

The Aftermath of Getting Bullied

NUZHAT HASSAN CHOWDHURY

"I was bullied both verbally and physically when I moved to London in my early teens. As the new foreign kid, my peers often made racist remarks and made fun of my appearance. I later resorted to picking on other people as I couldn't retaliate against my own bullies. However, being physically violent brought me no joy, and I soon realised that I was stuck in a cycle," shares Farhan Rahman, a clinical analyst at Renata Limited, who turned his experience into an opportunity to grow as a person.

Many of us have faced some form of bullying at school, university, workplace or at home. These experiences not only take a toll on the victims, but even when the bullying finally stops, its after-effects may linger for years to come.

"As someone who has dealt with anger issues for most of their life, it taught me the need to control my temper," he adds. Upon being asked about the consequences of being bullied on his self-esteem, he says, "Insecurities that stemmed from being made fun of for my appearance have largely been resolved, but still resurface now and then."

According to Dr. Most. Aeysha Sultana, Associate Professor at the Department of Psychology, University of Dhaka, most Bangladeshis don't have proper awareness about bullying.

"They tend to think that it is synonymous with fighting, which is incorrect. Both physical and verbal bullying can cause long-term psychological damage to the victims. It can develop low self-esteem or lead to students avoiding school in fear of getting bullied. Victims may later go on to become bullies themselves out of frustration from constantly getting picked on. This phenomenon is called displacement," she states.

Although some people are able to largely reverse the consequences of being bullied, others may struggle to do well in their adulthood.

Twenty-five year old Emad Chowdhury, a fourth year student at North South University, says, "The impact of bullying is long lasting. Even today, I hesitate to stand up for myself because a voice inside my head tells me that confrontation may lead to me getting ridiculed. I've noticed that I've become more of an introvert after my experiences with getting bullied."



Emad also believes it had more serious consequences. "It has also played a part in me developing social anxiety and overall lower confidence," he reckons.

Bullying is commonly associated with educational institutions and is mainly expected to occur between peers. However, the possible perpetrators could be anybody, even teachers. The line between a strict teacher and an unkind teacher is often blurry. This may lead to students having to endure unnecessarily harsh treatment in the name of being disciplined.

Fatima Tasnim*, a 20 year old student at UCLA, shares her experience with a school teacher who asked her to stay back after class to talk because she was late that day. "She outright said that I would never get into a good university after graduation, wouldn't get anywhere without the help of my parents, wouldn't get married and would be alone while all my friends would leave," recalls Fatima.

"Overall, I wouldn't say it affected me a lot because I had a great support system," she mentions.

I, too, was faced with a similar situation when I was assigned classes with a professor that bullied students and used inappropriate language in class. I later found out that he has a reputation for behaving this way, but seemed to have never faced any consequences. His behaviour was so discouraging that I contemplated changing my major as his disparaging words created

doubt in my mind.

The lack of consequences for such behaviour reminded me of the bitter truth that many people in positions of power know they can get away with bullying people, which is why they confidently continue to do so.

Furthermore, contrary to popular belief, bullying can also take place at home. Family members often comment on people's appearance, whether positive or negative. When it comes to negative comments, what seem to be "friendly" jabs, can often become the source of long-lasting insecurities for many.

Sara Jamal, 23, says, "I used to be fat-shamed by my relatives every time I visited them. I was young and didn't appreciate their comments. I then resorted to dieting before meeting them, but that never worked because I couldn't keep up with it. Today, I'm always insecure about how I look, whether it be chubby or thin."

In some cases, the consequences of enduring bullying over a long period of time can be severe and irreversible.

"My brother was bullied by his classmates for various reasons, but mainly for his skin tone. Even our extended family members didn't spare him in this regard. This went on for a long time and its effects permeated into our home when he started taking out his frustrations on us. He went on to become very emotionally volatile due to all this. What people targeted him for might be specific, but on the inside, it affected him in far reaching ways," says Akib Ehsan*.

Although some people are able to dodge or reverse the consequences of getting bullied, many understandably struggle to do so. The experiences of everybody mentioned in this article are testaments to the fact that our words and actions hold a lot of weight, so much so that it may impact somebody else's life in ways we never anticipated.

It is imperative to not only discourage bullying, but also recognise that it can occur in any place, and not just in schools.

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

Nuzhat has messed up her sleeping schedule once again. Tell her to go to sleep at nuzhatchowdhury07@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: ALIZA RAHMAN

School Laboratories Under the Microscope

SABIBA HOSSAIN & HIYA ISLAM

Laboratory exercises are mandatory for any student studying Science in high school. This requirement is often overlooked by a majority of schools in Bangladesh. Students from both Bangla and English medium backgrounds go through a number of problems when it comes to acquiring essential lab skills.

While many schools will boast about their up-to-date lab facilities with dedicated staff, the reality is a different story altogether.

Many a time, school laboratories are seen as rooms barely used. With dusty counters and scarce materials to work with, the hype of lab classes only falls among students. Avijit Ghosh, a Chemistry teacher at Banani Bidyanketan School and College, states that the school charges lab fees from students at the beginning of every semester but never takes any classes.

"The authorities are ready to spend their budget on trivial things but when asked to buy a reactant, they lose interest quickly," he states.

However, not all schools are guilty of poor lab facilities. Generally, lab classes begin from the eighth grade. Mehnaz Bushra Hamid, a recent Biotechnology graduate from Brac University who studied in Scholastica school, looks back in time and says, "We always had fresh reagents and well-maintained equipment. And spacious rooms where we could work on our own at times."

Despite having laboratories in their schools, students complain of not having spent enough time carrying out experiments. Manaara Saleh, a Lakehead Grammar School alumnus, recalls, "Going to the lab was a rare occasion. Most of the time, the teachers were used to demonstrating reactions in the classroom."

Adib Shaheen, an A Level candidate, adds that he thinks gaining hands-on experience helps students connect with the subject much better and helps with retaining enthusiasm as they advance. Whether it is the testing of pH of different solutions or measuring the velocity of a moving toy car, it is evident that a significant number of students are missing out on what it feels like to work in a lab. This is important to young learners who aim to study STEM-related majors at university.

At present, English medium students enrol in either of the two UK-based curricula and they vary in few ways; Edexcel provides paper-based tests only while Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) offers practical exams in some cases.

Very few English-medium schools are select venues for practicals. This has to do with the quality of labs and other factors that deem them fit for examination purposes by international boards. At this point, students do not feel comfortable with the idea of a real, practical exam even if given a chance.

Saleh says, "The fact that most of the lab-related syllabus is taught theoretically, there are high chances we would not perform well when we are manually put to test." This stresses the importance of trials and errors in labs where students can rediscover ideas by themselves and be confident about their results and observations.

When these classes do happen, they are lacking in more ways than one, thereby failing to meet students' needs. For starters, the duration of each class is either too short or not enough classes are taken on a weekly basis. Oftentimes, the capacity of a lab is insufficient to hold

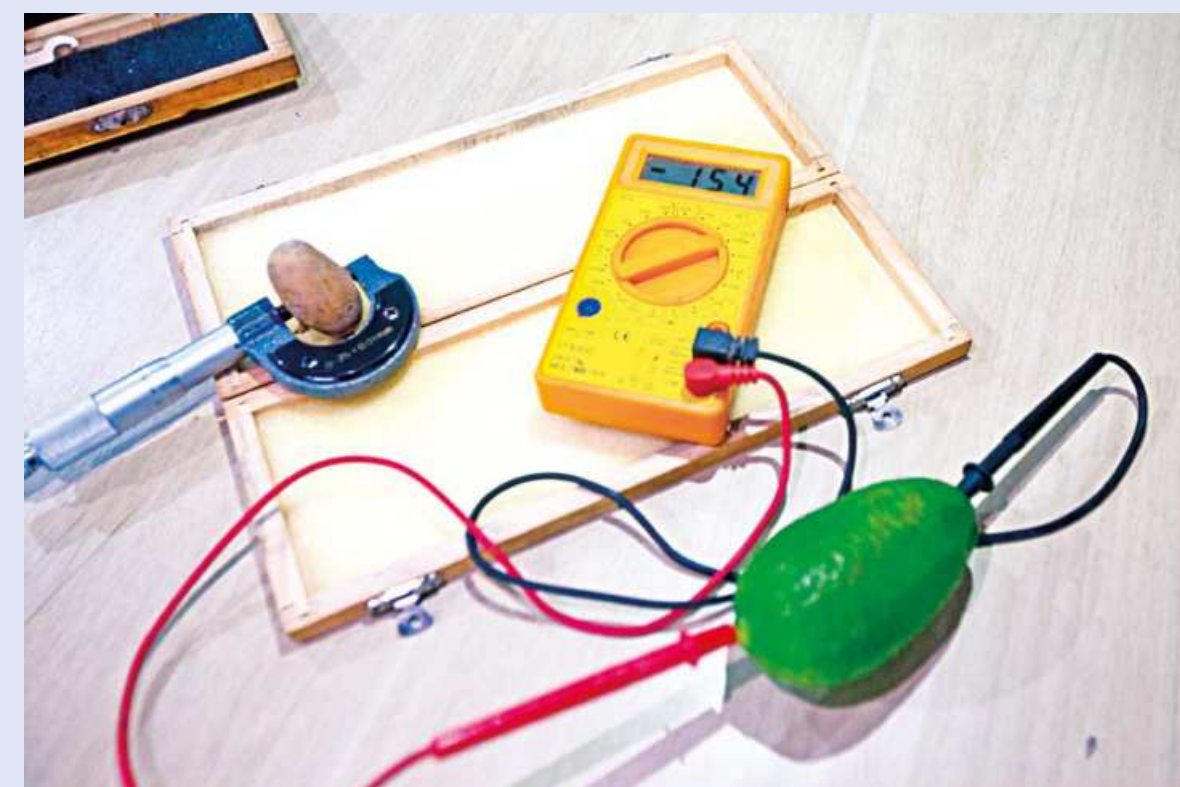


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

an entire class of students. As a result, students end up watching their teachers perform various procedures rather than try them out themselves. It can get too crowded to work and learn which also leads to unwanted group work that impedes individual creativity and freedom.

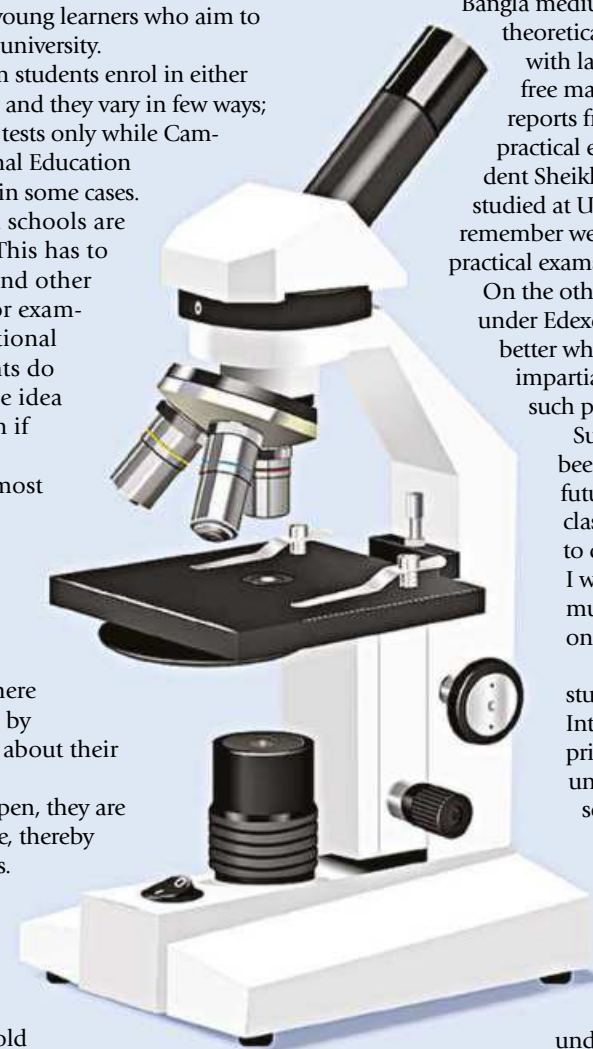
Ghosh complains, "Sixty students in a 30-minute period held for one or two days in the entire term, is it remotely adequate?" He further argues, "The way I see it is that students want to learn and it is the teachers' liability to teach. But in most cases the teachers are not interested in doing practical tasks."

Bangla medium teachers are busy with theoretical exams and bother little with lab routines. Students earn free marks by copying off lab reports from guidebooks in their practical exams. Current MBBS student Sheikh Sabila Afrine Sutopa, who studied at Uttara High School, says, "I remember we got full marks in our SSC practical exams without doing anything." On the other hand, students studying under Edexcel and CAIE fare much better when it comes to fairness and impartiality in earning marks for such practical courses.

Sutopa thinks she would have been better prepared for the future if she had regular lab classes. "If I had the chance to do my experiments alone, I would not have struggled as much in my academic life later on," she comments.

Faiza Khondokar, a former student of SFX Greenherald International School, says, "A prior lab experience is why university lab classes did not seem daunting." She later adds that many of her peers would beg to differ as they did not have the same privilege in their respective schools.

Students who engage in lab problems can understand the theoretical



concepts quickly and never develop a fear of working in labs. An ex-student of Udayan Higher Secondary School, Aditi Sarker, shares that she used to have one lab class per week in her school. She says, "It dissipated the monotony of the classroom. I looked forward to going to school when it was lab day." In hindsight, she feels that the instructors should have focused more on ensuring equal participation when working in groups.

Farhana Tasneem Chowdhury, a lecturer of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the University of Dhaka, says that her students often fail to demonstrate basic laboratory skills. "We try to keep our first-year lab work as basic as possible. We do it so that those who did not have the chance to strengthen their foundation at school can get a shot."

If lab classes were properly held in all schools, universities would not be stuck with beginner courses. Students would have been capable of taking on more advanced classes sooner in their undergraduate journey. Apart from that, students can get acquainted with lab etiquette and learn how to navigate themselves in such a setting early on.

Ghosh suggests that schools should aim to take one-hour lab classes thrice a week. Chowdhury thinks funding will be necessary to accomplish such a feat.

"If the government allotted more budget to the education sector Bangla medium schools can provide better lab education by allowing each individual its own working space and separate instruments to work with," she recommends.

With the national curriculum stressing ways to increase Golden A-pluses, the importance of practical lab skills goes severely unnoticed while students following international syllabuses endure the pain of negligence. These students equally suffer from the dearth of science practicality in their education. This, later on, takes into effect as a reduced drive in seeking research careers or jobs that value lab skills in general. Students grow up to view lab science as unimportant. But, if provided with the help they need, students can achieve a lot more in STEM and research related fields.

Sabiba Hossain is an alien coming from the future to rescue Earth. Tell her not to mess up with the time at fb.com/Sabibastro

Hiya loves food that you hate by norm - broccoli, pineapple pizza and Bounty bars. Find her at hiyaislam.11@gmail.com