ARE WE HUMANS OR RATS RUNNING FOR CHEESE?

Look around.
Everyone is running faster than yesterday, faster than the person beside them, faster than the version of themselves who once dared to rest. But no one can explain why. We're sprinting toward a destination we can't name, chasing a finish line that keeps moving, school, college, coaching centers, internships, and companies.
Every system repeats the same message: **Run harder. Sleep later. Achieve more. Don't fall behind.**

Life feels less like life and more like a lab experiment: millions of young people running on a wheel they never chose, chasing a piece of cheese society promised would make everything worth it. The expectations around us seep into our heads like venom, numbing our desires and replacing them with performance. But the truth is, no one wants to admit that the venom has no antidote, because we are the society; we feed it, passing down the same fears, pressure, and impossible standards, generation after generation.

THE RAT RACE STARTS EARLY: SCHOOL AS A PRESSURE COOKER

Parents have become scientists, experimenting on their own children, forcing them to burn under pressures they never chose. "We only hit you because we love you," they whisper, but love cannot mask pain. Kids suffer mentally and physically, punished for daring to be human. Their brilliance is dismissed; their talents judged irrelevant. Worth is measured in grades, ranks, and scores. They run faster than their legs can carry them, chasing a piece of cheese they never wanted.

Across Asia, in India, China, South Korea, and Japan, achievement is cultural.
One exam can decide your future. One mistake can shame your family. One low grade can change how your parents treat you.

- **South Korea**: Highest youth suicidal ideation linked to academic pressure.
- **China**: After-school tutoring bans children from studying more than adults.
- **Malaysia**: Over half of university students report anxiety from workload.
- **India**: 65% increase in student suicides in a decade.

Global physical abuse:

- 1.6 billion children experience violent discipline; 330 million are physically punished.
- 17% suffer severe punishment, e.g. repeated blows to the head or face.

- Social norms perpetuate it, e.g. Bangladesh: 9 in 10 children aged 1-14 experience monthly violent discipline.

"Discipline cannot be forced through pain. It must grow from understanding, curiosity, and guidance, not bruises or fear."

THE RAT RACE CONTINUES: WORK CULTURE IS NO BETTER

School ends, but the wheel remains. Work mirrors the classroom: long hours, high expectations, cutthroat competition.

- **US:** 4.2–4.4% unemployment, millions struggling.
- **India:** 5.1% unemployed, graduates without stable work.
- **UK:** 4.5–4.8% unemployment; youth unemployment is higher.
- **Finland:** Youth joblessness above 21%.
- **South Africa:** 33% jobless, trapping young workers in poverty.
- **Canada:** 7% unemployed; 1.6 million without a stable income.

In many countries, unemployment deepens poverty, social unrest, and despair.

THE END OF THE RACE

And what is the destination we've been running toward?
A room where the clock ticks louder than the heartbeat, where people lie on their deathbeds with hearts swollen with regret. In those final seven minutes, when the world blurs and the truth sharpens, they see it: **the cheese they chased was never meant for them.**

They should have painted that canvas. Played that guitar. Sung that song. Danced barefoot on rooftops. Baked that cake on a rainy afternoon. Travelled to cities they dreamed of. Took the photograph that froze time. Built the robot. Planted the garden. Written the poem. Auditioned for the play. Run toward joy instead of approval.

They should have been themselves — wildly, loudly, unapologetically. But instead, they ran. Faster. Harder. Farther from who they were meant to be. And the life that waited patiently slipped quietly through their fingers.

"We were born to fly, not to run on someone else's wheel, yet we chased their cheese until our wings forgot how to open."

Edited by: Ivy Huang