

Have we become too desensitised to true crime?

NAMREEN SHAIYAZ

"True crime" is a broad term used to refer to any kind of content that deals with real-life crimes. A common interest among many, its popularity only grows every day. But have we ever stopped to think how morbid this is as an interest?

Many people have different reasons for why they indulge in such content, but the major ones seem to be that it helps them be more aware of the kind of crimes that can occur in our world. Those who have a fascination for the psyche can use these cases as a way to analyse human nature, and what drives these people to do what they do.

For some, it can even work as a coping mechanism. This is what sets it apart from fictional mystery or thriller stories — the level of reality associated with it is the main appeal of it.

While these are valid reasons, the level of popularity it has gained is starting to become concerning, and with all popular media, there is worry about the way it is discussed.

Many creators do not seem to have the



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

level of nuance and sympathy required to handle such a heavy topic. It is not completely uncommon to see people treat these cases like they're some regular old story, and not an account of a horrific event that actually happened to someone. They recount these graphic events over mundane tasks like putting on makeup, and having food, some even going as far to crack jokes. It can come off as insensi-

tive as it seems like they are downplaying the effects of the severity of what they are talking about. It makes the content easier to digest, which is not what stories of horrifying crimes should be.

Another reason for why people become desensitised is due to the sheer volume of true crime content that exists. It is not just YouTubers or podcasters narrating stories, but it exists in the form of endless streams

of documentaries and TV shows as well.

It can be argued that there is some merit to such content as it spreads awareness about these events. However, it is not uncommon to see that some documentaries have the culprits portrayed by well-loved Hollywood heartthrobs. Certain "popular" ones even have multiple documentaries made about them, and half the time it's not quite clear if the makers just want to inform us about this individual or have us try to sympathise with them.

There is nothing inherently wrong with consuming true crime content. As mentioned before, people have different reasons, and some of these are understandable. But the endless barrage of content that is continuously being made about something so dark, and the rate at which it is consumed can make one question how much care is taken when talking about something so sensitive, and how much of an effect it can have on one's mental health.

Namreen has been stuck in the void for too long. Send help at namreen.shaiyaz@gmail.com

Being a woman who watches (men's) sports

NAHIAN NAWAR

I have been watching (men's) cricket for ages now and the person who kindled this interest in me was my mother.

Ma has been a cricket enthusiast since she was an undergraduate student in the 90s. Having left her family back home, she found a second home in the cosy TV room of her dormitory, where she and her girlfriends would gather to watch the likes of Sanath Jayasuriya and Brian Lara, the gods of cricket in those days.

Since I caught the cricket fever from my mother, and my sports loving family mostly comprises women, I hadn't realised until middle school that watching cricket, or sports in general, was considered a traditionally male interest. Partaking in conversations about cricket with male peers proved difficult, as my opinions were routinely dismissed.

Because I was a girl, it was assumed that my appreciation for the sport must not be as deep-seated as theirs. It was also taken for granted that I didn't understand the rules and terms as well as they did; they were the self-proclaimed pundits, and in their eyes, I was an amateur.

Luckily, I found a group of girls who were also fans of sports. We bonded over our love for the game and our shared experiences of being women who watch sports. From being subjected to barrages of unprompted questions ("Name the captain of the Indian cricket team in 1975. What does LBW stand for? What's the difference between 'reverse sweep' and 'switch hit'?) so the men could determine our "legitimacy" as fans, to being accused of feigning our enthusiasm to impress guys, the patronisation and outright humiliation was endless.

Over the years, my relationship with cricket has evolved. My younger self associated watching cricket with pure joy.



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These days, I feel this tinge of guilt when I join my family to watch a cricket match. The feminist in me is ashamed of how we only care about the men in the sport, causing female cricketers to go largely unnoticed.

Underhyped and criminally underfunded, it's no surprise that many find women's cricket uninspiring, especially when you're used to the glitz and glamour of the men's cricket. It's important to remember, however, that women's cricket

doesn't lack what is at the heart of any sport: skilled players who are devoted to the game. Though it's tough to care when nobody else does, as fans we need to start giving women in sports the screen time they deserve.

So, in the future, I want my family to be more gender inclusive in terms of the sports we consume.

Nahian Nawar is a slow reader and a fast eater. Teach her how to change her ways by reaching out at nahianawar.dhk@gmail.com

Living with an Eating Disorder

SHANUM SARKAR & AMRIN TASNIM RAFA

Trigger warning: mentions and/or graphic details of eating disorders

An eating disorder can refer to any of a range of psychological disorders, characterised by abnormal or disturbed eating habits. They might start with an obsession with food, body weight, or body shape. In severe cases, eating disorders can cause serious health consequences and may even be fatal if left untreated.

Contrary to popular belief and regardless of cultural background, people in Bangladesh are susceptible to eating disorders too, particularly anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. According to a recent study by National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), about one in four students were reported at risk of eating disorders in a public university in Bangladesh. Private university students in Bangladesh showed a 37.6 percent risk.

Despite these figures, people tend to latch onto misconceptions. Many refuse to acknowledge or educate themselves regarding the existence of eating disorders.

Women are at a higher risk for developing an eating disorder compared to men, as society places a higher concern on physical appearance and body image for them.

However, these disorders are becoming increasingly common amongst men and gender nonconforming people. These populations often seek treatment at lower rates or may not report their eating disorder symptoms at all.

"A desire to be attractive is a feeling reserved for women in our society. We're told to deal with body dysmorphia by just not caring about our experiences with appearance. For the longest time, I convinced myself I was fine despite extremely unhealthy eating habits. It did not occur to me that men were susceptible too, until much later," laments Kazi Nahian Nabi (18), a student at South Breeze School.

Cultural aspects significantly contribute to triggering eating disorders for many.

Social gatherings, or dawats, are particularly challenging for someone with any form of disordered eating. Food being the focal point of these events in our culture may spark anxiety for many, conversations surrounding food at these events may feel internally isolating.

People being unaware of these disorders altogether have serious consequences. Relatives throwing snarky remarks in regards to people's bodies may seem harmless initially. For people with distorted body image, these comments can pose danger.

When it comes to comments like these, 23-year-old Fatima Jahan Ena, third-year student at North South University shares, "Family members, friends, or even complete strangers often negatively point out someone's physical features, without giving it a second thought. This is a very common scenario in our culture. I've had relatives scrutinise my appearance daily.

Since anorexia can create a fear of gaining weight, these comments ended up acting as triggers."

As a result, she recalls going to great

lengths while restricting her diet. She mentions how she did not finish a single meal in a day and exercised to the point where she was close to passing out.

Dr Mithila Khandaker, consultant psychologist currently practising at Lifespring Healthcare Centre talks about trends observed, when asked about her experience with eating disorder patients during her clinical practice. According to her, bullying in regards to appearance and body weight seems to be prevalent in most patients.

She adds how patients generally lack self-esteem and are greatly influenced by opinions and comments.

Farah Abrity, a third-year student



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Farah generally wanted to avoid dawats, a common situation seen amongst a lot of other patients.

"My parents would try to force me to go, which led to two incidents where I had mental breakdowns about insecurities about my changed appearance, and feeling overwhelmed by all the rich food. They only blamed me and asked why I didn't lose all that weight before returning home," she says.

Friends and relatives alike refused to understand that Farah was subject to mental illnesses. They suggested that she see nutritionists instead of psychiatrists and get checked for hormonal imbalances, which might have led to her difficulties with food.

"The problem with our society is that we refuse to empathise with people suffering from problems we aren't familiar with and do not understand," Farah states as she concludes her story.

A.R. Faith* (18) says how people would threaten to put them through tube feeding if they refused to taste curry-based dishes — a cultural favourite. They mention having a preference for bland food, especially on days when their appetite is exceptionally low.

"Besides being frightening, intimidating statements like this filled me up with guilt. It made me think it was my fault for

being mentally unable to try certain types of food, no matter how hard I tried," they add.

The struggles are quite often shrugged off using phrases which suggest that the person is somehow responsible for, or in control of their eating habits. This further reinforces the guilt, shame and stigma surrounding eating disorders.

People may argue that they are concerned about their loved ones. However, airing out concerns in the form of mockery, especially coming from a place that thrives in misinformation and insensitivity, is unsolicited. This may worsen eating disorders and in severe cases, lead to body dysmorphic disorder.

Parents should also trust their instincts when it comes to eating disorders in their children, in addition to educating themselves about basic eating disorder information. Eating disorders can thrive in secrecy, but parents often intuitively know if something is wrong with their children. If concern arises, consulting with a specialist and early intervention is critical to effective eating disorder recovery.

Due to the complexity of eating disorders, recovery can take months, or even years. But with treatment, recovery is absolutely possible.

We asked patients what cultural shifts would help those battling eating disorders.

Faith says that the increasing obsession with the notion of body positivity seems unrealistic.

"On bad days, people won't be absolutely in love with their bodies. And that is okay. It is important that people are taught to accept their bodies first. This lessens the pressure to chase perfection and go to extremes when it comes to controlling eating habits, at least for me," she says.

"Our ingrained practice of body-shaming plays a big role here. Kids don't often think about their bodies that much and oftentimes, they grow to view it in a negative light because of scrutinising comments from family members," says Fatima.

What else can we do if our loved ones have an eating disorder?

For starters, we should not reinforce people's negative self-image any further by ridiculing their struggles. We should not promote diet culture or dish out unsolicited advice that has not been verified by a medical professional. When in doubt, we can ask respectful questions.

If a loved one is struggling, educating yourself, alongside simply being there for them may do more than you realise. Lastly, their relationship with food does not, in any way, transcribe to their love for you.

*Name has been changed for privacy

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