

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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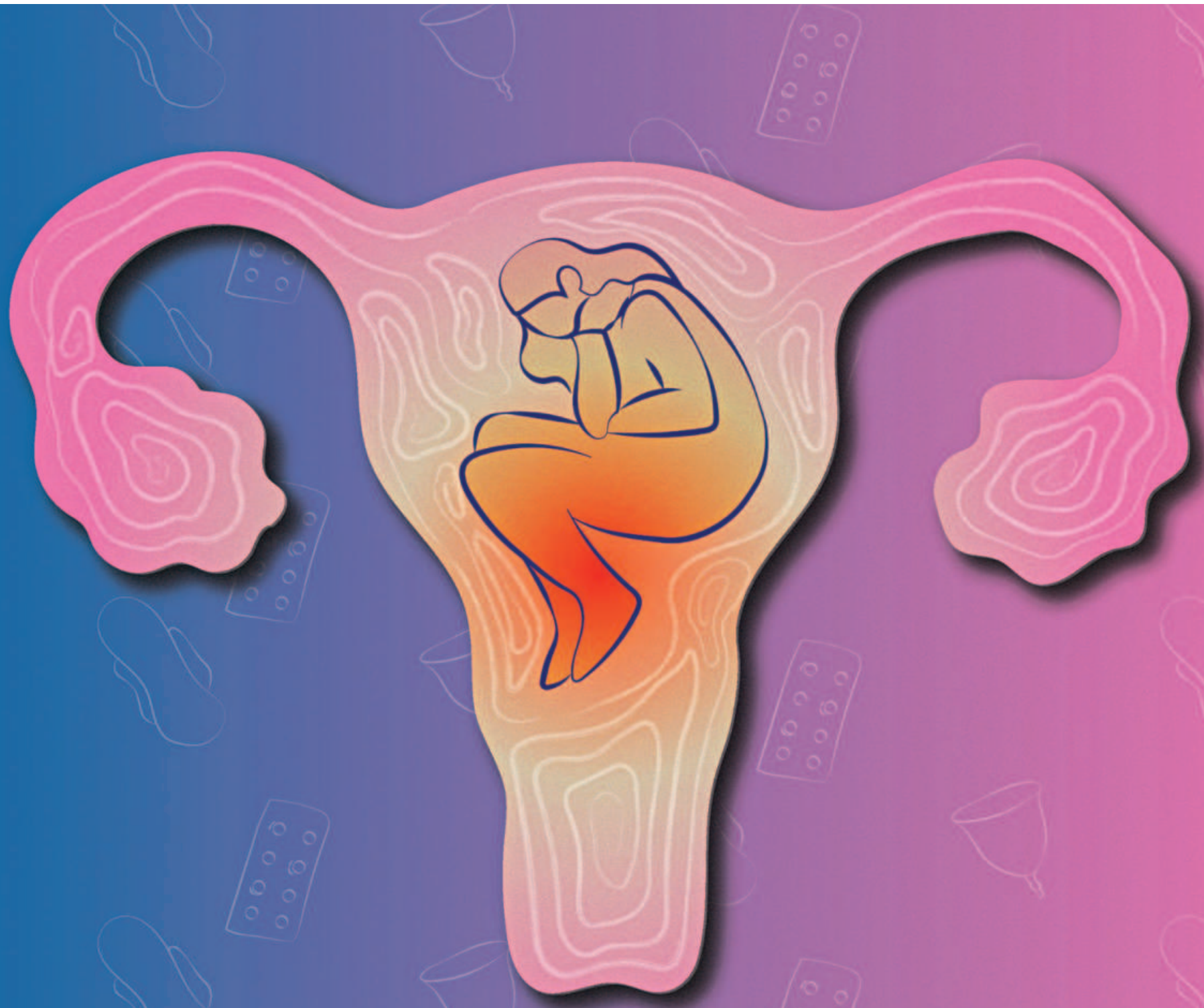


HOW CORRUPTION IS
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The ways **PCOS** takes over women's lives

ILLUSTRATION: TUBA TUHRA KHAN

EDITORIAL

Lately, life feels like an elaborate chore.

It's the same mundane routine every day with little to change. Weekends don't feel any different than regular weekdays. If anything, weekends are no longer about enjoying yourself or the free time you get. It's more about doing other chores that you couldn't make time for during the weekdays.

This rinse and repeat approach to life, it's not worth it, at least not in the long run.

The urge to break out of this routine is there in existence, somewhere in my mind at least. But every time I decide or try to break free, something pulls me back. Perhaps it's the sense of familiarity that I am so used to now, or perhaps it's the fear of trying to switch gears and embark on a new journey. Wanting to enjoy a weekend without thinking about chores shouldn't be this difficult, but it is, at least for me.

This chore that I call life will not get any better. But at least it won't get any worse, right?

– Faisal Bin Iqbal, Sub-Editor & Digital Coordinator, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

GAMES



A beginner's guide to soulsborne games

A.M. FAHAD

Soulsborne is a genre that defines the RPG, action, and fantasy universes developed by FromSoftware Inc., a Japanese video game development and publishing company, primarily associated with the supervision of the director Hidetaka Miyazaki.

This article serves as a guide to the most interesting entry points to Miyazaki's world and the soulsborne genre.

Elden Ring (2022)

Starting the list with the current most popular soulsborne game itself, *Elden Ring* is the first open-world Soulsborne game. You start the game as a lowly Tarnished, a member of the land's exiled group, set out for personal glory. The characters you encounter on your journey greatly influence your actions and decisions.

Elden Ring has multiple endings, and the choices you make in your playthrough greatly impact the world you create. In 2022, *Elden Ring* took the gaming world by storm with its breathtaking and immersive open-world experience, lore, character customisation, and build varieties. The game is loved for its intricate map design, exploration, unique characters, and boss fights.

Dark Souls 3 (2016)

The *Dark Souls* series is known for its punishing combat system, challenging boss fights, and unique level-up mechanic. *Dark Souls 3* is the epitome of what the fans call a soulsborne experience.

As the final game from the series, *Dark Souls 3* has all the aspects of the *Dark Souls* franchise, from the apocalyptic fantasy world setting to the average souls-like combat, but in a more polished and accessible form.

This game encourages you to read and understand the obstacles you face instead of charging head-on, whether it be hazy Catacombs or excruciatingly painful boss fights.

Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice (2019)

Set in a fictionalised version of Japan's historic Sengoku period, *Sekiro* is full of vibrant colours and stunning scenery. It has a unique sword-based combat system, and the game is a challenge in and of itself.

Sekiro has a more accessible storyline that guides you throughout the game compared to the previously mentioned games, to compensate for its mechanical difficulty. It can be frustrating once you get stuck in a challenging boss fight due to its simplicity. Resilience and perseverance are extremely important to progress in this game.

Bloodborne (2015)

It's impossible to talk about soulsborne games and not mention *Bloodborne*. *Bloodborne* is the gothic, H.P. Lovecraftian twist to the original souls-like formula. The game is set in a dark bloody city that starts with the idea of entering a bad dream and then transitions into full-blown cosmic horror.

Bloodborne isn't as mechanically taxing as other soulsborne games and does not require the player to understand a variety of build mechanics. It's one of the easiest entries to the soulsborne universe and also one of the most exciting ones. Unfortunately, *Bloodborne* is only available on PS4, and there is a big hoard of people eagerly waiting for a PC port or a remaster.

Fahad is a poet, a cat parent, and a self-proclaimed Pokémon master. Challenge him to a Pokémon showdown battle at [instagram.com/fuehed/](https://www.instagram.com/fuehed/)

TITLE OF YOUR MIXTAPE



A	B
EMPTY	RUN
KEVIN ABSTRACT	BTS
The Adults Are Talking	Other People
The Strokes	LP
Speed	Let You Down
Little Simz	NF
Closer	Different Mode
RM ft. Blanco, Mahalia	Faizan Ahmed ft Ahmed Souren

Email us at shoutds@gmail.com with feedback, comments, and reader submissions within 500 words.

How corruption is perpetuated across generations in Bangladesh

NAHIAN NAWAR

On January 31, Transparency International (TI) released its Corruption Perceptions Index 2022, and Bangladesh earned the 12th global lowest position. Keeping up with the worldwide trend, the overall situation in Bangladesh appears to have worsened compared to previous years.

Speaking from my personal experiences as a young adult growing up in Bangladesh, I find that there is little discourse around how the prevalence of corruption in our society is shaping the youth, the people who will go on to take charge in the future. This is not surprising in a country where adolescents are generally discouraged from thinking about politics and social issues, because these supposedly only concern adults.

Yet, there is no doubt that the misuse of power by authoritative bodies has an impact on the country's younger demographic in important sectors of their lives such as education and healthcare. The most recent example of this is a headmaster in Patuakhali who had been letting his brother occupy the school playground to run his contracting business, thus depriving students of school resources that are meant for their use.

Young people like me have grown up seeing how common it is to give or take bribes, where it has become the norm, sometimes even a necessary step to secure services that were supposed to be free in the first place. We see instances of embezzlement or nepotism, like the one in Patuakhali, being reported on the news daily.

The perception is such that high profile individuals in the most coveted positions, with the most money and influence, are the most corrupt. Young adults are expected to aspire to join these elite groups of the rich and powerful.

The irony is that the culture of corruption is so widespread now that it has infiltrated our schools and universities, the very establishments that are supposed to teach us about ethics and our duty to be law-abiding citizens. Even in our homes, we seldom get those teachings, because our loved ones are often actively partaking in this culture.

So, in a way, aren't we enabling a society where the best our newer generations can hope for is to end up on the side of the bribe-takers, or otherwise fall victim to the same corruption? In order to dismantle this broken system for good, there is a need to assess how young people are interacting with it.

Economists agree that rampant corruption is one of the main factors holding down the country's GDP growth rate. Extensive anti-corruption measures are the only way to curb this national crisis we are currently faced with.

At the same time, including the youth perspective in public dialogues surrounding corruption is very important. We are sick of never being heard while we silently suffer the consequences of a dysfunctional system we never helped to create, and if this is the legacy our predecessors are leaving behind, don't blame us for wanting nothing to do with it.

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1. The Daily Star (February 5, 2023). *School field under clutches of headmaster's brother's business operations.*
2. The Daily Star (February 1, 2023). *CPI 2022: Disappointing global and Bangladesh performances.*

Nahian is the friend that initiates group hugs. Find her at nahiannawardhk@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

The need for women-only scholarships

ISRA TAHIYA ISLAM

Newspapers and TV channels covering the success of female students right after board exam results are announced is a wholesome sight, but it should not be mistaken as a testimony of women's empowerment done right. The sad reality is that, for many of them, it will be their last academic triumph.

A report titled "Bangladesh Education Statistics 2021" from the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) shows that there is a significant decline in the rate of girls' enrollment after college, and this trend continues as they progress through higher education. According to the report, in 2020, out of 55.41 percent of girls who were enrolled in middle school from sixth to eighth grade, only 40.78 percent of them pursued a master's degree. Behind such a decline, there are a number of contributing factors with financial barriers being one of them.

In low-income households, girls are often viewed as a liability and spending money on their education is deemed an unwanted expense. The scenario, unfortunately, is also prevalent in many solvent families who believe that spending on their daughters' weddings is a far better investment. This is where such scholarship opportunities come to their rescue.

Women-only scholarships provide female students with partial financial support. The criteria for availing this facility may vary depending on the institution. Some institutions award it based on merit, some provide it based on financial needs, and some keep it allocated for all the female students, regardless of their socio-economic background.

These scholarships, however, have been labeled as a "double-standard" by many, as they believe it defies what feminism preaches – equality. According to the flag bearers of equality, scholarships for women are "special advantages" that put their counterparts at a disparity. Their claim is that if equality is what women are fighting for, then why should they receive aid that men cannot?

To address this "double standard," the thin line between equality and equity needs to be understood. While equality is the term we casually throw in debates, it is not always the most effective way to approach every situation. Equality, in most cases, preaches a one-size-fits-all solution, whereas equity acknowledges unique circumstances.

Equality is Cinderella's lost slipper that can change life dramatically for those who can fit their foot into it. But the unfortunate reality is that a glass slipper will not fit everyone, and for them, we will need a pair that they can actually walk in.

Preaching the slogan of equality without trying to identify the root causes of the problem is futile. As long as society fails to provide women with basic human rights, we must look for solutions of equity.

More girls are pursuing education and occupying important positions now. There is no denying that progress has been made. But the amount of societal and systematic barriers they have to push through to achieve the same goal as a man, is greater still, and this is not what equality should look like.

So, until the day comes, we will have to seek tools that can drill through hindrances that stand in the way of women's basic rights. And till then, we will need advantages like women-only scholarships to exist, facilitate, and be in effect.

Reference:

- The Daily Star. (2 July, 2022) *Why Are Girls Falling Behind in Higher Education?*

Isra is a last-stage patient of deadline amnesia, send your thoughts and prayers at tahiya232427@gmail.com

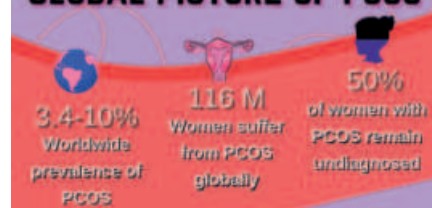


ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

The ways PCOS takes over women's lives

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GLOBAL PICTURE OF PCOS



AVERAGE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF PCOS

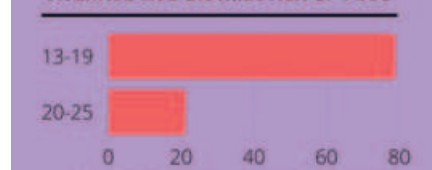


ILLUSTRATION: AAQIB HASIB

TAZREEN JAHAN BARI

Thanks to being an overweight person with an irregular menstrual cycle, I have been told by doctors of various specialisations, and aunts with no medical training that I might have PCOS. So, I got tested, not just once or twice, but multiple times and through a variety of tests. Turns out, you can have almost all the symptoms of PCOS yet not have PCOS, and vice versa. Which is exactly what makes understanding PCOS difficult yet crucial.

PCOS, or Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, is a multi-causal hormonal condition where an abnormal amount of male sex hormone, or androgen, is produced. As the name suggests, it often causes numerous small fluid-filled sacs or cysts to be formed around the ovaries. While some women develop such cysts without the condition, others do not develop cysts despite having it.

Although PCOS is one of the most common reproductive/hormonal health issues that Bangladeshi women, and even young girls go through, a lot of them remain unaware of their condition until late in their lives. As reproductive health check-ups and regular visits to the gynaecologist are not common in Bangladesh and periods are still considered taboo in most households, most women facing period irregularities only consider going to the

doctor when trying to conceive.

Dr. Zakia Sanjari, currently preparing for FCPS Final Part in Gynaecology and Obstetrics, explains, "The patients that we get with PCOS can be divided into two categories. The first group is younger patients with irregular periods; at least 70 percent of them present with obesity. Their main concerns are irregular menstrual cycle, skin conditions and hirsutism (a condition in women that results in excessive growth of dark or coarse hair in a male-like pattern — face, chest and back). The second group is older women in their mid-20s to 30s who are getting married or trying to conceive. They find out they have PCOS when they try to start birth control and realise their periods are not regular or try to conceive and fail to do so."

The exact cause of PCOS is unknown, but it is common to see it in women with a family history of PCOS, insulin resistance, or metabolic syndrome. Due to insulin resistance being linked to obesity, obesity is often seen as a cause of hormonal imbalance and subsequent development of PCOS.

Dr Sanjari further explains, "Among the patients we see for PCOS, almost 70 percent of them present with obesity. When you are obese, you naturally have a higher chance of having high cholesterol and insulin resistance.

Both these conditions can cause hormonal imbalances resulting in PCOS. So, doctors who make such assumptions cannot really be blamed."

She continues, "However, there is a certain degree of bias here. Although it is common, obesity does not always mean the patient has insulin resistance or high cholesterol levels. Some people have high body mass but low cholesterol levels. But due to the preconceived notion that being overweight means you must be physically inactive, that you do not burn enough calories, and must have high cholesterol, a lot of healthcare professionals make such assumptions without proper diagnosis."

PCOS can have many symptoms that vary from case to case. Some women have very heavy periods, while others have lighter ones. Some experience longer periods that last for whole months, while others experience an absence of periods for months on end. Many women experience excruciating periods, chronic fatigue, weight gain, acne, hirsutism, skin darkening, etc.

As the symptoms vary, women's experience across the spectrum also varies with PCOS. Nishat Tasnim Anika, a 24-year-old graduate from Dhaka University, says, "I went to the doctor for irregular periods and unwanted hair growth. When I did an ultrasound, it

showed that I have PCOS. The doctor never explained to me what it was, why it happened or how to deal with it through lifestyle changes. Instead, she directly prescribed birth control pills which gave me extremely painful periods to the point that I was bedridden during my flow."

"When I visited her again," continues Anika. "I asked for pain management medication, but I was not prescribed anything. So, I just dealt with it. Bear in mind that the pain was so bad, I literally could not walk. One time I got my period during exams. So, I had to do something. Then my friend, who also has very painful periods, suggested a medicine that helped her manage pain. I have been taking it ever since. I honestly have no idea if this will have any adverse effect in the future but I did not know what else to do."

Many women like Nishat are left in the dark about their health condition which makes it difficult for them to manage the symptoms in an efficient manner. What is more concerning, however, is that due to a myriad of confusing information available on the internet, and healthcare professionals who are too quick to prescribe medication to adjust hormone levels instead of suggesting lifestyle changes to patients, a lot of women are taking such medication from an early age.

"The first line of protocol for PCOS is lifestyle changes. Hormonal

marriage. She also said I will have difficulty conceiving in the future. This made my family put constant pressure on me to get married early. My partner at the time was very understanding and loving. We decided to get married. After a month of our marriage, my mother-in-law learned about my condition, shared it with her gynaecologist and told me I should consider conceiving as soon as possible."

Countless women are facing similar situations in Bangladesh when it comes to having PCOS. What doctors often do not consider, however, is the fact that their patient may not even want to get pregnant in the first place. Even if they did, getting married as early as possible and trying to conceive is not the only way to have a healthy child. Freezing eggs and fertility treatments are becoming more and more viable, yet most gynaecologists tend to opt for a conservative approach that borderlines harassment in many

cases.

PCOS can lower your pregnancy chances, but it does not make you permanently infertile. In fact, it depends very much from person to person. Sadly, due to the myths that surround PCOS and misconceptions that stem from a lack of knowledge, whenever people hear PCOS, they hear infertility.

Dr Sanjari says, "It is true that many doctors suggest getting married and trying to conceive when a patient comes to them with PCOS. They do it because they are aware of Bangladeshi societal expectations. The strength of a person's ovaries varies from the next one, and conceiving a child also depends on many other factors. However, if the doctor notices that the patient does not have many healthy eggs left and they're in their mid-20s or more,

the doctor knows the patient will receive a lot of pressure to have children soon, and by the

time they decide to, it might be too late considering their particular case. So in that case, it is only normal that the doctor makes the patient aware of their chances at pregnancy."

She adds, "However, having PCOS does not mean you are infertile. PCOS can have different stages and forms. It's totally possible to manage PCOS and get pregnant without medication, yet not impossible to be unable to do so."

Due to being mostly concerned about fertility, gynaecologists often do not discuss other long-term effects it can have on the body with PCOS patients. Developing type 2 diabetes, heart problems and hypertension being a few of these impacts. They are also at risk of developing certain cancers like ovarian cancer, breast cancer, endometrial cancer etc.

PCOS may be difficult to understand, take effort to manage and show up in different ways in the case of different women. However, it is treatable and



manageable and most certainly does not ensure infertility. Living with PCOS is undoubtedly difficult, but awareness about management and compassion from healthcare professionals and family members alike can make the process easier.

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ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

Why do people self-sabotage?

SUMAIYA RASHID

Do you ever get the feeling that you are actually two people? One is motivated to succeed and the other is holding you back like an anchor stuck between rocks? Do you ever feel unworthy of all that you have done in life, as if you are a constant lie that people can't see through? If you can honestly reply no, you are one of those rare people who are so sure of themselves, their goals, and their methods that they usually never have to worry about self-sabotage.

Self-sabotage, unfortunately, is an all-too-common human shortcoming, and many of us have fallen victim to it at least occasionally. If not, you may have seen a friend at some point in your life and thought to yourself, "He/she is ruining his/her own life."

When you consciously or unconsciously sabotage yourself, it can have adverse effects on your goals and general wellbeing. Even if there are several reasons why someone could self-sabotage, it doesn't always happen in the same way. Self-sabotage may take many different forms and the way it manifests depends on the individual. A few of the primary causes of people's propensity for self-sabotage include fear of failure, low self-esteem, cognitive dissonance, difficulty/discomfort with change, anxiety, and a need for control.

Procrastination, or delaying something and coming up with excuses, is a common example of self-sabotaging behaviour. Excuses are used to try to rationalise an unnecessary delay that keeps you from achieving a goal. This can result in people intentionally avoiding a commitment to partake in some other activity, even if they find themselves doing things that result in the opposite of what they initially wanted.

Procrastination is not the only way self-sabotaging behaviour manifests. A common scenario is when you end up setting

unreasonable standards for yourself and begin to mistrust or second-guess yourself frequently. If you wind up creating unrealistic expectations for yourself, perfectionism may also lead to self-destruction.

To avoid dealing with uncomfortable emotions or dwelling on previous trauma, some subconscious self-saboteurs may turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms like substance abuse. On the outside, self-saboteurs may wear a strong and cheerful face to conceal their emotional vulnerability. However, when others approach them in an attempt to develop connections, these individuals could get hostile.

Defensive self-saboteurs could have trouble being in the moment and end up pushing others away in order to prevent being emotionally damaged. The self-sabotaging state of mind compels them to act in a way that validates their notion that they don't deserve anything better.

Failure to achieve desired targets or results can exacerbate poor self-esteem or beliefs by causing or worsening depression, anxiety, self-doubt, and helplessness. The key to preventing self-destructive habits is being more conscious of one's triggers. Once you've identified areas where you might be tempted to self-sabotage, such as a huge assignment at home or entering into a healthy relationship after a traumatic one, you can concentrate on monitoring your thoughts and behaviours and steering yourself away from sabotage.

Reference:

IJSER.org (January, 2017). *To Study the Self-Sabotaging Etiquette in concordance with Criminality*

Sumaiya is in the midst of her researching untold topics era; send her leads here, sumrashid10@gmail.com



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

Don't think realistically, think with balance instead

FABIHA AFIFA

Until roughly two hours months ago, I was a proud, lifelong realist. No glass was half-full or half-empty; it was only ever a glass of water. But now, my days of thinking realistically are over.

I've realised that realistic thoughts entail the possibility of failure. No one, including myself, has ever told me, "Think realistically. You could get what you want." Instead, it's always been, "Think realistically, and prepare a plan B."

In other words, the reality being discussed was always about me missing the mark with a backup plan figured out. It never once occurred to me that realistically, there's an equal chance of me achieving my goals, assuming I tried my best and the odds weren't entirely against me.

Of course, a lot of this has to do with my perception of luck and success. Some people might be very comfortable with believing that success is something out of the ordinary while failure is more grounded in reality, but I personally find that a tad harsh. I like to think there's always the element of unpredictability that can change the course of things. There's been plenty of times I won when I was least expecting it, and lost when I thought I had a fair chance of winning. That being said, the contest between luck and effort is simply too obscure to figure out, which is why I've found an easy fix to my dilemma: I've decided to have balanced thoughts from now onwards.

My concept is simple and based on the idea that unless there's a major obstruction in my path, I'll always have equal chances of winning and losing. There's no room for dire statistics here. However, in case things go awry, I'll have alternate plans ready as always. It's just that I'll no longer think that failure is far more realistic than success.

I can see how the whole concept of having balanced thoughts can seem too cushioned to some people. Perhaps they find more ease in knowing their "realistic" chances of getting to their goals, or perhaps it's knowing something beyond them can determine the result that scares them. Either way, I think for people like me, who've subconsciously always had a sense of unease with the narrative that reality is usually conducive to failure, the practice of having balanced thoughts can be very helpful. It allows us to still take into account the possibility of failure, but it never feels like resignation before even trying. It also gives us the chance to work on our flaws without being too hard on ourselves. By no longer assuming reality is mostly directed towards failure, there's a feeling of wanting to do even better every time, and an eagerness to learn from past mistakes.

But as with most things in life, it all depends on the person. There's no fool-proof method to make everyone feel equally motivated and confident in their abilities and future, and it's all about trying out new mindsets before finding out one that yields the best results. For me, though, thinking with balance is the way to go now.

Fabiha just found out she's actually the heir apparent of Dorne. Renew your allegiance to her at afifafabiha01@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

Love won't you look at me

RAIAN ABEDIN

I have lived too long to not be crushed by desire and self-doubt? It is brought out every time I feel my words pass like the wind.

I have walked this city one hundred years ago, in shoes that won't fit me anymore, now I speak ten words an hour and I look on in despair whenever the nights come, you don't read me the way I am meant to.

Does the crowd bother you? The ones made by men and their eyes and the stone walls, the pillars, and the ceilings. When they collapse do you finally feel at home? I am not an old soul, I merely see lives unlived. My heart/your eyes. There is no need to stay this misery, I am but a passing moment. Not just, nothing but.

Nothing changes over the centuries, not your gaze, nor that of the walls around us. Closing in, hold me close now, don't loosen your gaze upon me. The streets get narrower as we walk.

A wild child passes us at some point, he is the only one who cannot see the walls, he is coated in the city's dust, he belongs to the starless heavens.

I hope to see you there as well.

The clickity clackity of a mechanical keyboard is the only thing that brings Raian peace. Find him on IG: @raian_is_burning

Double Dream of Dhaka

AHMAD SALEH ABDULLAH

for Maa

Dawn opens her eyes
And from the edges of the world,
Clouds shoot up through the pipes
Obscuring the undressing of the sun.
Her spectral, astral chest, still yellow at middle age,
Nourishes her children with eternal motion,
Churning and *churning* around morning news and coffee cups
—Seven sons obedient and one delinquent daughter.

The slowly brewing hurricane of crows
Mechanical crow, a cosmic synchronised dynamo,
Sometimes spiritual, perhaps, sometimes almost too lively
like the cold kiss of death,
Jolts the world in its orbit, cuts the umbilical cord of sleep,
And onto the screen roll the actors' credits.

Cars upon cars clamber on roads upon roads,
All the arteries choke with wristwatches' sorrows,
While sleepy-eyed children, shorn of dreams and unicorns,
Watch as the slow dance of death unfolds.
Through the skyline laden with future's intestines
Gets lacerated the fabric of reality.

Eve wraps up her night veil, exposing
White vast belly dotted with airline veins while
The moon hides behind the eggshells,
The dreams boil in sunflower oil, and in your eyes
I see flicker the auroras of Jupiter.

And in alleys Neptune's tears sing
The silent epitaph of our love.

Abdullah thinks he's the reincarnation of Lorca, which, obviously, isn't true. Break his reverie at asabdullah.ag@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: **SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM**



ILLUSTRATION: **FATIMA JAHAN ENA**

When time stops

SHAIKH SABIK KAMAL

When time stops,
The world cascades into a shade of white.
The wind leaves its trail with undaunted spite,
My heart escapes from a maze with a faulty plight.
And the shadows crawl beneath the shades,
Crashing into our minds like hushed waves.
An aura of distinct demeanor fades;
Away from the bittersweet cage; I run

When time runs,
I wait for the hour to be mistaken.
Exhilarating tendencies lastly awoken,
With the monument of hope morosely shaken.
And the dreams we buy sell more than the truth;
For the lesser the days, the weaker the youth.
Cries of disbelief, nothing left to sooth,
Inside my demise once again, I return

When time crashes and burns,
We get lost in the dimensions of a broken compass,
While the Earth collapses like our uncharted memories,
The skies collide in the unseen terminus;
So, I wait, for the doors of this cage to be opened,
Freedom under the moonlight, unrestricted,
And I wait, for the time to once again be taken:
Then I shall run to the hour that reaches out to us.

I wait, and I wait till there's
Nothing left to wait for;
And I wonder, why, when time stops,
My world searches to find its true purpose.

Getting started with competitive chess

FAIRUZ SHAMS

Chess is a sport that's been fairly popular within the country for a long time now, with a player base almost as widespread as the demographics of the nation's population. Despite the country not boasting much impact in the realm of competitive chess, there is a small, albeit a dedicated, following. However, it pales in comparison to recreational chess. And that's simply because of how exigent and adverse it can be for an amateur trying to enter the discipline.

There are a number of factors behind why that is the case but fortunately, almost all but a couple of them can be smoothed over with effective information and forethought.

But before proceeding any further on that topic, it should be stated that a universal expectation for anyone pursuing chess professionally or even semi-professionally is that they hold an earnest admiration and appreciation for the sport. That will be the fuel, or at least part of the fuel, that's necessary for improving and advancing as a player. Without it, competitive chess will just remain a pipe-dream.

Now, in the case of someone who does have that degree of interest and dedication towards the sport, the obvious overall goal is learning. But, that's exactly where the aforementioned adversity and exigency comes into play. Competitive chess is a sport that has an extensive history with layers upon layers of tried and true data that's been coalesced into what the field consists of in the modern day.

To put the magnitude of that into perspective, Mahmuda Hoque Chowdhury, FIDE Woman Candidate Master and current Managing Director at Elegant International Chess Academy, says, "Trying to learn all the strategies and tactics of chess in a formal way would take a timespan of roughly 150 years. And if you are learning from supplementary material like chess videos on the internet, there are thousands of them at any given time. Trying to navigate that is like trying to navigate a jungle and it is beyond easy to 'get lost'. The best way to circumvent this situation is to find a mentor who can guide you to what you need to learn and do."

This mentorship can be sourced from a more experienced chess player, an instructor or even a general mishmash of advice and information gathered from different places. The main point is that there needs to be clear guidelines to follow in order to effectively navigate the mountain of data available and use it to its full potential for

improving as a player.

In the case of there not being a mentorship, there are some technical pointers that are useful at any instance. The first of those pointers would be to learn the notation of the chess board as early as possible, since pretty much all learning material found on chess uses the notation system for showing strategies and moves played. Trying to study tactics without knowing the notation system would be like trying to learn mathematics without knowing the numbers.

The second pointer would be to use chess applications and websites like Chess.com and Lichess as part of the learning process, as they aggregate available information on chess into one place. That makes them infinitely helpful if used appropriately.

In that regard, Nawshad Uddin, captain of the champion team of 'Marks Active School Chess Champs' and student at St. Joseph Higher Secondary School, says, "It would not have been possible to improve as a player without all the applications and videos available on the Internet. Practising chess puzzles, studying strategies, and playing chess matches helped enormously in getting to where I am now."

For a current player, these are basically indispensable support tools. But completely relying on these tools, specifically playing chess online most of the time instead of using a real chess board, can often backfire.

In Mahmuda Hoque Chowdhury's words, "Players that play online often struggle while playing over the board in real life. They have trouble analysing the game and making decisions, resulting in more blunders and worse performance. So, it's better to play chess matches over the board while practising."

The third pointer would be to play chess a lot. Now, that might seem exceedingly obvious but there's nuance to it. To improve as a player, one has to play chess analytically and methodically. Playing the game with the goal of learning rather than winning will be a major factor in improving as a player, because the more games played, the more strategies experienced, recognised, remembered, and learned. In that regard, any strategies and tactics learnt should be subsequently used as soon as possible. It not only helps in memorising them, it also accelerates the evolution of the player's style of conduct.

The final pointer would be to remember that everything is part of the improvement process. An amateur player delving into a competitive field is bound to lose matches more often. It is imperative that learning remains the key focus of those matches. After all, learning still remains the overall goal of it all. The best way to ensure all of that would be to simply take a minute after a match. Cool down all the cylinders firing, take some deep breaths, think back on the match, and when everything is calm, proceed to the next task at hand. Abiding by this will keep that probability of winning the next match much higher.

