Duara, R., Hugh-Jones, S., & Madill, A. (2015, Sept). ***Understanding and supporting young adults through 'quarterlife crisis'***. British Psychological Society Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section conference, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK, 2-4 September.

Aim and Background: Research suggests that a central challenge of early adulthood is 'finding one's place in the world'. This can involve looking for a life partner, settling on an occupation and discovering 'who one is'. Some people find this phase of life difficult and the term 'quarterlife crisis' has been applied to those experiences, characterised by panic and feelings of loss and uncertainty. This study examined the nature of the crisis, attending to the multiple influences and contexts which may make the transition to adulthood more difficult for some than others. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides the theoretical backdrop to the study. It proposes five environmental systems (from micro to macro), each with their own roles, norms and rules, which may shape psychological development. Broader systems incorporate cultural, political and economic influences and micro contexts capture an individual's biology, attitudes and familiar and peer influences. Outer systems interact to shape individual level outcomes. For example, in the UK, shifts in economic systems affecting young people (e.g. high unemployment) may affect micro systems (e.g. a person's capacity to move to independent living). Yet much research in this area assumes linear development, and we know little about the contemporary, contextualised and cultural systems shaping the 'quarterlife crisis'. This paper reports on two specific outcomes from our exploration of the crisis, namely 'family expectations' and 'betrayal of the ideal' in relation to two cultures: Assam (India) and England (United Kingdom).

Method: A sample (22-30 years) of both Indian (n=5) and British nationals (n=6) was recruited. Data on the transition to adulthood was collected using photo-elicitation and timeline interviewing. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analysis the interview data.

Conclusion: Cultural differences in the ways in which macro systems shape individual experience of the transition to adulthood were evident. 'Family expectations' were seen to be culturally informed, and powerful. Indian culture involves an economic system where the family provides financial support for children throughout their lives creating a particular responsibility for young people towards their family. Some Indian participants experienced a 'crisis' in trying to negotiate personal goals whilst meeting responsibilities and/or the entire relinquishing of personal 'dreams'. In contrast, the UK cultural priorities of independence and financial stability appeared to create a different type of crisis experience where negotiation is made from a relatively equal position to that of parents' or the wider family. The second theme, 'Betrayal of the ideal', captures the ways in which macro and micro systems inform an ideal developmental trajectory which come to constitute (and limit) the 'dreams' and 'hopes' of young people. Participants from both cultures talked about the challenges in facing the 'reality' that these 'dreams' would not be realised, and how their crisis was one of being betrayed by the myth of what it means to grow-up successfully. Most of the Indian sample had relationship ideals whilst most of the UK sample had education-to-work ideals. The study illustrates contextual effects on experience, while further understanding how some young people 'transition' successfully whereas others struggle.