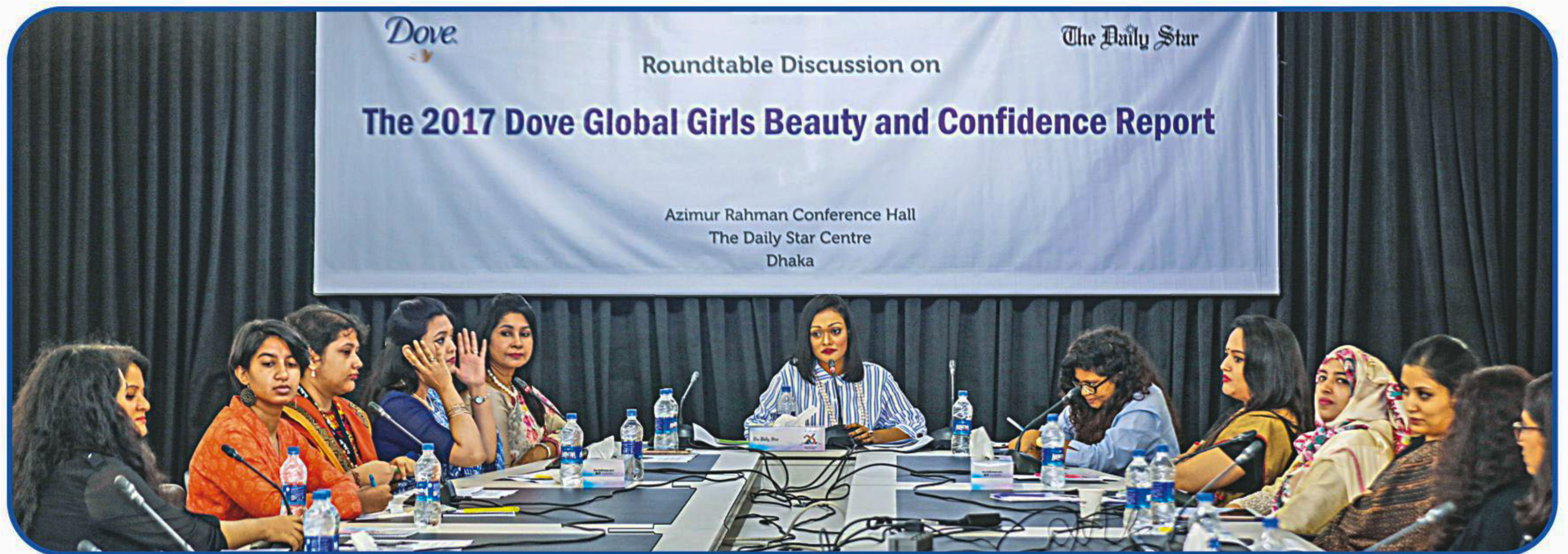Dove

The Daily Star

GIRLS ON BEAUTY

New Dove research finds low beauty confidence is driving girls to opt out of future opportunities

Recently Dove and The Daily Star organised a roundtable titled "The 2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report". Here we publish a summary of the discussions.

Azra Mahmud, Fashion Choreographer, Model and Moderator of the Session

Our roundtable is aimed at discussing the findings of 'The 2017 Dove Global Girls Beauty and Confidence Report' which reveals that more than half (54 percent) of the girls across the globe do not have high body esteem which causes them to miss out on key opportunities in life. The research, which was conducted across 14 countries with 5,165 girls aged 10-17, found that eight out of ten girls avoid important activities such as engaging with friends and families, participating in activities outside of the home and trying out for teams and clubs if they are not happy with the way they look. Seven in ten girls with low body esteem will put their health at risk by not seeing a doctor or skipping meals. On the other hand, 8 in 10 girls with high body esteem are more likely to think they are beautiful, even if they look different from traditional images of beauty. Overall, the report reveals a strong correlation between a girl's body esteem and her confidence and life satisfaction. What brings hope is that nearly all girls, about 82 percent, feel that every girl has something that's beautiful. I think this is a fact that needs to be celebrated.

Dove is committed to a world where beauty is a source of confidence and not anxiety. Our intention here is to have a robust discussion about how the existing beauty stereotypes and body-shaming affect girls from a very young age. We hope to hear some unique and innovative solutions to address the issue.

Shahida Rahman, Teacher, Grace International School

We all agree that young women and girls are the ones who are most affected by body image issues. Pre-set ideals of beauty created by society and the media are somewhat to blame. From a very early age, young girls are bombarded with advertisements that project models who are seemingly flawless. Even the most natural aspects of a woman's body - like body hair- are stigmatized. It is deemed as imperfection and in turn becomes the reason for low confidence for the girl in question. Even going outside without any make-up on is considered unacceptable since you are expected to look a certain way.

As a teacher of young people, we need to get young boys and girls to like the way they look. This is particularly important in our society where fair skin color is an obsession which seriously affects the confidence of young girls.

Anjuman Ara, English Teacher and Exam Coordinator, BAF Shaheen School

Teachers, parents and students focus a lot on good grades which the academic curriculum helps students to achieve. But there is nothing in the curriculum that can help female students tackle existing beauty stereotypes. Young girls in particular are the most vulnerable with their insecurities regarding complexion and body image. I think the main problem is that we are not listening to their troubles.

Kaniz Almas Khan, CEO and Managing Director, Persona

Our young generation is excessively concerned about appearance. But they care little about inner beauty. We need to change our mindset about what beauty means and build self-esteem in our children at their formative age. Here, parents and teachers have big roles to play. They should teach children that beauty is all about being natural and that there is no need to aspire to an ideal form of beauty. This will help them to be confident in whatever they pursue in life.

Kajalie Shehreen Islam, Faculty Member, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka

The media and advertisers have fixed an ideal image of beauty for others to follow. The first thing a journalist can do is to break this stereotype. Journalists should highlight the stories of real women who do not have the so-called "perfect look" and yet are happy and successful in their lives (Dove research shows that 7 in 10 girls with low body esteem say they feel worse about themselves when they look at images of beautiful girls in magazines).

Rumana Rashid Ishita, Actress, Director, and Writer

In the age of social media, a picture is for everyone to see. Hence there is always an undue pressure about the way one looks. But a child is hardly born with the idea of what beauty is. It is the parents who give them the first lesson of beauty which is, once again, a concept imposed by society. As a result, beauty-related prejudices are perpetuated through generations. I have seen in my own family that when relatives - even educated ones - come to visit a newborn, the very first thing they comment on is the color of the baby's skin instead of his/her health. That's why I am convinced that we should first educate our adults.

Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin, Chief Nutritionist, United Hospital Ltd.

As a nutritionist, I encounter many young people who want to lose weight. When I ask them about the problems they have with their body, the common response is, "I am so obese". This is irrespective of whether she is actually overweight. I ended up refusing a prescription to many patients because I do not want to write a prescription for weight loss for someone who was in fact under-weight.

Once I met a patient who is 19 years old. She was almost 12kg overweight and looked very depressed. The mother was complaining non-stop about the girl's food habits. But the girl remained quiet. I was trying to communicate with her over a number of topics but I noticed that she was avoiding laughing out loud. When I asked her why, she replied that it's because she looks fat when she laughs. I was very shocked when I heard that.

What's interesting is that it also happens to boys. Recently, a kid aged 13 came to my chamber. His parents informed me that the boy was being bullied in school because of his weight. He eventually had to be taken to a psychiatrist. I am sharing these stories to give you a picture of how things are getting worse day by day. Parents have to speak to their children about these issues. I must appreciate the study done by Dove. I think similar studies should be conducted on parents to find out ways in which parents can help their children tackle these stereotypes which harm a young child's body esteem.

Zarin Rayhana, Contributor, Shout, The Daily Star

When I was younger people used to call me fat. It affected me a lot. But as I grew older I began to understand what true beauty is and learnt that I should be confident about who I am. I read articles about these issues in various media. My mother – who is a teacher- helped me a lot in shaping my thoughts. I think external beauty is superficial as beauty standards change over time. We should inspire our peers to take a broader perspective on this issue and learn to think beyond the stereotypes.

Mormee Mahtab, Contributor, Lifestyle, The Daily Star

The idea of long, straight hair as a notion of beauty is quite common in our society. I had curly hair. When I was growing up I was constantly told to straighten my hair. It bothered me and I used to follow their advice. One time, at a party, I forgot to straighten my hair. All my friends told me that I have really nice curls and that I should probably go to the party with my natural hair. Since then I started sporting my hair as it is. I was further motivated by seeing Ashley Graham - the plus-size model who was featured in sports magazines in US. She was very confident about the way she looked; it never occurred to me that she is a plus-size.

Adiba Mahbub Proma, Contributor, Lifestyle, The Daily Star

Nowadays we constantly look for external validation. There are a lot of internal battles that we have to fight every day. Even when you are doing well in school or extra-curricular activities, people talk about how you look. I want to also add that we don't give young girls enough scope to play outside, saying "You are going to get dirt on yourself," and at the same time we tell them that they are fat or not fit. This is a dilemma for a girl child. We should celebrate the achievements of young people who have overcome these stereotypes and have gone on to do wonderful things in the world.

Iris Farina, Feature Writer, Lifestyle, The Daily Star

I think the pressure to conform to an ideal standard of beauty is self-imposed to an extent. I was never told by my parents or relatives that I had to look a certain way. But now, we have more exposure through social media where people can make random comments about the way you look, some of which is often demeaning and affects one's confidence. Some comments seem like acts of jealousy and the main motive behind these insensitive acts is to belittle a person. Therefore we should stop being obsessive about what people think of us.

Shahida Rahman

We ourselves are guilty of perpetuating the idea of the ideal body size. When we hear terms like "plus size", it helps to further amplify the idea of an "ideal" size. I think there shouldn't be such a term. When we say 'plus size' we are already implying that somebody is above a standard size or is fat. We should avoid these stereotypes which implicitly promote an ideal standard of beauty.

Anjuman Ara

In school we teach students not to bully their peers amongst other moral lessons but that is not enough to build confidence. We need to teach students to not give in to beauty pressures. To do that, we ourselves need to stop judging people based on their looks. I would like to recommend Dove to visit schools and talk not only to the students but also to their parents.

Shahida Rahman

We have to teach our students, particularly boys, that you can't objectify girls based on appearance. The body shaming aspect needs to be tackled at the grassroots level from a very early age. We have to teach them that appearance should not be a cause of anxiety which would hold them back from developing themselves. I also want to address this particular idea of 'inner beauty'. I think when you tell a person "You are a beautiful person inside," the person is inclined to think that he/she is not beautiful from the outside. We need to promote the idea that everyone is beautiful.

Rumana Rashid Ishita

There was a time when local audience used to receive educational messages from television programs aired on BTV. I think when large corporations invest behind TV programs, they should make a point to include educational messages in the program addressing self-esteem issues and beauty stereotypes.

Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin

We should promote the idea of living a healthy life. Schools, parents and media can help raise awareness of the importance of health. We need to make people understand that good health is a prerequisite for beauty.

Zarin Rayhana

I would suggest that local fashion brands include models who go beyond the ideal beauty narrative to challenge society's preconceived notions of beauty. It will definitely make a positive impact.

Azra Mahmud

All the speakers agreed that the starting point of removing beauty stereotypes should be the parents. Parents should instill in their children the idea that there is no fixed definition of beauty and every person is beautiful in his or her own way. If the same values are taught at school, then the children would learn to internalize the concept from a young age. A good point that surfaced from the discussion was how media and brands can play an important role in changing the beauty narrative by featuring models who fall outside the conventional notions of beauty. Dove for one has always used real women in all its advertising and marketing campaigns.

Dove has been on the journey of building self-esteem of young girls by helping them develop a positive relationship with the way they look. By 2015, they had trained 20 million young people through body confidence workshops around the world. Now they are aiming to provide training to an additional 20 million young people by 2020. As part of this initiative, Dove Bangladesh also observes the International Day of the Girl Child and conducts self-esteem workshops amongst school-going students every year. There is still a lot of work to be done in helping girls develop the resilience they need to overcome the impact of beauty and appearance pressures. But all of us can make a difference in our own way with small agencies of change.