

Institution: Colorado College
Student: Tashbid Shafat Sattar (Nawar)
Title: **The “Shaanti” Project**
Dates: June-August 2014
Location: **Dhaka, Bangladesh**

Bangladesh has faced some terrible disasters this past year, and victims of such disasters are left heavily traumatized. These victims continue to suffer. Some relief has come to them in the form of monetary compensation, but a different kind of relief is also necessary. The mental health of disaster victims needs to be addressed. Unfortunately, like in many other nations, mental illnesses are heavily stigmatized in Bangladesh, to the point where speaking about mental health is considered taboo. Further, Bangladesh’s resources to address such issues are very limited. This project, entitled the “Shaanti” Project, seeks to raise awareness about issues regarding mental health, particularly PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), and form a support team for future disaster victims. The Project is grounded in the belief that a sustainable peace in any society is linked to the peace of mind of its citizens. The Bengali word “Shaanti” means both peace and calmness.

Context

On April 24, an eight-story commercial building collapsed in Savar, a subdistrict of Dhaka, Bangladesh. The building, Rana Plaza, housed a number of textile factories on its upper floors, which had been built illegally. After over two weeks of searching through the rubble for bodies, the death toll stood at a staggering 1,131 people. The Rana Plaza catastrophe is not the first of its kind; the garment industry in Bangladesh is plagued with disasters. Just in October, another factory fire killed 10 people. Some relief certainly has been provided to those affected by the Rana Plaza tragedy, and this has mostly come in the form of monetary compensation. Compensation aside, an equally important matter goes largely unaddressed: the mental health of the victims.

Bangladesh is a disaster-prone country. Terrifying events seem to occur all the time, from natural calamities like cyclones and floods to horrific disasters such as the factory fires and building collapses that have plagued the textiles industry. Such events often leave victims suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). For example, one rescue worker in the Raza Plaza disaster named Omar Faruque Babu, hailed a hero for his efforts to find bodies under the rubble, later checked himself into a hospital. Faruque Babu was disillusioned after witnessing the effects of the disaster. Soon after, he hanged himself. Many others, disaster victims and rescue workers, continue to suffer from the trauma.

Mental health is a huge issue that requires attention in all societies, but Bangladesh is especially ill-equipped to address the matter. The Center for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed, a large private facility in Savaar, has nobly attempted to care for Rana Plaza’s wounded. However, a

lack of trained mental health professionals has meant that patients with symptoms of acute psychological trauma receive “a minimum” amount of counseling before they are discharged, according to Hossain Mehedi, a doctor at the center.

The Objective

- 1) Raise awareness of mental health issues in Bangladesh, particularly PTSD
- 2) Provide PTSD training workshops for volunteers
- 3) Set up a support team to provide future disaster victims with support if needed. This team will be a product of the workshops, consisting of both professionals as well as trained volunteers.

The Project

The project will be carried out in various parts of Dhaka City and Saavar (the area of the Rana Plaza collapse) between May and August 2014. The Dorpon Center, with trained psychotherapists Zakia Anam and Atiq Sobhan, has kindly agreed to partner with the project to host various workshops to raise awareness on mental health issues, including PTSD. Shakowath Sharif, trained psychotherapist and EMDR specialist at the Monobikash Centre, has agreed to conduct workshops to train volunteers on a form of PTSD management. We hope to host three awareness-raising events – two in Dhaka City, and another in Savaar. These events will largely be one- to two-hour-long information sessions, with food and drinks provided. The workshops will consist of one two-hour session per week over a period of ten weeks in Dhaka. The participants of the workshop will then form an ongoing support team to assist future disaster victims.

The awareness-raising events will be part of a larger city-wide campaign to raise consciousness over mental health issues. The campaign will include information sessions on the local radio, and we will also try to provide an information session led by our project members on the show “monodorpon,” a television show on mental health in Bangladesh. Further, we will print out information on fliers to distribute in public places.

Personnel

Tashbid Sattar, a junior at Colorado College, is a Mahindra UWC of India graduate and a Davis UWC scholar. He is the son of a trained psychotherapist and has had past experience volunteering at Sadhana Village, a residential care center for those who struggle with their mental health.

Shakowath Sharif is a trained psychotherapist and EMDR specialist at Monobikash counseling centre.

Zakia Anam and Atiq Sobhan are trained psychotherapists at the Darpan counseling centre.