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■ OFF CAMPUS ■

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO LIVE ON YOUR OWN AS A STUDENT?

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

Having to leave the comfort and familiarity of home to pursue education is an experience many of us undergo at some point in our lives. While some of us look forward to finally leaving the nest, others may find it difficult to cope without the comfort of their family. Dormitory life has its ups and downs, but it can be the highlight of your life if you're blessed with good roommates and food that is somewhat decent.

However, institutions often don't have enough housing capacity to accommodate all their students. Not to mention, some universities don't provide residential facilities at all. The onus to arrange housing then falls on the students themselves, along with additional responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, and other household chores, which are tasks dormitory residents tend to be spared from. Students also often cannot afford the luxury of living alone due to soaring rents.

Mohammad Muhibul Haque, currently enrolled in the Architecture department of BRAC University, who moved to Dhaka from his hometown for his undergraduate education, shares that his experience has been a mixed bag. He says, "We live in a three-bedroom flat within walking distance of our university. There are four of us sharing two rooms, and the third room is our studio for working. The living standard here is well below average considering how much we have to spend as there is a tendency to overcharge bachelors."

"Living alone, doing chores, and everything else on my own is definitely a challenge, but I am enjoying it. I feel that this experience has made me more responsible, and capable of adjusting to sharing a life with friends and flatmates," he adds.

Dhaka, despite being home to some of the best and most reputed educational institutions, is far from being student friendly. Students have responsibilities beyond attending classes and can't afford to spend long hours on

the road commuting, which often forces them to move out and arrange accommodations despite already living in Dhaka with their families.

Faisal Raihan, a student at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), moved into a place closer to his university despite already being a resident of Dhaka. "I tried commuting from Uttara to BUET for the first two months by bus. Getting to campus would take an hour and a half, but returning in the evening took almost three hours," he says.

Faisal shares, "It gets lonely sometimes, and you have to do everything by yourself. I realised while living with my roommates that boys are generally very messy. However, my mother was strict about cleanliness growing up, which I also internalised. Naturally, I became the one nagging my roommates about the mess."

A common factor of the students' accounts is that the experience is made more difficult by landlords, who go out of their way to impose heavy-handed rules. Muhibul remarks, "My landlord is fairly accommodating, but oftentimes, landlords impose ridiculous rules like not allowing friends, even if they're of the same gender. They would randomly come into the house to check the rooms, which is a violation of our privacies. Not to mention, they would be very negligent if anything in the house needed servicing."

Anika Tabassum, a student of Computer Science and Engineering at the Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB), shares her experiences, "The rent where I live is unreasonable. The lowest rent in my area is 7,000 to 8,000 Taka for a single room, and that's excluding utilities. Not to mention, living alone as a girl is hard. A bunch of restrictions are placed on us simply due to us being girls. For example, we aren't even allowed to have home deliveries because we are female students without guardians. Although I do think living alone teaches us many things, a hygienic dormitory

with a good living environment facilitated by universities is preferable."

There are also other circumstances that compel students to move out as well. Kashem Chowdhury*, for instance, is an architecture student from BRAC University who had a rather unorthodox reason for moving. "As an architecture student, I have to work on large scales to make projects that can go up to seven to eight feet in size. We tend to complete these in groups, so while working, we often have 10-20 people over at a time. I used to work at a friend's place before, but his landlord was very unaccommodating. They also don't allow members of the opposite gender to visit, which poses a problem. Considering all of these, I decided to rent an apartment to serve as a studio for my friends and me."

Aside from chores and adjusting with people who share a living space, there's a financial aspect to living independently. Most students try their best to finance themselves or at least contribute to their own expenses. This also entails that they're in charge of budgeting, which means they have to watch out for how much they're spending. Faisal shares that sometimes he even has to skip meals to accommodate his budget at the end of the month.

Living away from home and outside of the campus is by no means an easy feat. Adjusting to added responsibilities amidst hectic academic schedules takes some time. Anika shares that while she felt the burden of acclimatising to a new environment, her friends got her through it. This is a sentiment Faisal, Kashem, and Muhibul all share.

Despite the multifarious challenges posed by the transition of moving out of family homes, students share that living by themselves allows them freedom and a sense of self-sufficiency that they wouldn't have achieved otherwise. That, along with the company of friends you love, can make this next step wonderful, and you may find that the compromise is a small price to pay for such experiences.