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Stress and Anxiety Research Society (STAR) 37th Conference, Croatia 2016

Title: The stress of 'forced adulthood': Comparing young people in India and the UK

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Abstract

Aim and background: The phase of life which can be termed 'transition to adulthood' typically involves search for a life partner, settling on an occupation, and discovering 'who one is'. Some people find this transition difficult and the term 'quarterlife crisis' has been applied to those whose experiences are characterised by feelings of panic, loss, and uncertainty. This paper reflects in detail on how some young people experience the 'quarterlife crisis' through comparing two cultures: the UK and India.
Method: A sample of young people aged 22-30 years living in India (n=8) and the UK (n=15) were recruited. All identified with experiencing challenges making their 'transition to adulthood'. All were interviewed using also photo-elicitation and time-lining. Participants brought photographs to the interview to help illustrate and explain their challenges and placed these on a time-line of their life during the interview. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analysis the data.
Results: Some participants described the stress of experiencing a sudden turning point in their life which meant having to take on 'adult' roles earlier than they had expected. Others reported a more general assumption of adult-like responsibilities. However, even then, this was experienced as intimidating and participants demonstrated little preparation for this challenge. Hence, in both pathways, adulthood was characterised as 'forced'. Three sub-themes were created to understand the experience of forced adulthood: (1) train myself to be an adult, (2) rushing into financial self-sufficiency, and (3) 'man of the house' (relevant only to the Indian participants).
Conclusions: Within broad similarities, a specific cultural difference was identified in the experience of the challenge of forced adulthood in the two cultures studied. Specifically, the British sample focused on training themselves to take up adult roles to attain independence. In contrast, the Indian sample assumed adult roles and responsibilities in order to take care of their family.