

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

Psychological costs of an uprising

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ALIZA RAHMAN

In July, a friend told me about a student protester whose anxieties had become so severe, they wanted to be captured by the police just for the ordeal to be over with. The anguish expressed in such a desire is just a snapshot of the horrors experienced by individuals who saw a state turn against them in one of the most harrowing times in the country's recent history.

Nawshin, a student of Dhaka University, remains traumatised, "I saw the police firing with my own eyes, and I saw the kids fighting back with bricks and sticks." She found herself having a panic attack multiple times, an occurrence that is not typical for her.

The fact that she lives alone, away from her family in Dinajpur, made her situation worse. "I felt like I was living in a prison," she said. Without much cash, bKash inactive, and limited messages owing to a small phone balance, her woes were exacerbated by the tightened claws of a state machinery grasping for power by any and all means. We know, but we forget to mention, the case of many such students who were away from family at that time. Have they been able to find, in a new city they might have begun to call home, even a sliver of the peace they previously found there? Is it possible now to return to dormitories that saw raids, arrests, and the violations of privacies—including by the unlawful checking of phones? Can peaceful sleep come, even months after, when the walls of one's room stopped being a protected place?

The disruption of one's intimate space violated in this manner has been one of the most defining moments of the entire period of uncertainty we lurched into; the violence outside was another. However, the period after August 5, has its own issues. Raian Abedin, a student of North South University who partook in the protests, said, "I just cannot come to terms with a reality that shifted this violently and quickly. I know so many who suffered deep, deep wounds from the protests. While I myself was fortunate enough to not face the worst, the smell of tear gas, and the fear of death still comes back to me like a memory. What we are doing now is forcing normalcy, because we have to keep living no matter what."

Presenting a "normal" face to society is a struggle many face even in peaceful times. In the aftermath of an emergency, this issue becomes intensely complicated. It is after all, an event of massive proportions that shot

its roots through every household. Zareena (name changed for privacy), a mother of two sons, who participated in the uprising, shared, "Because of the surroundings I am in and the upper class society we mingle in, the people I usually mix with were not too invested in the situation. I felt I could not fully express my feelings."

While parents such as Zareena have been supportive, many friends and family may unwittingly be insensitive to those suffering from the memories of July. Dr Mehtab Khanam, an honorary professor

of the streets as akin to her own children, she stated, "I have survivor's guilt that I was alive when they were out on the streets risking their lives."

For many, the return to one's previous life has been made difficult by reminders of the violence that occurred in the places they regularly pass through. For Nawshin, the Dhaka University campus bore remnants of the violence, not just in her memory, but also in the graffiti memorialising the martyred. She said, "Each time I go to campus, I am reminded of the blood. Each time I enter, I

protesters themselves are finding themselves in uncertain situations. Musharrat Hossain, senior lecturer at North South University, stated, "In the aftermath, we are seeing that many students at the frontlines of the uprising are now being sidelined. At all campuses, vested groups seem to be awaiting their chance to take their stakes from the movement. In many cases, those who had put their lives on the line are not getting their due recognition."

At present, even identifying the underlying issues poses challenges. For one, not enough

states, "It is unfortunate that we have been unable to develop an education system that is able to make all aspects of a child flourish." She mentioned the lack of attention to vital life skills, whether communication, anger management or problem-solving, that remain untaught in our educational institutions.

In a similar vein, Musharrat Hossain said, "The reality is we have to help the students heal. Teachers have been altering their syllabi to accommodate student's needs after such a violent period. In truth, however, we have failed to truly help them heal. Trauma-informed teaching is something we are unable to do in our universities at this point."

The systemic issues, along with the more vicious cultural stereotypes surrounding mental health, make even the admission of one's struggles a minefield. Pair this with the mushrooming of individuals claiming to have solutions for those already in a vulnerable condition, and you have a recipe for the exploitation of people with mental health struggles. I asked Dr Mehtab Khanam how an individual can know for certain that the professional they are seeking help from is a legitimate entity, and she replied, "There is currently no way to know." The answer is distressing, but Khanam explains, "At present, while there is a licensing body for psychiatrists, no such body exists for psychologists. Further exacerbating the situation is the existence of very short courses that require only a small amount of training. For a psychotherapist and a psychologist, it is not only hours of training that are required, but application of knowledge and also personal sessions for the therapists themselves."

For people battling mental illnesses for a long time, the problems are far too intimately known. Many see the answer in individual efforts, but the fact might be that just as the uprising took thousands, this challenge too will take thousands to solve. In the case of Bangladesh, it would be millions. Musharrat Hossain lays the responsibility on institutions. She said, "There is no such thing as people's reform. It must happen at a policy level, and the current period is crucial for us to act in order to prevent the vulnerable from being further abused and marginalised."

What we do know however, is that in some ways, a cultural shift has occurred post-July, if not at a mass scale, then at least among many individuals who had previously not been as concerned about the state of affairs in the country. When asked if the uprising made her more protective of her children, Zareena said, "No, the courage has increased. If the need arises, I would expect my children to stand for what is right. Unless I am satisfied that the sacrifice of all those we lost was successful, I will remain concerned about the current situation of Bangladesh."



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

in the Department of Psychology at Dhaka University, and a practicing psychologist, discussed how harmful making comparisons can be, and stated, "A lot of hurtful and judgmental comments are often passed wherein a person who is struggling might be asked why they are unable to manage when someone else in the same situation has."

This idea that one must recover because another has done so is deeply troubling. It has the effect of inflicting even more suffering on those already grieving. It is an issue afflicting not just the young, but parents like Zareena who feels she was unable to do much in her neighbourhood. Seeing the children on

feel like I am once again traumatising myself." However, violence has not become just a memory after August 5. It has remained an active threat for many. Nawshin stated that she never needed to think about what she wears, but now, it is a fear she carries.

Raian stated, "The protests were not the end of the story. If anything, they gave rise to numerous new things to worry about." Recently, there have been accounts of mob lynchings and increased attacks on women, but also in the retaliatory acts of violence against family members of the Awami League and the increased threats posed against systemically vulnerable communities. Even

time has passed for us to know if people have post-traumatic stress disorder. Moreover, the symptoms of distress and various stress disorders are numerous, ranging from disrupted sleep and changes in appetite to a loss of ability to function or control one's moods. Making the situation worse is the lack of understanding that the majority of the population has towards mental health issues. Dr Mehtab Khanam stated, "There remains a lot of stigma about mental health. A majority of the nation's citizens are unaware of matters regarding mental health." Locating the problem to one of the fundamental aspects of modern society, she

WORLD SIGHT DAY

Let us prevent preventable vision loss



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Today marks World Sight Day—a crucial opportunity to reflect on the importance of vision and its profound impact on our lives. Sight is often taken for granted, yet it is the dominant sense through which we experience and interpret the world. We are reminded of the value of eyesight once more when reflecting on the hundreds of individuals who lost their vision from bullet injuries during the uprising in July and August this year. These people, many of them young, were fighting for justice and a brighter future, yet they were met with violence that affected their lives forever. The streets, which should have been filled with the promise of change, became battlegrounds where their sight was stolen in an instant. Their courage, even in the face of this profound loss, should fuel our fight for a future where everyone can protect, preserve, and celebrate the gift of sight.

Globally, visual impairment affects millions, and without urgent intervention, the number of individuals living with blindness could triple by 2050. In 2020, the Nationwide Blindness Survey published by National Eye Care revealed that 19 out of every 100 adults aged 30 and above in Bangladesh had some form of visual impairment. This stark statistic mirrors the global challenge—1.1 billion people worldwide live with untreated or preventable visual impairment, according to Sightsavers. Alarmingly, more than 2.2 billion people globally are visually impaired, with over half of these cases being preventable or treatable. A lack of access to quality eye care services means that millions are deprived of the care they need.

The loss of sight affects every aspect of life. For a child, it can mean missing out on an education and the joys of social interaction. For an adult, it can mean losing independence, mobility, and the ability to earn an income. Vision loss thus carries profound social and economic implications, and World Sight Day aims to raise awareness about the importance

of ensuring equal access to eye care for all.

Low- and middle-income countries bear the brunt of this crisis. In Bangladesh alone, approximately 27 million people were living with some form of vision loss in 2020, nearly one million of whom were completely blind according to the Vision Atlas of the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness. The country faces a significant eye care crisis, driven by high levels of poverty and a lack of awareness. Cataracts, a condition that is easily treatable, remain one of the leading



VISUAL: FATIMA JAHAN ANA

causes of blindness in Bangladesh, with more than half a million adults affected. Immediate action is required to prevent needless vision loss, yet eye health continues to be an under-prioritised issue.

Eye care has the potential to transform lives. Access to quality services can empower individuals, enabling them to learn, work, and contribute to society. It can alleviate poverty, reduce hunger, and improve overall well-being. The economic implications of poor eye health are vast. The Lancet estimates that visual impairment and blindness result in a global productivity loss of \$410.7 billion

annually. From diminished workplace productivity to children struggling in school due to undiagnosed vision problems, the ripple effects are significant.

Despite these challenges, Bangladesh has made notable progress on the international stage. On July 23, 2021, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the groundbreaking resolution "Vision for Everyone: Accelerating Action to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals," committing the global community to address eye health for the 1.1 billion people living with preventable vision loss by 2030. Bangladesh played a pivotal role in advocating for this resolution as the chair of the Friends of Vision group, underscoring the importance of eye health as a development and human rights issue.

As Bangladesh graduates from its status as a least developed country (LDC) and transitions into a middle-income nation, it must prioritise the elimination of avoidable blindness. The country's future depends on ensuring that all citizens, from children in primary schools to elderly individuals, have access to comprehensive eye care services. Eye health should be integrated into the nation's healthcare delivery system and extended to the most vulnerable populations.

To achieve this, several key measures are essential. The government must take actions to incorporate eye health into the national health systems, including service delivery, healthcare financing, and supply chains, and ensure that eye health is considered in policies across education, labour, finance and other relevant ministries. Authorities must also prioritise primary and community care models to enable broad access to services and strengthen coordination across health sectors such as neonatal care, noncommunicable diseases, rehabilitation, and elderly care. Finally, digital health information systems (DHIS2) for eye health should be fully utilised to ensure efficient data management, planning, and progress tracking. In addition, civil society involvement is needed to raise awareness and advocate for the implementation of integrated, people-centred eye care (IPEC), and empower communities to take charge of their own eye health needs. It is also important to promote research to generate evidence that supports effective eye care interventions and integrate eye health into public health planning curricula. Plans must be in place to reach elderly persons, people with disabilities,

minorities, ethnic communities and other marginalised groups, including garment workers, tea garden workers, and people living in hard-to-reach areas to ensure delivery of inclusive eye care services. Furthermore, rehabilitation plans are needed to ensure people with vision impairment and blindness can exercise their rights, participate in society on an equal basis, and take part in income generating activities.

As we commemorate World Sight Day 2024, we are reminded that sight is not just a physical ability—it is a pathway to opportunity, dignity, and participation in society. The tragedy of the people who lost their sight during the recent student movement is a solemn call to action. Their

loss highlights the urgency of ensuring that no one else is forced into darkness, whether through violence or preventable conditions.

Bangladesh stands at a pivotal moment. As the country transitions from least developed to middle income status, we have the opportunity to make avoidable blindness a thing of the past. By prioritising eye health as an essential component of our healthcare system, we can ensure that every citizen, regardless of their background or location, has access to the care they need. The global commitment to eye health through the UN resolution offers us a roadmap, but the work must start at home. Let this World Sight Day be a turning point—not just a day of reflection, but a day of renewed dedication.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Executive Engineer

District: Tangail
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.9300.000.07.014.24.6876

Date: 09-10-2024

Corrigendum

With reference to the e-Tender Notice No.05/2024-2025, e-Tender ID No. 1016932, 1013629, 1013628, 1014001, 1014002 & 1014003 Memo No. 46.02.9300.000.07.014.24.6432 Date: 23-09-2024 & e-Tender Notice No. 06/2024-2025, e-Tender ID No. 1014004, 1014005, 1014006, 1014007, 1014008 & 1014009 Memo No. 46.02.9300.000.07.014.24.6433 Date: 23-09-2024 it is to notify all concern that the tender submission date will have changed as mention below.

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Closing date & time	10/10/2024 15:00	15/10/2024 15:00
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Last date & time for tender/proposal security submission	10/10/2024 14:00	15/10/2024 14:00

All other terms & condition in this tender notice will remain unchanged.

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