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Is enough being done to curb smoking?

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The act of smoking is one that is far too often misinterpreted as a soother of sadness, when it really is a deadly companion. From every possible perspective, it is the arch-enemy of the human body. Nonetheless, there are people who are aware of this and still smoke frequently, even from an alarmingly young age.

Personally, from an early age, I had faith that everyone in my class would internalise the lessons taught about smoking and never engage in it. Starting from textbooks listing the harms of smoking to raising general awareness, I assumed Bangladesh had already done enough to stop smoking for the new generation.

But now I think to myself: what went wrong? The faith I possessed was naively built on fragile foundations, and encountering more and more students who indulged in smoking only solidified that misconception. Some of my friends, who swore to stay clean, would soon become additions to this club of regular smokers.

All of this begs the question, is enough really being done against smoking in our country?

In search of an answer, it became clear that some issues and stigmas around smoking aren't discussed often. It's widely accepted that many smokers in Bangladesh are victims of so-called "bad company". But people usually forget to consider that many people start smoking to escape from pain, depression, and trauma. They were rendered helpless, and in their vulnerability, cigarettes and tobacco products were readily accessible.

Imagine if your own schooling institution has tobacco sellers disguised as tea stalls in close proximity. Imagine being persuaded to smoke by your peers and seniors who did so as a coping strategy during difficult times. Institutions even show poor records of dealing with student smokers, failing to give them

proper counselling and rehabilitation.

Culturally, smoking is oftentimes associated with manliness, being a femme fatale, or rebellion. There are fictional smokers who may be romanticised or portrayed in a favourable light in the pop culture landscape. Additionally, despite not being chain-smokers, many influencers advocate for a hazard that traps others into developing a nicotine addiction.

But saying all of this as if Bangladeshi authorities haven't made any attempts to combat smoking would be disrespectful to the hard workers who truly want to combat the issue.

With acts like "The Smoking and Using of Tobacco Products (Control) Act, 2005" and "The Juvenile Smoking Act, 1919", Bangladesh has successfully reduced smoking from a reported 34 percent to 20 percent within the span of 13 years (2000-2013). Nevertheless, how strictly these laws are being implemented is still questionable, as statistics show roughly 4 in 10 of student smokers starting before the age of 10.

There aren't any concrete parameters for what can be considered "enough" against smoking in our country. However, we can do better against it. Whether it's through ensuring the strictness of authorities on the matter or simply providing a close friend with proper guidance and support, there are things we can do against smoking that can help to make a difference.

References:

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2. National Library of Medicine (2006). *Prevalence of tobacco use and its contributing factors among adolescents in Bangladesh: Results from a population-based study*

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You can be the cycle-breaker of trauma in your family

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Tales, heirlooms, and genetic traits are just a few of the things that are passed down through the generations, but many of us are unaware of the fact that trauma may also be one of those things.

The passing of physical, emotional, and psychological damage from one generation to the next is referred to as intergenerational trauma. Many factors, including historical trauma, familial relationships, war, abuse, etc. that occur throughout our lives can lead to generational trauma.

It is important to remember that our parents' hurtful behaviour may be a result of their traumas, not because there is something wrong with us. For instance, parents who experience oppression may come up with "survival messages" (such as "don't cry or ask for help, it's a sign of weakness") and hand them down from one generation to the next. While these messages may have worked to protect previous generations, they can cause subsequent generations to have a fearful outlook on life, which prevents children from seeking assistance that is required to overcome the trauma.

All of this occurs in response to a traumatic event because our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents all needed to find a means to survive with no room for processing their situation. A parent who retains emotional wounds from childhood trauma will unintentionally pass on dysfunctional coping mechanisms to their children by how they treat them, what they teach them, and what they model to them.

According to research, if parents do not pause and reflect on the memories, traits, or even survival tactics they retained from their childhood, their children might inherit the negatives of those aspects as trauma. Researchers also state that if the negatives do get passed on, the children can learn to develop themselves in a healthier way if they can understand the impact of such trauma.

Now that we have the awareness to be able to notice these patterns, we also possess the potential to change. But where do we start?

Learning to recognise generational trauma is the first step towards changing it. We cannot change what is happening unless we acknowledge or identify it. The second step is to locate the origins of the trauma, even if it began generations ago. This will allow room to understand how the trauma branched through the generations, which will help us in the third step, and that is to challenge these ideas. We may then learn to detach from the ideals perpetuated by the trauma and disassociate from it.

In order to learn how to self-regulate and prevent ourselves from being overcome by negative emotions and harmful behaviours, it is important that we establish coping mechanisms and seek professional help throughout the process.

Lastly, it is important to remember that we in turn can pass on the trauma or negatively affect those around us. While we have no control over what triggers us, we can learn to have control over how we deal with our triggers, even if it is extremely tough. Learning about the complex layers of intergenerational trauma, as well as being self-aware, is key in breaking the cycle.

Reference:

DeAngelis, Tori. (February, 2019). *The Legacy of Trauma*; APA.org

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ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA