

SPOTLIGHT

It's results day!

And what exactly does results day mean?

Did you think it's a day when exam results come out? You are gravely mistaken.

Results day is the day that proves what kind of a human being you are. Whether you are amiable or insolent, your results will tell us. Whether you are capable of a future or will live on the streets, your results will tell us. Whether you are a man of God, or Satan's spawn, your results will tell us. In Bangladesh, results day is the day you find your worth in the world.

This year, three SSC examinees have committed suicide after the release of their results. Many more have admittedly gone into depression. The pressure becomes unbearable once the results do not match the expectation of society. "From a very young age, students in our country face the 'nothing except an A grade is acceptable' pressure from school and parents. This inflicted pressure causes an excessive release of neurotransmitters in their brains, which change the structures of their cells and neurons. This change in structure is what causes agitation, depression and a severe drop in confidence level," says Nishat Fatima Rahman, Assistant Professor, Early Childhood Development, BRAC IED. In many families and schools, weak students are prone to becoming a subject of mockery, as they are constantly told off if an A grade is not attained.

Most routines of school going children involve 8-10 hours of studying, which requires them to be confined in a room with no human interaction. "This creates severe problems in children's mental health. At a young age, they need to go out, explore, interact, in order to grow. But their growth is being stunted the moment they are handed so many text books that they are required to memorise all day long," says Prof Nishat.

The obsession with results par excellence has lead to more than just depression and suicide. There are students and others across the country forgetting their moral values for good results. Question papers are leaked before every board exam and despite investigation; the Government fails to prevent the heinous act. Facebook now consists of pages called '*Porikkhar ager rater proshno nin'*' which, if literally translated, means 'Final questions the night before the exam', which proves that question papers are expected to be leaked on a regular basis. Even the page titled 'Bangladesh HSC Board 2014 Suggestions and Questions Help Line/Center' has revealed question papers before the exams. Leading newspapers along with eminent activists and academics around the country, including author Professor Muhammad Zafar Iqbal of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology have compared

the leaked papers to the actual papers and found that 95 percent of the questions match.

This trend of leaked question papers has become so popular that it has even seeped through to the innocent minds of PSC examinees, mere 5th graders. Despite complaints though, the Government denies the incident.

"There is a lot of politics in our education system," says Professor Shumon. "One's education and knowledge have now been summarised into results. If you actually dig deep into our education system, you will find a lot of flaws. Teaching methods, schooling techniques, all of it needs improvement in our country. But that will need a lot of money to be invested. So what happens then? Grades are given away. At least that way, it will seem like the students are doing well, even though we know they aren't." The abnormal rate of GPA 5 in SSC and the abnormal rate of failure in HSC every year is evidence enough that there is a major flaw in the system,

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which is why we see that many who passed with GPA 5 in SSC, fail in their HSC. Or sometimes even those with perfect scores in the board exams do not get admission in any universities.

The problem primarily starts from a very early age, for students. "From class 1 all the way to Master's, our students are burdened with a massive amount of content. Children of kindergarten carry 5-6 heavy books everyday and get into the habit of memorising," says Prof Dr Wahiduzzaman, educationist, and Vice Chancellor of Noakhali Science and Technology University. "And you will see, the pressure on children, the happier their parents! Guardians nowadays do not care if their children are mentally and physically healthy, as long as they bring in the results," he continues. According to him, teaching methods need to change drastically. Wahiduzzaman also believes that the tradition of memorising must be eradicated in order to get children to use their own thoughts to produce answers. "The trend of memorising leaves children clueless about what they are studying. They may write the correct answers, but most of the times, they don't know what



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

TO SOAR WITHOUT WINGS

NAZIBA BASHER



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

they are writing. Many teachers like sticking to old traditions, and force their students to memorise. This must stop. The creative system implemented by the Government in the board exams may finally make a difference in this regard."

On the other hand, a student of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College studying for SSC exams, Asfia Azhar (not her real name), says "it's creative only because they say it is. There is nothing creative about it. We are provided with guide-books for creative questions, and once again, asked to memorise answers." Along with this added pressure of memorising answers and making sure they are word for word from the books, there is the enforced 'coaching' tradition. "There are compulsory coaching classes that the students of class 5 and 8 are required to take. These classes take place after school for around 2 and half hours, and it almost has no additional effect. It is just extra pressure for us students.

improvement in the education sector, thinks Prof Shumon. "Education must be readily available for all. In our society it is believed that without a higher education, you are nothing. In other parts of the world, this is not the case. People get good paying jobs with basic education. We need to let our children find their own paths instead of forcing them on the one we think is right for them," he adds, "parents need to stop investing their whole lives and dreams in their children, and citizens, policy makers, teachers and ministers need to ensure that there is no politics involved in a child's education or future."

The only way to stop this problem is awareness. "There is an urgent need for parents and teachers to study child development. There is no reason to believe that every child is equal. Comparing one student with the other needs to stop, by parents and teachers both. Mocking young children and



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There are also teachers who make us fail on purpose if we don't attend their private coaching classes." This malpractice from teachers is an open secret, says Professor Wahiduzzaman. "I think the best way to eliminate this problem is by increasing teachers' pay, and giving more respect to the position."

The societal pressure that comes with education is something that is engrained in our culture and traditions. "I have been to many places around the world. And I would say that our race is inherently intelligent, when I compare. If we can give our children the space to be themselves, we could do more good to the world than we hope for. Parents must let their children play, run around, and be involved in extra-curricular activities and give them space to develop their bodies and minds themselves. Teaching our children morals, and letting them explore themselves and their talents, is what will make them strive. Parents need to understand that," says Prof Wahiduzzaman.

The cold hard truth is that, no matter how many GPA 5s or Golden A+s are produced every year, until the system changes, we will not see much

mentally abusing them just for results must stop too. This is no way of obtaining good results. Every child needs different individual attention, because growth processes and learning capabilities differ from child to child. We must learn what kind of method to apply on which kind of child. We can't use the same method for all," says Prof Nishat. "There should be courses available on parenting and child development given by either the Government or NGOs. Most of the times, they don't even know the amount of harm they are inflicting on their children. So without the knowledge of child behaviour and development, our children will always suffer."

As a child growing up in Bangladesh, the one phrase we are most used to is 'what will society think?' This particular phrase establishes society's role in our life as a body that is meant to scrutinise, criticise and objectify our every move. It is, on the contrary, the job of the adult members of society to understand and support our children, harness moral values, and make them confident enough to reach for the sky on their own. For now, our children are trying to soar without wings. ■