment is gone. The main item in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in assignments in online learning - Increase in written assignments rather than speaking tasks since home environment unsuitable - Home = workplace + rest place - Some students are digitally present in class, but mentally and physically absent - Less interactive classes - More written tasks and fewer continuous assessments - Questions, rather than assessments, became more creative

		assessment is now question and answer. The different types of assessment is gone but the questions in assignments got more creative.	
15	How consistent are you as a student? Please share with me if you have experienced your coursework piling up even if you put hard work into your grades.	<p>If I compare my online and offline, I used to see the course outline and study everything beforehand. But now, whatever I learn in class, I need to process that before I can load any new or advance information to be ahead of classes into my brain.</p> <p>And what happens in online classes? Before I can learn, process, digest a topic entirely, the teachers 'launch' another topic. This makes coursework pile up and leaves us falling behind deadlines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to study topics ahead of time is gone because of the need to process already learnt material - Not enough time given to study a topic thoroughly before teaching a new topic, leading to coursework pile and missing deadlines up by students though inputting hard work
16	Could you please share it with me how anxious you feel when you sit down with your assignments, class tests, exams etc. Is anything different about it during offline and now (online)? Why do you think that is the case?	<p>When it was offline, I had ... umm ... normal anxiety before exams. But in online, things are like I know the question but I'm anxious about whether I will be able to submit the answer sheet on time or not, whether I will be able to understand the question and answer accordingly or not. For example, 24 hours is given for an exam. In these 24 hours I am also eating, bathing, doing housework, praying, reading the question and thinking about the answer. So not much time left to complete the answer, isn't it? This results in me getting a lot of anxiety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Occasional anxiety before exams grown into general anxiety during exams and whether time will be sufficient to complete exams or not - Though 24 hours may be given to complete an exam, students have other things to do at home, hence time is not enough

17	<p>What is your stance on meeting deadlines, speaking up in the class, not being able to see peers during online classes? Explain your feeling – are you scared or worried about it? How much is the worry? Does your concern stay all day?</p>	<p>I want to speak up in the class but I worry about interruption. Let's say I got some chance to talk in the class after some student. When I've unmuted myself and started to speak, suddenly mom would appear and listen intently. The sight of her makes me nervous and puts me in an uncomfortable position. I want to say something but I say something else, I make grammar mistakes, I mess up my words, I stammer and all the while mom does not move an inch, she makes a face like why can't I be confident and I cannot tell her that she is the reason I can't be confident, the teacher thinking what's wrong with me – it's a lot of hassle, and anxiety provoking.</p> <p>Then during class time, if, when I speak up, if at that time any of my family member makes any noise, what will the teacher or my friends think, because everyone has a family like me and these things are normal but still when they come up in workspace or learning space, people seem to see it as alien, like this doesn't happen to them, like they aren't a part of their family or society or whatsoever. So, this worry gives me anxiety and stops me from speaking in the class. But, fortunately enough, this worry does not stay all day – juts confined to the class hours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Worry about interruption - Interference of mother makes student unable to talk openly and leads to mistakes out of nervousness - Fear even of things people cannot control such as preventing background noise from family members - Ordinary incidents are alienated hence students feel sorry for things they cannot control - Worry stays only during class hours
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18	Have you ever experienced panic attacks related to your coursework? Please share it with me in details.	Yes, once. The teacher was very strict. She never considers late submissions, at all. I had to teach in the school that day physically. On the same day, I had an assignment to be submitted of that teacher's course. That day I had a panic attack. It was supposed to be submitted by 12 am. I submitted by 2 am. I got periods of sweaty palms, I was on high palpitations, hyperventilating, heart racing. All these symptoms were happening for a certain period of time, then I was fearing that it will happen again which it did then I feared it will happen again which it did like it went on till I submitted the assignment. I donno what I wrote in the assignment, I just know I submitted it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had panic attack once due to inconsiderate, strict teacher - Symptoms of panic attack: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sweaty palms 2. Palpitations 3. Hyperventilating 4. Racing heart 5. Fear of impending sense of doom and repetition of panic attacks – a fear which came true
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Question No.	Interview questions	Direct quotes	Preliminary quotes
1	Please tell me your name and which university you came from.	Aff University A	Aff University A
2	Please tell me about your educational background – are you from Bangla medium, English medium, English version, or Madrasah?	English medium	English medium
3	What was your choice of discipline in college – Arts, Commerce, Science, or a combination among them?	Science	Science
4	Please tell me which semester or year you belong to at your university.	10 th semester	10 th semester

<p>5</p>	<p>Please share your thoughts about your online coursework system during COVID-19. How has your mental wellbeing been during this time? Can you please talk about some advantages and disadvantages of the online shift in relation to your mental health?</p>	<p>It was very monotonous because I did not get to see my friends. The courses I took required coursework in the form of group works. The online made me disconnected from my friends and as this disconnection grew into disconnection from coursework as well. I went abroad in the middle of my studies to do my Honours there, but my parents were unable to bear the costs so I had to return. When I returned, learning was hell. One, I don't know anyone like the people I knew all passed those courses and semesters and two, I hate groupwork. I became very depressed. But when the learning shifted to online, it was a HUGE relief for me. I became happy because I'm an introvert. I don't like being around people much.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bored because friendless - Hates groupwork - Went abroad for Honours, on return, old friends gone - Disconnection due to online group work - Happy and relieved for online mode due to introversion
<p>6</p>	<p>Please explain the differences you find between doing assignments and exams offline and during COVID-19 (online). Were there any changes in the mode of your learning – pen and paper to computer and keyboard? Please share your feelings about it.</p>	<p>I think it's better to be dependent on computers because now-a-days almost all jobs require you to be with computers. They require a knowledge of computers. So, I think, by learning with computer and keyboard from pen and paper is a positive change. I got to learn more by researching and deep reading. It's a um ... revolutionary change because this learning has more connection with real life tasks like analyzing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revolutionary change: pen-paper to computer-keyboard because: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jobs require computer usage knowledge 2. Practical knowledge like analyzing is learnt - Positive review about online because of loving isolation

		Offline was boring. Only memorize. No real life tasks. But online is interesting. The exams are helpful. Got to give them from our own homes, own rooms. Love, love, love this experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disliked offline because creativity absent in offline
7	Do you find yourself becoming more jumpy or slower than usual when you sit down to study? Why?	Nope. I feel more energetic. Yeah, it can be boring at times when I watch buX video lectures, but here's the advantage. Because the buX videos aren't fulfilling, I got to know more, I got to explore and learn and study from websites I never knew existed with so much information before. I'm an introvert and this has suited me really well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Energetic feeling during online learning though sometimes feels bored - Positive scope for learning more from external resources due to incompetent video lectures
8	Do you feel disinterested to study because it seems it is not worth it to you? Or do you feel you have studied more than you actually need? Does this loss of pleasure stem from your coursework?	This is not applicable to me. Sorry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not disinterested in online learning coursework - Politeness noted in tone
9	Could you please share if the condition of your appetite and sleep have changed since the online classes started?	Appetite, noh, not at all but I gained weight though lol. But there's a reason for it. Before, I had to run up and down the stairs to reach classes and sometimes I'd walk home. Now, I'm scooped up in my own room. I just out of bed into a table and chair or sometimes, just be in bed and do the online classes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unchanged appetite but gained weight due to isolation and lack of need to move around at home - Scope to sleep during online classes (whereas it was not possible to sleep during offline classes)

		Sleep, yes, because I feel no pressure to sleep at a particular time. I can choose when to sleep and when to do the classes unlike offline, cause in the offline's – no matter how much I don't like, I had to stay awake for the classes.	
10	Did you feel guilty for feeling tired though you needed rest and that continued for days?	I'm so sorry. This does not apply to me.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No feeling of guilt for being tired - Politeness noted in interview
11	Did you ever feel that your concentration is fading over the course of online classes? For example, you have read and re-read or watched and re-watched or you have been about 45 minutes into a lecture recording and you suddenly remembered that you have already watched that video?	Bux videos are monotonous but I'm able to mark what I did understand and what I didn't, which was not possible during offline. For example, you can now sue teachers for not explaining a concept [E].	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Able to maintain attention despite lectures being monotonous - More scope to ask teachers for clarifying concepts
12	Do you feel accomplishment or any bodily reaction after you complete a task, assignment etc.? If so, please explain. If not, please share any particular issue about coursework that brought this change in feeling.	After the finals, I feel a surge of dopamine and feel excitement down to my nerves. I feel so-o-o-o-o-o relaxed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Happy and excited - Relaxed
13	What would you cite as the main reason for feeling irritated at simple tasks and being unable to complete them or being distant from your studies, even if you care about it? Have you personally faced this?	I'm again really sorry that this does not apply to me. Online is good for me. Offline was worse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disliked offline learning
14	How many quizzes, assignments, viva, exams etc. were taken during offline semesters, and did they increase/decrease	During offline, I did all the GenEd (General Education) and COD (Course out of Department) courses. Some	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did suffer depression but interviewee hesitated a lot to say it out loud

	during online semesters? What do you feel about managing them? Are they too much or do you feel they are alright?	<p>people did suffer a lot. I didn't much but I can empathize with them. I'm barely able to trudge along my daily life in this world full of chaos and a world war and an apocalypse probably knocking at the door.</p> <p>So-o-o, umm [---], I ... did ... feel ... de-p-ress-ss-ed [h] but I feel it totally depends on the teachers [H]. Some take a lot and some don't. Umm, not a h-u-u-uge difference, I believe [h].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lots of hesitation noted while talking about mental health struggles - Interviewee tried hard to cover hesitation by speaking hastily - Not much difference in the amount of assignments - Teachers responsible for making assignments manageable
15	How consistent are you as a student? Please share with me if you have experienced your coursework piling up even if you put hard work into your grades.	I don't know [N/L]. Coursework does pile up when I feel down, especially when it's groupwork. Everyone doesn't communicate. Someone is always busy at one time or another. One person has to do all the work and the rest of the folks just take the credit for it. It just always happens in the 400 level courses. I really don't understand why groupwork thing is still a top chart pedagogy. I don't see it serving the purpose it claims, at all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nervous to talk about consistency as a student - Hates groupwork due to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of communication among group members 2. One member does majority of the work 3. Unsupported claims
16	Could you please share it with me how anxious you feel when you sit down with your assignments, class tests, exams etc. Is anything different about it during offline and now (online)? Why do you think that is the case?	I'm again really sorry I cannot answer this as I think this is not applicable to me.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No anxiety for coursework - Politeness noted
17	What is your stance on meeting deadlines, speaking up in the class, not being able to see peers during online	Sorry. Can I please pass this question? I'm actually better off online because it gave me the luxury to be myself. So,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less worried - Likes online for being an introvert

	<p>classes? Explain your feeling – are you scared or worried about it? How much is the worry? Does your concern stay all day?</p>	<p>I'm more calm and less worried. I'm really sorry I cannot give you a vivid answer since I saw others suffer a lot but I myself did not. I cannot tell you something that I did not face as mine. That would be plagiarism [E].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wants to give genuine answers
<p>18</p>	<p>Have you ever experienced panic attacks related to your coursework? Please share it with me in details.</p>	<p>Yes. Once. I had fever and felt like an impending sense of doom is rushing like a hurricane towards me. It was terrible experience with a COD course. None of the topics taught in the class and buX came in the exam and I couldn't even get the answer or some idea of the answer or idea of the question from net. Not plagiarizing per say. But just an idea. All net showed me was HUGE articles that made me drown in panic faster. I'm sorry. I hope this answers your question.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One experience of panic attack - Impeding sense of doom - Test was not content reliable, hence the panic - Politeness noted in response

8.3 Appendix C: Sample Theme Generation

Question 3: Do you find yourself becoming more jumpy or slower than usual when you sit down to study? Why?		
Name	Code	Theme
Mash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fading interest - Procrastination increased - Accepted society's belief: having higher education is necessary for better life - Goal is unfulfilled: becoming mentally unstable instead of acquiring life skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression symptoms • Burnout symptoms • Anxiety issues • Manageable coursework – able to write spontaneously • Increase in assignments • Worsening in physical ailments • Disadvantage of online – teacher's fallacy • Classes are less engaging • Advantages of online • Isolation, disconnection – cannot see people in physical environment • Alienation • Panic
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bored and distracted - Feeling of isolation - Lack of motivation - Fidgety because cannot see anyone around in the physical environment 	
Dilahk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fidgety because unable to study like offline - Diminished memory and memorizing skills due to online coursework (used to be a memorization freak) 	
Afira	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling isolated because cannot see students and/or teachers in the physical environment - Isolation to disconnection to demotivation - Alienated: the only one to sometimes turn on the camera while in class - Less engaging in class due to camera being turned off - Digitally present, mentally and physically absent (awesome comment!) - Frequent voice break-up noted. Interviewee trying hard not to cry 	
Tahia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fidgety due to loud family members - Requires time to switch on study mode - Offline: note-taking in class, read notes at home - Online: cannot multitask by watching the video lectures and taking notes simultaneously 	
Masamune	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impatient during reading due to being a slow reader 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No problem in writing extensively (ability to write spontaneously) 	
Zizi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Slow both in offline and online - Annoyed with studies - A rushing tone noted 	
Medha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not feel fidgety 	
Aff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Energetic feeling during online learning though sometimes feels bored - Positive scope for learning more from external resources due to incompetent video lectures 	
Seher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Screen time gives migraines - Feeling: learning by own self than from teacher - Maximum 1 assignment per day - Panic and worry about assignments 	
Paw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulty in transitioning from pen-and-paper to keyboard-and-mouse mode - Much more time required in reading eBooks 	
Feriha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Able to study at own pace hence interested, not fidgety 	
Nouf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Slower - Tendency to take advantage of online learning's flexible nature of being able to watch back the class recording 	
Maha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feel fidgety when studying because of the need to take care of family being the eldest - Classroom environment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Helps focus on study 2. Distracts from home environment and the responsibilities that come along with being at home 	
Tyler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviewee blanked out, looked away, blinked excessively and refused to answer question 	
Sidra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of the ability to use apps being on online and on a computer is distracting - Changed patterns by doing self-care, keeping busy in productive tasks (gardening, tailoring etc.) and spending time with family - Change was not easy - Struggled with depression at first 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Symptoms of depression: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Talking to family and friends required effort hence felt burdened 2. Attending to exams and coursework felt like a waste of time and money 3. Feeling worthless 4. Loss of interest in things once enjoyed 5. Lethargic 6. Irritated and frequent angry outbursts 7. Felt abandoned which eventually became true 8. Difficulty in thinking, concentration and making decisions (missed an entire exam due to this) - Online made it harder to reach out for counsellors - Unable to talk freely to counsellor even if reached out because of fear of home people hearing it and feeling bad about it - Taking psychologists' help from hospitals impossible due to pandemic: physically sick people not getting treatment, let alone mentally ill 	
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Question 14: Have you ever experienced panic attacks related to your coursework? Please share it with me in details.		
Name	Code	Theme
Mash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Once - Sweating and racing heartbeat - Vomiting out of panic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panic • Depression • Not applicable, unchanged • Anxiety issues
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sweaty palms - Panic attacks during timed exams - Impending sense of doom - Trying in vain to stay calm 	
Diahk	- N/A	
Afira	- No panic attacks but had periods of severe depression and burnout	
Tahia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experienced severe panic 1st time last year - Symptoms: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Panic attack felt like heart attack 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Depersonalization 3. Derealization 4. Excessive crying 5. Sweaty palms 6. Palpitations and shivering - Palpitations since childhood but OCD diagnosed in college - Heightened emotion noted in response - Worsening palpitations during lockdown and online classes - Needed to fall apart completely many times before getting the desired psychological help - Doctor's mandate necessary for parents to understand that OCD is a real problem - Treatment of symptoms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Medication 2. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) 3. Psychotherapy - Full recovery from psychological therapy dissolved by lockdown, online learning and classes - Death of family members and inability to go out of home due to COVID-19 exacerbated mental health and reinforced compulsive behaviours - OCD and panic disorder symptoms (OCD leads to panic): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Got into a loop 2. Fear of loop 3. Impending sense of doom so much that it becomes reality 4. Doom actually happens in a row thus confirming to obsessive thoughts - Disbelieving faculties about OCD since symptoms of OCD are diverse and may not repeat next time it happens 	
Masamune	- No experience of panic attacks	
Zizi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No panic attacks - Interviewee ended the talk before closing formalities were done 	
Medha	- Did not experience any panic attack	
Aff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One experience of panic attack - Impeding sense of doom - Test was not content reliable, hence the panic - Politeness noted in response 	
Seher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More than once - Racing heart - Sweaty palms 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nightmares - Regular panic attacks during studies - Had to be prescribed with a medicine for old people - Blurred vision - Significant increase in eye power 	
Paw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anxious about plagiarism - Slow typist, especially when anxious - Loss of concentration when panicky 	
Feriha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Once had panic attack for not being able to understand course content 	
Nouf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not suffer panic attacks 	
Maha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had panic attack once due to inconsiderate, strict teacher - Symptoms of panic attack: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Sweaty palms 7. Palpitations 8. Hyperventilating 9. Racing heart - Fear of impending sense of doom and repetition of panic attacks – a fear which came true 	
Tyler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not experience panic attacks 	
Sidra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has exam phobia - Always panics when sits for exams - Symptoms of panic disorder: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sweaty palms 2. Panic attack mimicking heart attack 3. Rapid, short breaths (hyperventilation) 4. Shivering in excess 5. Fear of panic attacks happening again, and the fear does come true 6. Fear of impending sense of doom - Participant's sister somewhat managed to reduce intensity of panic attack by light taps on shoulder, but it is not much useful 	

8.4 Appendix D: Sample Screenshots

8.4.1 University A

Screenshot 1

Coding:

- (Assignment + viva +project) deadlines due within a week of all courses

- Students feel each course is done from different universities
- Examples of teachers being inconsiderate:
 - ✓ Assessments were not announced slowly over a period of time
 - ✓ Despite having Boishakhi storm, no internet, electricity, mobile data not working, teachers refused to change exam times
 - ✓ Students had 3-4 quizzes, assignments and mid-term exams followed by vivas from different courses on the days of the storm
- Empathy mottos enforced by university not working
- Students forgot there was even a day without 3-4 deadlines
- When complained to the authorities that mid exams are taken despite promised otherwise (not to be taken), students were told viva is NOT considered as an exam by the faculties which the students felt is an unfair practice
- Mass demotivation and course dropout/failure resulted

Screenshot 2

Coding:

- Continued studies in order to save grades (functional depression) and making parents' money worthy despite being COVID-19 positive
- Cannot fulfil course requirements even if wanting to because loved ones suffering from deadly virus:
 - ✓ Making student(s) in dilemma – what's the point of studying?
 - ✓ Direct mention of depression – diagnosed by doctor
- Seems unjust that those affected by COVID-19 should leave:
 - ✓ Why should only physically affected COVID-19 positive students be exempted from studies?
 - ✓ What about those negatively mentally distressed by seeing students affected by COVID-19 + studying pressure?
- Had to search for ICU for parents while facing viva + assignments + midterm + final exams:
 - ✓ May not be the very student but since friend so suffers too with the student
- No exam policy by government is put into practice:
 - ✓ Taking distressing amounts of assignments + exams + viva
 - ✓ Justified as this is needed to ensure correct grading of students
 - ✓ Students – who cares about grades when own/loved ones' life is at stake?
- With family members having COVID-19:
 - ✓ Students have to do all the work (house, finance, source of income, job etc.) leaving less time to study
 - ✓ Students cannot focus on studies due to mental pressure (anxiety, depression, panic)
 - ✓ Chronic fatigue is a big issue

- ✓ Increased suicidal ideation + attempts

Screenshot 3

Coding:

- Students expected that exams are taken to determine their expertise in a subject/course but in reality, exams drained students' energy and motivation
- 3 hours of writing is not enough to cover a question set with a time limit of 1.5 hours
- Either question will be very difficult or too many questions to be answered
- No time to think and write answers, so test is not reliable
- Exam time is not enough to answer all questions, take pictures, make PDFs, and submit in a single document for students – faculty refuse to take this into consideration even when they are informed about the issues
- Proshno kothin kore ki shikkhar maan barano jay? (Translation: Does making a question difficult enhance the quality of education?)
- Teachers giving difficult questions to examine students but happening the opposite (students getting frustrated instead)
- Grade leniency omitted to detect student plagiarism but this only made students more frustrated
- Students believe the teachers' approach to evaluate them is inhumane
- Who to blame:
 - ✓ Unorganized course structure (crisis learning instead)
 - ✓ Pressure through frequent quizzing
 - ✓ Imposing offline-like grading policy when student mental issues are at their peak

8.4.2 University B

Screenshot 1

Coding:

- Writing post with cannula in one hand
- Used to study at a public university away from family before, became very sick there
- Lost 1.5 years and came to a private university to be with family and regain in good health but instead became sicker than before
- Terrible health condition due to constant pressure from assignments, quizzes and other assessments – student going in and out of consciousness
- Confirmed doctor report: student sick due to excess mental pressure in addition to physical ailments
- Student under saline, cannot move an inch
- Student believes it's not their fault so why they should drop out and waste time and money in addition to the already lost 1.5 years

- Students' attempt for a better life all to waste because of online semesters' excruciating pressure

Screenshot 2

Coding:

- No consistency in grading of assessments
 - ✓ Once giving good marks and surge in CGPA
 - ✓ The next semester, change in grading policy, harder questions and fall in CGPA
 - ✓ Mass burnout, depression and suicidal ideation noted in students
 - ✓ Questions made 10 times harder so much so that student(s) need to retake to pass course
- Students doing everything they can (making notes, watching videos given by course teachers, attending online classes), still teachers expecting them to give more effort by giving them more assignments
- Students feel public university is better during corona time since those students are not facing assignments' pressure

8.4.3 University C

Screenshot 1

Coding:

- Intolerable online education – student(s) pleading authorities to stop it
- Instead of midterm exams, teachers are taking assignments + presentation + viva (sarcasm 100%: student reported 'feeling relieved')
- Lack of structure for following online activities and study tasks (crisis learning)

8.4.4 University D

Screenshot 1

Coding:

- Students feeling like they are being treated as products/assets because they paid tuition fees to study – alienation from university
- Grading system putting immense pressure on students
 - ✓ Mass dropouts
 - ✓ Depression on the rise – diagnosed by doctor, especially functioning depression
 - ✓ Many students at high risk of suicide – main reason cited as not able to go up the grades' ladder despite putting effort

Screenshot 2

Coding:

- Severe migraine issues and cluster headache
- Eye disease
- Need to stare at phone for 6-7 hours straight for quiz, midterm, assignments, final exams and viva
- Student(s) took 2 painkillers – skin feels burning and turned red due to all the balms used to lower migraine pain and study little
- Student(s) threw up several times during exams
- Phone on reading mode with lowest brightness to help cope
- Mass insomnia and weight reduction for no reason
- Student(s) developed low pressure 90/60, some lost balance and fell on floor