

The trade-off between school and private

AMRIN TASNIM RAFI

Bangladeshi students preparing for O and A Levels face the dilemma of whether to stay in school or just attend private coaching centres and register for the exams independently. The dilemma arises due to significant structural failures, and in reality, it's a choice only for some.

Due to the stakes of the board exams, more students are willing to enrol in coaching centres, where the teachers' income is directly proportional to how well they teach and how high their students consequently score. A cycle is created and perpetuated.

Because teachers are underpaid and underappreciated by their institutions, they might not be teaching in full detail in schools. What further consolidates this practice is the presupposition that students have already learned the material. Pupils being absent in classes, a lack of interest when they are present, or deliberate attempts by teachers to lure more students into coaching all lead to students making the decision to leave school.

Since coaching is made indispensable to many, staying in school can be an additional burden to maintain. The entire day becomes occupied by school followed by coaching, leaving students with no time for themselves or too drained to study at home. School and coaching may run at different paces, covering and test-



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

ing different topics of the same subject, which at its worst, feels like double the workload.

Coaching classes are not cheap and neither are English medium schools. The luxury of investing in both simultaneously is affordable for only a few families.

With the odds stacked against staying

in school, the more holistic aspects of education are lost. Private students don't get to participate in extracurricular activities. They have to look for opportunities they can pursue independently, which are often not available.

Losing out on the socialising aspect of school and only attending rigorous exam

preparation classes can also take a toll on the mental well-being of high school students.

However, the decision of whether or not to leave school should largely be made according to what one's aspirations are for higher education.

Applying to universities abroad poses certain challenges to private candidates. There are no official high school transcripts and predicted grades to show alongside board exam results, and no school faculty to send in recommendation letters. This means that the situation is made quite harsh for a student who had to leave school due to financial constraints.

Regardless, admission abroad is not impossible. The challenges can be mitigated by building a strong profile, presenting your case in a compelling manner, and explaining the private system in your personal statements.

For students staying in Bangladesh, leaving school should be fine as the prerequisite for admission tests are sufficient board exam grades. If the additional time gained from leaving school is used to get acquainted with the vastly different structure of the NCTB syllabus, leaving school might even be beneficial.

Amrin's confusion is at its peak, she's been screaming internally for a while now. Send help at amrinrafa@gmail.com

How I recovered from body image issues

NUZHAT HASSAN CHOWDHURY

Body image issues have been a concern plaguing the youth's minds for years, though it has become a more pressing issue now. The conventionally desirable body type changes every few years, but what remains constant is the largely unattainable aspect of it. However, it is branded as a "must-have" by popular media and many around us.

I still distinctly remember the day I got up to submit my work to the teacher. On my way back to my seat, a classmate pointed out that I had gained weight. That one comment sent my mind spiralling to an extent I couldn't fathom. I was only 12 years old and my impressionable mind suddenly thought I needed to make drastic changes to my appearance by losing weight.

Soon enough, I started trying to lose weight at an unhealthy pace. At an age when nutritious food for a growing child is essential, I completely disregarded its importance. The pressure to look a certain way led to coping mechanisms that I now know were harmful.

For several years, I bought clothes that were one size too small for me, thinking that they'll look great once I got slimmer

and fit into them. I became nit-picky about how clothes fit me as I believed something was wrong with the way I looked, so the issue must lie within me.

Another factor that contributed to my body image issues is the way people started viewing me as I grew up. As family members, even the ones I barely knew, started fussing over the need to cover up more once I got older, things got more confusing. I felt as though just the existence of a girl's body is what people have an issue with.

Years later, I can finally say I have recovered from that distressing mindset. I have obviously gained weight since I was a pre-teen, and I'm thankful for it. I'm physically healthy and give greater importance to nutritional intake than I used to.

I finally buy clothes that fit me and if something looks a bit odd after trying on, I simply accept that it is either not made for my body type or is simply faulty tailoring. This acceptance has brought me

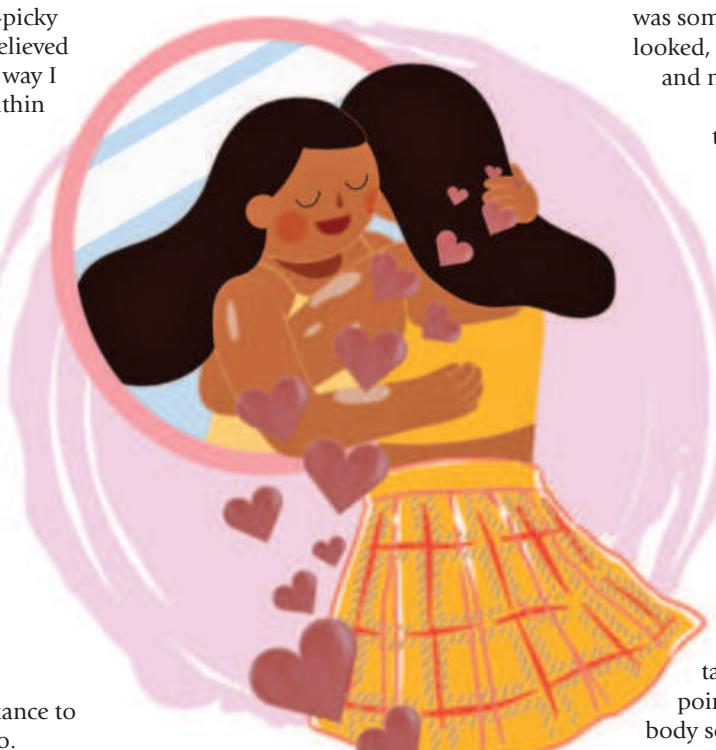


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great relief mostly because my body image issues once led me to believe there

was something wrong with the way I looked, so the issue must lie within me, and not the clothes.

In a nation where sexism appears to be the standard, it is no surprise that women and girls alike are constantly scrutinised for their clothing choices, even in their own homes. However, as I've grown up and become more comfortable in my own skin, I have realised that this has more to do with certain people's tendency to criticise and less to do with me personally.

Every now and then, I still catch myself wanting to look different, but now I'm able to quickly get past those thoughts instead of letting them consume me. My biggest takeaway has been that there is no point in me wanting to look or embody somebody else's ideal. My health and happiness have to come first.

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