

The Quarter-Life Crisis

LABIBA ADIL



The future may hold great promise but young adults still have to figure out what that future should be.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The 'quarter-life crisis' is not a myth. The term is often thought to aggrandise the problems faced by those in their early and mid twenties. The conflicts however do exist and it is best experienced by fresh graduates. With a degree in hand and the ever looming pressure from family, they often feel the burden to amount to great expectations. Even when the future holds great promise, the lives of young adults are riddled with uncertainty and a sense of alienation. Studies show that the brain does not reach full maturity until 25. This means that in most cases, fresh graduates who are between 22 and 23 are not ready to make the type of life altering decisions which are often thrust upon them. Even with vastly different circumstances, most 'twenty somethings' feel uncertain and off track.

It is believed that graduating summa cum laude will inevitably mean better prospects. However, many fresh graduates feel stranded even with very high GPAs since their desired jobs demand a certain

degree of prior work experience. "My job is alright although it is not what I wanted but I had to start somewhere," says a recent English graduate from North South University. This is a common complaint. "I wanted to work as an intern in certain companies but they demanded a Masters degree!" Those with degrees from abroad are not spared from similar predicaments. A recent graduate from Monash University says "The moment you land in Bangladesh after graduating from one of the top 50 universities in the world, you're faced with a crucial question -was it worth it?" Many local employers do not want to hire graduates with degrees from foreign universities due to misconceptions that they are from rich families and the offered pay is not enough. They wait months for one call for interview. For others, settling for a job you do not want is often not an option. Sometimes students with high marks from prestigious universities feel a sense of entitlement which often leads to disillusionment. "Our

generation is a bit unlucky when it comes to finding a job. Most corporations have kept their recruitment frozen for political unrest; foreign investors are taking their time," says a recent Business graduate. On an average, fresh graduates remain unemployed for 3 to 4 months before they find a suitable job. This waiting period is a difficult time. "I had to sit at home pointlessly for a month before I decided to enroll for an MBA," says a graduate from Jahangirnagar Uni-

Due to exceeding social pressure to uphold a specific standard of success, the feeling of inadequacy and lack of or misplaced ambition has become a common affliction. Undergraduates in their final year often blindly apply to top jobs which are expected of them rather than questioning what they truly want. This often sets them up for dissatisfaction. "I applied because that's what business graduates do and these companies are supposed to be good for your career" said a student from the Institute of Business Administration.

Apart from unemployment mid twenties can be difficult in terms of responsibility. In most cultures, graduating is followed with moving out, which acts as a stepping stone to adulthood. In Dhaka, living alone is a luxury. Those who do manage often face baseless suspicion. "Bachelors are thought to be unruly, problematic and behind on rent," says a recent graduate from Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology who recently moved to his second apartment. Rise of living expenses and lack of healthy entertainment adds to the stress. When asked how this is affecting lifestyle, a student of Dhaka University replies, "I have no other way to entertain myself than to drink and smoke, all of which are expensive habits, with no real substitute". Others, especially young women, are urged to get married soon after graduating. For some this proves to be the right decision and they balance household and career responsibilities successfully. However, some women prefer to delay marriage until they are sure they can handle the responsibilities. A final year student of Economics explains, "Graduating itself is such a big step and on top of that the thought of marriage fills me with fear". Marriage and graduation are two different turning points in life and some need an interval in between.

Support from family and friends is the biggest factor which helps young adults maintain a healthy lifestyle and stay motivated to pursue their dreams. An English graduate admits that a certain amount of pressure from family makes sure that one does not stall big decisions for too long. "I am facing a situation where parents and friends are expecting me to know what I am planning to do with my life, when in fact I am still just as clueless now, as I was when I started undergrad. But that pressure of expectation has helped me search for answers". Maintaining a healthy and open relationship with family provides them with a firmer ground. Visiting a career counselor or taking a post-graduation trip takes the initial pressure off.

Most new graduates should prepare for a big reality check. This is the time when their aspirations and reality intersects, they must be prepared to accept their limitations and make the best of their resources. Patience and confidence goes a long way. Early to mid twenties is a crucial time. The transition to adulthood is a tricky path. With mounting social pressure it is important to remember that finding the right job or partner is only secondary to finding yourself.

Due to exceeding social pressure to uphold a specific standard of success, the feeling of inadequacy and lack of or misplaced ambition has become a common affliction.

versity. "I was not happy with my decision at first as I was looking for the right job." The conflict between building a career and pursuing higher education poses as one of the most difficult decisions a young adult has to face. When asked why a Masters is the next step, a second year Electrical and Electronic Engineering student from North South University says, "I have realized that money talks and I need to make plenty. So I plan on getting a Masters in Business".