

Does our position in the socio-economic order affect our mental health?

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Our world is dominated by neoliberal capitalism. From gigantic billboards on the streets to annoying ads on popular social media platforms, it is easy to find oneself being sucked into the temptations of consumerism which encourages us to acquire goods and services in ever-increasing amounts.

But what does that do to our mental health?

We live in a society where we are constantly judged based on the material things we can or cannot afford, and this is fuelled by consumerism. From the clothes we wear to the restaurants we dine in, people are constantly under the pressure to meet societal demands of a living "standard". When people fail to meet those demands or choose not to pay attention to them, they are shunned and shamed.

For example, one of the main reasons why weddings are often so extravagant is because people do not want their extended families and friends to scrutinise and ostracise them for having a smaller wedding function.

People ostracise others based on material goods primarily because they often equate material goods with intangibles such as someone's value and character. This often happens from a very young age. So, for example, when someone is unable to afford a new pair of basketball shoes at school, they are often judged and bullied by their other classmates who treat them as someone inferior. Similar incidents not only happen in schools and colleges but even haunt us in places like offices or universities. These events cause people to look down upon themselves and it worsens their mental health as social alienation and self-loathing leads to issues such as

depression.

Additionally, neoliberal capitalism preaches competitiveness, not just in the form of consumerism, but by also promoting values such as individualism. Kids are often indoctrinated with ideas such as "hard work is the key to success" – a narrative which is the result of the competitive social order around us.

However, such ideas are not only false, but they are equally harmful too, as success is often dependent on one's innate abilities, resources, and their surroundings. Success and privilege have a direct correlation, and that cannot be left out of the conversation.

Not everyone is able to excel at everything. For example, someone who may be really good at sports may perform sub-par in the fine arts. So, when we are unable to succeed at everything we approach, we tend to blame ourselves as we think we are not just working hard enough despite giving the maximum possible effort. This again causes us to doubt ourselves and crushes our self-confidence and jeopardises our mental health.

People from low socio-economic factors have to face the consequences of such a competitive social order even worse. Thanks to a lack of regulations and dysfunctional labour unions, workers in factories have to work in hazardous workplaces for long hours to maintain the increasing costs of living. Working in tough and intimidating conditions, coupled with a lack of social security such as food and shelter, causes workers' physical ailments, and their psychological woes follow.

This is made even worse by how inaccessible mental healthcare is in

the country. Neoliberal capitalism also causes mental health services to be strictly driven by the incentive of profit in most cases and so the charges are often inflated. This means that people from a low socio-economic status cannot access the required services to fix their already aggravated mental health woes and this feeds into a vicious cycle.

Unlike the popular myth that mental health issues are solely related to emotional and psychological well-being, they often have their origins in distressful socio-economic conditions and a faulty social order. Improving social security, funding mental health services and encouraging better working conditions

by dismantling capitalist influences can go a long way in breaking the chain of mental health issues.

References

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Hrishik would like to dedicate this article to his comrade and mentor Sajid Bin Mahamud. Reach out to Hrishik at hrdibbo@gmail.com



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