

Dysfunctional offsprings of Functional Families: some theoretical considerations during COVID 19

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COVID 19 lockdown in India, currently underway allows us to investigate how familiar theories of child rearing and outcomes are correlated. The lockdown has brought into close proximity erstwhile dispersed families and thus, both the origin and the need for this paper. A simple Google search at 00:18 hours Indian Standard Time, 17th May, 2020, will show how psychologists and psychiatrists are bothered throughout India about marital discord resulting from India's lockdown and the possible effects of these bouts of marital discordance are well documented in both psychiatry and psychological literature. Papers abound in the public domain regarding the disastrous effects of marital discord among children and adolescents. Both children and adolescents who have incompatible parents will go on to have more psychological issues which need therapeutic interventions in the long term. And we as mental healthcare professionals are more acquainted with these children of unhappy marriages.

The problems of those adults growing up in happy families have not been studied except in fiction. Whereas a significant number of them go on to lead normal lives, there are individuals who fail to cope with the mismatch between reality with Platonic ideals formed in their minds. *Gone Girl* (2012) by Gillian Flynn (b.1971) brings this neglected developmental issue to our notice. In this novel, which went on to be made into a movie; we have the eponymous 'girl' highlighting her plight while growing up overshadowed by starstruck parents

whose compatibility is to be rarely found in real life. Growing up amidst loving couples, some individuals may develop an unreal schema of society and construct unrealistic hopes of a utopian world in which their partners display unwavering trust in them. As they grow up, they are more likely to develop anxiety spectrum disorders. Yet others may develop a phobic attitude to commitment to a marital or a live-in partner. In fact, they may undergo a traumatic alteration in the orientation of their gender. Disillusioned from setbacks, these adults may not be able to confront the human failings in their partners when their own marital lives fail to match the settings of their happy parental upbringing. This can lead to maladjustment, culminating in myriad mental health issues, ranging from adjustment reactions to even psychosis. Crisis situations may be just as likely to arise with these children.

In terms of treatment, too, there are hurdles. Mental health professionals have traditionally been able to conceptualize the problems faced by children reared in conflicting homes. Standard therapies in such cases include family/couples therapy along treating the symptoms of the child or adolescent. However, when the problems of the children growing in non-dysfunctional families is considered, family therapy as we know it, has no place. The key here lies in being able to enhance the individual's coping abilities and in making them understand societal needs and non-utopian scenarios. Even then, the individual may fail to adequately comprehend the pertinent issues due to a sense of false hope, failure to act our 'expectations' and be realistic. The only solution in such cases may be to let the child come to terms with the world by herself with time. It may turn out to be calamitous in cases where the child is unable to sustain mental strength through an adequate repertoire of coping skills.

Understanding child development in the context of those typically faced by a growing child was studied by many psychoanalysts, notably by Sigmund Freud. Some of Freud's ideas have stood the test of time, though there were others whose views are found to be more acceptable and relatable to our social context. Erik Erikson believed that the stages of life went

on in such a way that any conflict generated at any stage would have a negative impact on the next. Lack of trust in personal and intimate relationships hinders the resolution of fidelity issues in these individuals. Thus, they are not able to achieve self-actualisation, much like those children who have seen their parents dissatisfied with their marital lives. Therefore, these children too end up sharing the same fate as their explicitly troubled counterparts reared in unhappy families. In the midst of this lockdown as a psychiatrist posted in semi-urban India and attending COVID 19 patients; the author does not have the time or the luxury to cite everything. Only the pandemic is over he can elaborate on these issues. The Lockdown will further bring children of happy parents to closer proximities with their parents and thus taking the cue from *Gone Girl*, this paper proposes that mental healthcare professionals begin interventional strategies for helping these maladjusted children of adjusted parents.

Management of these adults poses challenges to mental health professionals. However, in this ‘brave new world’ where mental health issues and relationship problems have become more common, this topic merits a study and is likely to have exciting results. Future interventional studies in this area should offer a fresh perspective into understanding relationship difficulties in a world where maintaining these commitments grows more challenging than ever before. The COVID 19 lockdown will certainly see a spike in adults in the long run who suffer the effects of seeing the joy and the conviviality of their parents for over 60 days during our Lockdown.

This paper was written in a hurry within a psychiatric ward with COVID 19 patients at one go. It is being released in the public domain as is. Fair citation usage is required by the author. Please contact the author at udayan.bhaumik@gmail.com for queries/discussions.

