

Moving to Bangladesh after growing up abroad

NUZHAT HASSAN CHOWDHURY

It's not easy to uproot your life from one country and start calling a completely different place "home". The feeling that you don't belong usually comes with the culture shock as a package deal.

I grew up in Saudi Arabia and moved to Bangladesh only a few years ago. I had to leave behind my closest friends, and the environment I was so familiar with, to shift to a place I barely knew. Soon after my arrival, I had a bone to pick with restaurants that called any

random wrap a shawarma, and any rice with orange food colouring kabsa.

Growing up abroad also meant missing out on growing up with extended family members. I never really had the chance to become friends with any of my cousins, or celebrate festivals with them.

Even now, we are practically strangers. Many times, when speaking in Bangla, I have been told that I mispronounce certain words. This puts me in a minor existential crisis, having realised I'd been saying these words wrong for about 20 years. However, I soon understood that wrongly speaking a language would be the least of my worries.

One of the first challenges I faced after moving to Dhaka was the need to get used to the chaos. I was accustomed to a quieter life back in Al Jubail, Saudi Arabia.

Here, no matter where I go, I always feel like there are too many people. I start to feel out of place and soon realise that perhaps I am too soft to survive this city. I stopped being as soft-spoken as I used to be when I realised that that trait has little to no value here.

My safety concerns have increased drastically since moving. I still have to give myself a pep talk before crossing the roads and feel the need to stay on guard every second I spend outdoors. Although it is not easy for women in Saudi Arabia either, I feel it's significantly more difficult in Bangladesh due to the additional challenges.

On the upside, I've met wonderful people during my time here. I've made new friends, learned new

things, and I have a better understanding of the culture in Bangladesh now.

Settling into a new country, learning new norms and adapting accordingly was a difficult process, one that often confused and surprised me. There are things about my previous home that I'll always miss, and the people I grew up with there will forever have a special place in my heart.

For now, I'll cherish my old memories and focus on making new ones at my new home.

Nuzhat zones out every ten minutes. Tell her to snap out of it at nuzhatchowdhury07@gmail.com



For the love of street cricket

It was a busy, cold Dhaka afternoon at the height of January winter. But this meant little to our protagonists in their pocket-sized Melbourne Cricket Ground.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

SYED TAMJID TAZWAR

Taped-over tennis balls, slippers that encompassed imaginary cricket stumps, and a fervour to imitate their favourite cricketing figure. Two bats; the one on the crease clearly better than the other. The younger kid who is just there to field; the slightly older kid who is doing everything. I realised I wasn't just witnessing a one-off phenomenon, but a timeless image.

Dhaka, as a city, is in perpetual love with cricket. The extravagance of the Premier League or glamour of the UCL can't seem to reach the hearts of the ordinary, as much as cricket can. Be it an ordinary match against Zimbabwe, a World Cup closing ceremony, or even an idle noon in BPL, the city's extended love affair for cricket comes at a full display with dozens gathering in front of every electronic store and tong with a TV. This love affair extends to this city's many alleyways and roads with space enough to accommodate a cricket pitch.

Kids taking up a significant portion of the street to play cricket may seem like an annoyance. Surely, they must be causing trouble for every unfortunate passer-by or vehicle that chooses to go that way.

But the effortless coordination in which everyone playing moves around to make way whenever someone comes by makes up for the disruption. Even the rules for street cricket are set in a way that helps the match blend in with its surroundings. Play too recklessly, and you are out. Break someone's window, and you have to pay a fine.

No point in lifting the ball off the ground, as it won't score you some extra points. The ball gets lost, and you have to pay from your own pocket. In many cases, even pace bowling is not allowed due to its risky nature.

Growing up, I have had my fair share of experiences playing street cricket. Sadly, I never became good at it. If there is a way to complete an innings, misplaying every shot and doing everything wrong, I have probably done it. I even broke my nose, moving around carelessly around a wannabe Gilchrist's line of sight.

Regardless, I still remember playing in the streets so fondly. The endless chattering about no balls, the urge to finish a match before Maghrib seems all the more vivid now.

The reason why street cricket is so popular seems pretty obvious. There aren't enough suitable playing grounds. But throughout the years, street cricket established itself as something more than just a replacement for real cricket.

As the skyline of the city slowly kept rising and the area dedicated to sports and amusement kept decreasing, people's love for cricket didn't stop. As a result, street cricket kept on rising in popularity more and more in the last few decades.

Street cricket has slowly become a testament to this city's love for cricket.

Syed Tamjid Tazwar is terrible at cricket. Send him batting tips at syedtaazwartamjid@gmail.com

WHY YOU SHOULD GO TO THERAPY

AMRIN TASNIM RAFA

What do you need therapy for? You have probably started looking for a "justified" answer to this question, racking your brain for a strong valid reason that will seem viable enough, or does not sound like an excuse.

Therapy, or any sort of help for mental health issues, may be long neglected concept in Bangladesh. But the need for it is long overdue.

Through pop culture or the media, pretty much every single one of us young people has come across the idea of therapy, and many of us have considered giving it a shot. However, a regrettable majority out of this group of people have not been able to show up to receive any kind of help.

For young people living at home, therapy is not accessible without your parents supporting you, or at least knowing about it. The concept of mental health is approached differently by us, the young generation, and our parents and grandparents, the older generations.

"One big struggle I face is actually gathering the energy to go up to my parents and tell them that I would like to try therapy since they will most likely take it as a personal insult. My parents have a certain reluctance to not only take me to therapy but even acknowledge its existence," shares Zuhayer Khan, a grade 11 student at Scholastica, on why he had never been to therapy despite considering it.

"If I do mention the desire of therapy to them, I would be met with a tedious process that may end in me getting therapy. But I do not feel going through all that would be worth it."

Brac University student Nusrat Chowdhury* thinks that the hectic schedules of young people are another prominent barrier to receiving therapy.

"When you need to go to therapy sessions regularly, oftentimes your appointments may clash with class or work. And due to our mindset around mental health and how it is not yet considered a valid reasoning we can give to our teachers and employers, a lot of people feel guilty about missing work and let go of therapy altogether," she says.

Given that many young people feel the need to go to therapy because they feel anxious and overwhelmed due to their workload, it is important to take some time out of work to care for their mental health, otherwise, it often deteriorates more over time and jeopardises the work they were worried about to begin with.

Naomi Sharif, an HSC graduate from Viqarunnisa Noon School & College, shares how therapy turned out to be a very rewarding initiative for her. She explains, "I was suffering from hopelessness and weight loss throughout 2020. I missed classes and the recordings kept piling up. Eight months in, my best friend pushed me to go see a professional and get myself assessed. I tend to avoid talking about my feelings, but I'm glad I went to therapy.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The first thing I told myself after that was that I was not at fault for my months of inefficiency."

Soon, Naomi started considering therapy sessions and caring for her mental health as a lifestyle change, and her wellbeing improved considerably. She considers any progress to be beneficial, however small it may be, and practices setting small realistic goals for herself.

Naomi and her friend eventually founded the mental health awareness organisation Mindspace, which recently launched "Vent by Mindspace", a psychological help hotline service supervised by professionals.



Even if we do not need help ourselves, Naomi's story tells us the importance of being informed about symptoms of illness so we can detect them in our close ones. A small nudge on our part, encouraging our friends to go see a professional, can go a long way in improving the quality of their lives.

Furthermore, the thought of the costs is something that keeps a lot of people from considering therapy, and according to Dr Sayedul Ashraf Kushal, lead psychiatrist and managing director of Lifespring, we often consider caring for our mental health to be a luxury, even though conse-

quences of untreated mental illness is lifelong. "For common mental illnesses that afflict the youth, such as depression and anxiety disorders, if you complete the suitable course of treatment alongside actively working towards getting better, the process will not be very lengthy, and therefore not require you to bear its costs for very long. If finances are a barrier, consider public hospitals such as Dhaka Medical College Hospital, which provide generally affordable mental health services, relative to private hospitals or organisations," comments Dr Kushal. Asked about his professional opinion on how parents and their children should approach the idea of therapy, he adds, "When your child asks for help, never tell them that you have also passed the stage of life they are at, because you have not. The world was not as globalised or fast-paced before. Very young kids are exposed to things they are not prepared for, are not old enough for, and there is little we can do about it."

Currently, one in five people are neurodivergent, he mentions. None of them are 'crazy' or 'insane'. The treatment of mental illness is somewhat similar to improving the circumstances the child is living in, relative to before. As parents, there is no need to take personal offense when the children require help.

On how to approach therapy to benefit most from it, Dr. Kushal says, "As a patient, for therapy to work, a bit of effort and willpower is required on your part."

Therapy is an option worth considering; an option worth the time and effort it would take for giving it a shot. Do not go in expecting to find solutions overnight, however, it does empower you to take steps to go out there and seek the help.

So, do you need therapy? There is no need for an answer. You can go to therapy for no particular reason at all. Life, with all its uncertainties and complications, is enough.

Even if you do not think you have a mental illness but have been grappling with uncertainty for long enough for it to be daunting, going into therapy can present you with fresh new perspectives on tired old problems.

These are difficult times, it is not unusual to struggle. We have been stuck in our houses long enough for it to be forgivable to get stuck in our minds.

**Name has been changed upon request*

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