

‘Forced adulthood’: An aspect of ‘quarterlife crisis’ suffered by young English and Assamese adults

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Abstract

‘Quarterlife crisis’ describes difficulties experienced by young people in their transition to adulthood. Little is known about how this crisis manifests in different cultural contexts or the impact of educational background. Using photo-elicitation and timeline interviews, we explore the lived experience of ‘quarterlife crisis’ among 22-30 year olds from England (n=16) and Assam, India (n=8), each group including people with and people without a university-level education. Data were analysed with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. We report the key theme of ‘forced adulthood’, consisting of the traumatising experience of having to assume adult roles and responsibilities before one feels capable of so doing. We explore how cultural and educational factors shape this experience though: feeling rushed to financial self-sufficiency; having to train oneself to be an adult; and having to be the ‘man of the house’. In conclusion, we demonstrate that, even though there is some consistency around the traumatising effect of too early an assumption of adult responsibility, culture and educational background can change the contours of this experience and its meaning.