

PRESSURE TO PERFORM

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SHOUT

Imagine this. You are eight years old, you spend a significant amount of time with your drawing and colouring books. When your parents start to notice your interest, they decide to enrol you into art school. You attend and learn new techniques that improve your skills. You are happy for now.

Quick. You are now 11. Your house has some of your work framed on the walls of the living room for your parents to show when your relatives visit. Your parents seem proud when they do get the opportunity to. You have started contemplating professions to pursue, and (let's say) being a cartoonist for Disney becomes a dream.

Zoom. You are now 14 and have been told that your dreams are unrealistic and immature. That you are no da Vinci. That you need a "safe and proper" career option. So you decide to put your dreams on hold, until you become an adult and can make your own choices. Of course, you have decided to choose a safe combination of science and business subjects that will supposedly "keep your options open."

Wow. You are now 21 and haven't touched your paintbrushes in years. In between all your pursuits to attain a degree for a "practical" major and your part-time jobs, you find your dreams slipping away.

This hypothetical situation is sadly the reality for a staggering number of people. However, what makes matters worse is that often people are under the impression that they have to measure up to certain standards to pursue their dreams. That, if they aren't the best at it (and everything else that comes along with it), the ambitions aren't worthy of being chased. Or maybe they aren't. This notion of 'being average' and the overall pressure to perform, has sadly put the last nail in the coffin for dreams. While many argue that this is a process of systematic selection, what is the cost of allowing such a process to triumph?

ARE YOU STRESSED?

We asked a few people if they felt stressed, and these are a couple of responses we received.

"I absolutely hated STEM subjects. I could never seem to grasp the concepts, hence, my grades suffered. As a result, I would often find myself dwelling in

episodes of self-deprecation and panic about my future. What added to that was how all the teachers painted a very gloomy picture as a 'prediction' for our futures unless we performed well academically," said Tahmid Alam*, student of an established school following the National Curriculum.

"When a student fails to meet with academic expectations, that student is not encouraged to take up extracurricular activities, regardless of their passion or talents. To some extent, it feels unfair that schools concentrate on a narrow lesson plan. Not all students are motivated to study science or business; different students have different fields of interest, like sports or music. Often, pursuing our hobbies or passion projects leads to our teachers and school authorities taunting us about our involvements when our grades aren't up to mark. I was once taunted for bad grades because I had been involved in the organisation of an

event the teachers had initially asked me to organise," said Sumaiya Rashid, student of a well-known English medium school in Dhaka.

"During my time in university, I had to constantly juggle between freelance projects, tuitions and my studies. Being part of a middle-income family, I had to support myself and contribute to my family as much as possible. My situations were mine, and I had to accommodate everything perfectly, otherwise, I'd just be someone who didn't make it. When I did, I had to involve myself in competitions and online courses that helped me attain better skills and would improve my résumé. Most times, I felt like 24 hours weren't enough, even when I had deprived myself of sleep and leisure time," said Noora Tahiya*, recent graduate from a renowned private university in Dhaka.

THE ROOT OF THE STRESS

The society that we live in shapes the

narrative of success to such a level that it becomes impossible to perceive your achievements as a success. Since we are told that society judges in comparison to the best of the best, those expectations can be crushing. If you are not a 13-year-old entrepreneur with a billion-dollar business, you have failed. If you haven't gone to space by your late teens, you have failed.

The fear of living up to the societal metric of climbing up the success ladder gives rise to over-glorification of hard work. Hard work is often seen as the most powerful weapon to have in your arsenal, and what matters more than the quality of your emotional and physical capital is the quantity of it. Often what's seen as progress is the amount of stress you are dealing with and the amount of workload you are under. Burning out all your energy is tangible proof of your progress, even though the quality of your work was mediocre and not satisfactory. Because quantifying subjective progress gets difficult from a societal point of view, hence the physical and mental effort you put becomes more conspicuous and easier to quantify.

You will see people getting greater satisfaction from being stressed and burning out rather than doing fruitful work, because they feel the pain of the effort is directly proportional to the development of their identity as strong, independent individuals who can prove to the society that they are elites, gaining societal appreciation. This translates into finding ranks among professions. We glorify high-stress level jobs to be better jobs and thus by default, these professions are paid more; art is seen to be easy and are thus discriminated against and looked down upon by society. The standard of success for an artist is much higher nowadays because it is really hard to convince the society that even an artist is a hard working human. This debases the idea of mediocrity and how it is okay to be mediocre and humble. You do not have to be a rocket scientist or a successful entrepreneur to be happy, you need to be enough for yourself and for others around you. It is also imperative to appreciate small progresses because the extraction of happiness and satisfaction from minute steps taken creates a cycle of less toxic notions that gives rise to individuals being more productive and actually develop themselves as human beings with dynamic identities.

We can also see the romanticisation of stress being marketed. Companies that sell coffee make their advertisements in such a way that it glorifies the stress of a person. Most of these commercials tie success with how stressed a person is and how coffee is

a solution. It is not just marketers – we can find this glorification on TV as well. The show *BoJack Horseman* explores the idea of stress and its opportunity cost with its character Princess Carolyn, whose success comes at the cost of high levels of stress and a blurred work-life boundary.

THE OVERALL IMPACT OF BEING OVERSTRESSED

The impacts of oversteering are often side-lined due to the immense workload and can often be easily overlooked. These impacts are detrimental to not only one's mental health but also one's physical health. It all begins with skipping meals due to loss of appetite or lack of time, not drinking enough water, and compromising on sleep. Starting from simple headaches that can lead to chronic migraines, oversteering is the root cause of serious health conditions. High blood pressure, heart diseases, diabetes, and kidney complications can often begin from the anxiety of the next corporate presentation.

The crippling anxiety that comes with stress can lead to mental conditions such as panic disorders, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Moreover, the workload causes a significant decrease in the number of social interactions, leading to isolation. The loss of human interaction allows for lesser avenues to de-stress, therefore a cycle of unhealthy mental state is created. Oversteering can have significant impacts on your ability to perceive goals and to track the actions that drive you towards those goals. This is usually due to the loss of concentration because too much information becomes overwhelming for the brain to process. Instances such as these make people question their own self-worth and their capabilities which can create a downward spiral of damaging thoughts.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

There are a few techniques that doctors use when it comes to de-stressing. Mindfulness is a technique followed by a lot of people to reach extreme levels of self-control of their emotions. Quantum Techniques can also be a way of dealing with stress by helping oneself spiritually. De-stressing involves the experience of healing one's inner self and the Quantum Technique encourages this form of healing.

You need to set certain boundaries that will bring sound physical alterations to enhance your daily life because the



overpowering workload leads to negligence towards one's own self. Self-care activities usually pile up at the bottom of one's list of priorities. Making conscious decisions to self-actualise and practice self-care is simple, yet extremely difficult to implement. It's about giving yourself time to breathe and take minutes out of your robotic routine. Maintaining stress diaries is another effective way to deal with stress. Writing down stressful situations and the causes behind it decreases the burden on one's cognitive abilities. But none of this will matter if we as a society are not ready to recognise that putting pressure on individuals to perform and making them feel the necessity of stress will never drive us toward success.

*Names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

BYLC Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center
YOUTH CARNIVAL 2019

DATE

December 27 & 28 2019

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bylc.org/carnival2019

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Government College of Physical Education Mohammadpur, Dhaka

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