#HEALTH & FITNESS

How young men are finally talking about mental health

My father is not an expressive man. I can never tell what he is thinking: happy, sad, struggling, or nothing at all. The only emotion I have ever seen him show is anger.

He is not unusual. The script for Bangladeshi men stayed short for generations: endure, provide, and say nothing. Mental illness was "madness", a word that could sink a family's marriage prospects. If you struggled, you were told to be stronger, to pray more, and to stop thinking so much. Silence passed for strength.

Something is shifting, however. Men my age talk about therapy, burnout and panic in group chats, on podcasts, sometimes even at the dinner table. It is clumsy and uneven, and I am not sure my father would recognise it. But the subject is no longer whispered.

For Shihab, 25, getting there took years.

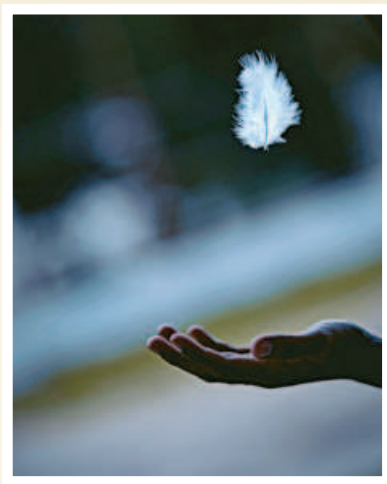
"It took me many years to realise that I was struggling with myself and that I was not a burden on anyone," he says. When he finally told his friends and family, they urged him to see a therapist. Nobody treated it as shameful, he says.

Nabil, 22, thinks that response is something we choose. "It is only as stigmatised as we make it," he says. In his view, the stigma survives because people keep treating it as one.

Taufik, 18, goes further. "I find the idea that men are not supposed to cry toxic," he says. "We are humans too, and we want to express our feelings. Men are not robots."

He seeks help actively and talks to his friends. It is a short, unpolished statement, and it says more than most awareness campaigns manage. I struggle to imagine my father's generation saying it at any age.





My own way is less dramatic. I unplug from social media. Scroll long enough, and every young man online seems to have it figured out: the job, the money, the body. The bar of success it sets for young men is unrealistic, and it makes me feel inadequate. Switching off does not fix anything, but it quiets the comparison.

I am not suggesting everyone delete their apps. For me, it is a small act of honesty: admitting that I measure myself against people I have never met and that the measuring costs me something.

That honesty, I think, is where it all starts. Nabil is right, and the first step is simpler than it sounds: we have to accept that a mental health problem is as serious as a physical one. No one tells a man with a broken leg to pray harder and stop thinking about it. The second step is harder: admitting, to yourself first, that something is wrong. Shihab's years of silence show how long that can take. Acceptance is not weakness; it is the step that makes help possible.

None of this is neat, and it is not equal. Talking is easier for some of us than others. Shihab's family urged him to see a therapist, but not every family answers that way, and a young man in a group chat is not the same as a man of fifty with a household to run. The change I am describing is real, but it has mostly reached people like me: young, online, and with someone to listen.

Which brings me back to my father. He has never said anything like this to me. I do not know what he has carried, or whether anyone has ever asked. I only know the script he was handed, because I grew up inside it. When he is angry, I have started to wonder what else sits underneath. Maybe our job is not to fix men like him but to ask earlier and to keep asking even when the answer is silence. That is a small start, but it is a start.

By Zawad Arif Arian

