

Marital life during pandemic

On a countless number of couples worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought on unprecedented marital challenges. China, where the outbreak first occurred, experienced a spike in divorce after the country began to lift the lockdown. Having said that, there are also couples for whom the lockdown has opened new opportunities to bond like never before. No matter what, this pandemic surely has pushed us into a situation we did not foresee. When two people live under one roof and see each other 24/7 month after month with no end in sight, conflicts are inevitable.

"We are living in a highly anxiety-provoking environment," said Nusrat Siraj, a licensed mental health counsellor (LMHC) of Bangladeshi origin, who practices in New York City. "Social isolation, financial stress, loss of loved ones, and health concerns have all led to an increased marital conflict globally. The good news is that the challenges of a pandemic do not necessarily have to harm marriages," she said. "If they invest time and energy, couples can emerge stronger in these extremely challenging times."

Every day, we are adjusting and re-adjusting to the 'new normal'. Every sphere of our lives seems to be sustaining damage of some sort as a result of the pandemic, including our romantic relationships. However, some good things are coming out of this mess, too.

"In the early days of the pandemic, we used to fight a lot and fight over even the littlest things," said Kazi Tahmina, a senior lecturer at a private university in Dhaka.

"The stress level was insurmountable. With two small children around, working from home itself was and continues to be, a major challenge," she said. "But our marital relationship took an about-turn when both

of us contracted the coronavirus back to back."

Falling ill with COVID-19 changed perspectives of Kazi Tahmina and Md Palash Sharker, a sub-editor at a Bengali national daily, on their marriage and family. Being diagnosed with COVID-19 was unsettling enough. What added to this couple's anxiety was the fear of losing each other to this deadly virus. The illness and the fear brought them closer together, helped them re-establish the connection that was lost somewhere in translation.

"We fight a lot less now," said Tahmina. "We now try to understand and listen, like really listen to each other."

"Being down with COVID-19 helped me realise who my real friends and well-wishers are," said Sharker. "Now I can proudly say that my wife ranks #1 on that list. She looked after me throughout my illness."

"It took both of us to fall ill to realise how much we love one another," Tahmina added.

Marriages are about spoken and unspoken expectations. We expect our partners to understand and love us, and we expect them to share financial, childcare, elderly care, and household responsibilities. But sometimes, the idyllic first months of a marriage quickly disintegrate and make way for quarrels and disagreements as our expectations increase dramatically.

"High expectations kill the fun in a marriage, I think. With the passage of time and births of children, we also cannot afford the energy to make the other person our centre of attention anymore," said Vidita Gazi, a communications specialist at a development agency. "Priorities like school fees, bills, and children's happiness come in the way."

In this time of pandemic, it is perhaps important that we do not make unreasonable expectations from our

partners. We are all fighting our own battles! For Gazi, the lockdown has brought her and her husband closer to one another. Although it was chaotic in the early days of the lockdown, they are now bonding like never before.

"When he complains, I manage, when I complain, he manages. I guess this house arrest brought us closer. We learnt to develop this coping strategy for managing our stress through discussions over afternoon tea one day," she said.

Like many urban families with two working parents, Gazi's family is grateful to their helping hands at home, who made this 'new normal' more bearable for them. "But I don't know how we will manage or if this conjugal harmony will last when these girls take their annual leave at the end of this year, because it looks like this virus is not going anywhere anytime soon," she said.

The struggles or achievements for newlyweds in this pandemic, however, are different from those who are married with children. Samira Rahman, a Bangladeshi American, is one of the several millions in the U.S. who are looking for a job right now. Samira got married last November and moved to a new state with her husband. She was adjusting to a very new and very important phase of her life when this pandemic struck hard.

"It was overwhelming!" Rahman said. "In the beginning, we even used to argue over things like how the kitchen should be managed, or how much of the everyday life details should be shared with our respective families."

But at the onset of the pandemic, things quickly changed for this newlywed couple. "I think it has kind of put our relationship through a crash course of understanding,"



she said. "I see more consideration

and empathy in both of us now, something that probably would have taken longer to achieve as newlyweds, if the pandemic did not hit us all."

According to Nusrat Siraj, LMHC, marital conflict is not a sign of an unhealthy marriage as conflicts in a marriage are simply unavoidable. "In this pandemic, individuals can engage in the following behaviours to nurture healthy relationships: maintaining self-care, work schedule and routine; communicating with partners with an open mind; spending time in nature; working on fun projects with kids; or planning something exciting like virtual dinner with friends and extended families."

Couples all over the world are adapting to the 'new normal'. With financial uncertainty, fear of unemployment, and limited job prospects looming large on the horizon, staying married during a pandemic is an arduous task. However, our investment of time and energy in our marriages during these struggling times can warrant harmony and happiness for ourselves and our children when good days return.

By Wara Karim
Photo:LS Archive/ Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Names of some of the interviewees have been changed to protect their identity.

HOROSCOPE



ARIES
 (MAR. 21-APR. 20)
 Colleagues can come through for you. Try to keep to yourself. Major opportunities are apparent. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



TAURUS
 (APR. 21-MAY 21)
 Ease disappointments by making amends. Unpleasant changes at home are evident. Don't be too harsh with your partner. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.



GEMINI
 (MAY 22-JUN. 21)
 Financial issues can add to your depression. Make the tough decisions. Don't entertain pushy individuals. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.



CANCER
 (JUN. 22-JUL. 22)
 Avoid going out. Children may not be honest with you. Check on your investments. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.



LEO
 (JUL. 23-AUG. 22)
 Direct your energy into physical exertion. Residential moves will be favourable. Don't be rash. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.



VIRGO
 (AUG. 23-SEP. 23)
 Don't live for others. Build up your savings. Stubbornness can lead to estrangements. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



LIBRA
 (SEP. 24-OCT. 23)
 Take on creative projects this week. Problems with your partner is likely. Find ways to enjoy yourself. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



SCORPIO
 (OCT. 24-NOV. 21)
 Social outings will do you good. Don't allow anyone to cause friction with your partner. Expect opposition at work. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.



SAGITTARIUS
 (NOV. 22-DEC. 21)
 Your lover will be annoyed. Find yourself a challenge this week. Unexpected bills may set you back. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



CAPRICORN
 (DEC. 22-JAN. 20)
 Projects may not be fruitful. Take care of pending legal matters. Don't mix business with pleasure. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



AQUARIUS
 (JAN. 21-FEB. 19)
 Sign up for fitness programs. Find time to travel. Don't lose your temper at work. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.



PISCES
 (FEB. 20-MAR. 20)
 Secret affairs are evident. Act fast on any opportunities. Children may cause limitations. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.