

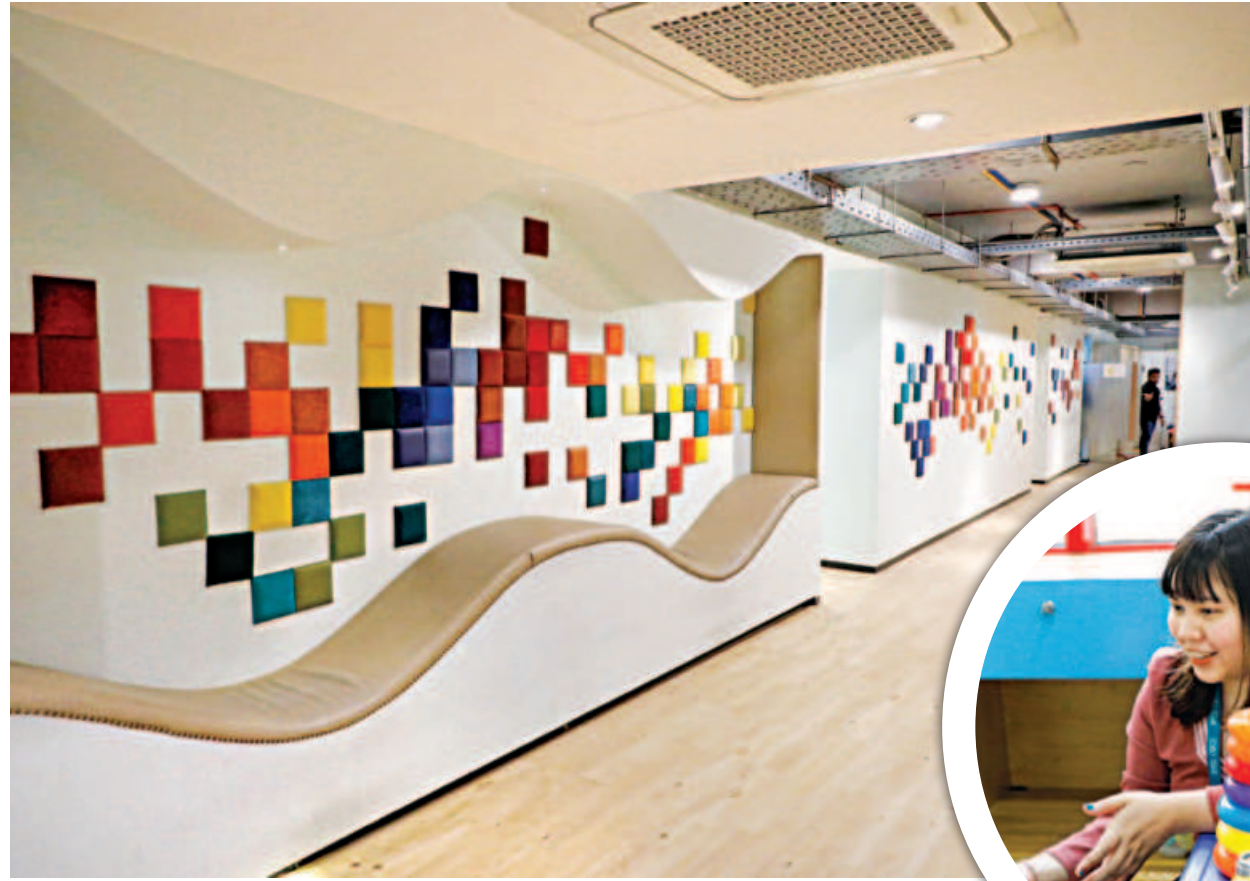
Children's mental well-being: A practise in empathy and care

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he would not have thought that because there is no stigma attached to those places. In many cases, the child or adolescent patient knew that they needed mental assistance for a long time, but they could not get it due to a lack of support from family members."

The importance of familial support cannot be undermined in any capacity when it comes to the mental well-being of children, especially when caring for a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). However, parents are also in need of proper guidance and support throughout the whole process of their child receiving therapy. Inner Circle, operating under SAJIDA Foundation, is one such organisation that opts for a holistic approach when it comes to caring for children's mental health. The organisation holds seminars for parents to become familiarised with the right approach in dealing with ASD coupled with frequent family meetings and counselling.

Thuji Grace, the Head of Special Services at Inner Circle, talks about the importance of involving parents in the treatment of children, saying, "Parental education is very important as well, as they become overly anxious about their



acceptance is on the rise, as Dr Ghose says, "Currently, parents are more aware than before about children's psychology. The taboo still exists, but acceptance is being seen more and more. Parents often talk about how their child may have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), anxiety, depression, etc. That means they have gained knowledge through watching videos, reading, and they correlate the symptoms to their children. It's not just popularity, but the treatments are being accepted as well. When they are getting a positive outcome, the patients, and their parents naturally become more compliant with the treatment."

Even though the topic of children's mental health is a collective issue, it requires individual attention for every child. While it may help to consider the narrative of children being the future of a nation, we must also remember to practise empathy on a personal level for them. Only then can we properly ensure the health and well-being of our country's youth.

*Some names of interviewees have been changed upon request for privacy.

References:

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The Dhaka Tribune. (September 9, 2022). Report: 45 students committed suicide per month in 2022.

By Fatima Jahan Ena
Photo: Orchid Chakma
Fatima Jahan Ena is a sub-editor at SHOUT, The Daily Star.

Currently, parents are more aware than before about children's psychology. The taboo still exists, but acceptance is growing. Parents often talk about how their child may have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), anxiety, etc.

child's diagnosis. A doctor will just give a diagnosis but what is the way forward? There must be a holistic approach to education. When it comes to ASD, early intervention is key. It takes some time for parents to properly open and accept assistance in understanding."

Apart from parents, schools also play a prominent role in the mental development of children. Educational

institutions not only provide a platform for socialisation, but they also aid in early intervention in case of suspected mental health concerns of children. In spite of that, cultural barriers create obstacles, as Thuji says, "We give talks in schools where teachers share any concerns of mental health issues in students. Teachers cannot just tell the parents that they have concerns regarding specific students' mental health because of the cultural taboo. So, we talk to them and the parents, and provide instructions catered to each child."

While it is commendable what the aforementioned organisations hope to achieve, the glaring socio-economic disadvantage cannot be ignored. The

accessibility of mental health services for children are often dictated by the family's financial background, as well as the social underpinnings that obstruct acceptance of seeking mental assistance.

In the case of Inner Circle, the costs are driven up due to the international standards with which the organisation operates. In such cases, the expansion for more accessibility cannot occur at the cost of quality.

Tajwar Hoque, the Head of Strategy and Partnerships at SAJIDA Foundation, says, "SAJIDA is quite well known by now for mental health interventions. Focusing on the quality and having that international experience meant that it's going to be very niche and

expensive, but it also means that we would be able to build local capacities."

As for more affordable alternatives, Tajwar says, "Now that we've gained some traction in the local market, we can plan on expanding. We're coming up with some lower-cost models for different parts of Dhaka. The implementation of tech will help in early diagnoses for children since early intervention will help the child to cope better. There will also be a focus on educating parents so that they can serve some duties of the therapist at home and be aware of sensitive issues."

On the other hand, social

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