

Covid-19: Lockdown In My House With My Family and our mental health

Sayere Nazabi Sayem

COVID-19 or the novel coronavirus is a virus that was first identified in Wuhan, China back in December 2019. Ever since, it has spread globally, appearing to be a continuous pandemic that struck Bangladesh in March 2020. As of 1st June 2020, almost 50 thousand people in Bangladesh were infected and 600+ people have lost their lives. Similar to the worldwide scenario, Bangladesh too had a steep rise of infections. Since there are no particular vaccines/treatments for the COVID-19 fevers, the government enabled a lockdown and ordered people to quarantine themselves at home to stop further infections starting March 26th. This resulted in residing with our families 24 hours of the day for almost 3 months straight and acquiring experiences like never before, in the longest confinement of our lives.

The small little family of mine of my parents, younger sister, grandma and cat, became very lazy this quarantine. It is a bittersweet feeling to always seeing these very familiar faces. One minute I'm dying to go out of the house whereas the next minute, I feel all nostalgic after listening to stories from my grandma and want to hear more, while she braids my oiled hair. The day to day scenario now reminds me of my childhood when life was simpler, my time was mostly devoted to my loved ones and sans the everyday rush of meeting newer goals. No one has to leave for work as they can attend meetings from home, I don't have to leave for classes nor does my sister have school. Our cat is extremely surprised to have us all at home for these many days with contrast to how previously she used to roam around in empty rooms, have no one to play around with and sleep all day, bored. But now it has been so long that she almost reached her breaking point; her face tells that she is annoyed by cuddles 24 hours of the day. We used to go for walks in the neighbourhood until some of our neighbours started getting infected. Besides age, coronavirus is known to attack diabetic, lung and heart patients more easily. My father and grandma are diabetic and heart patients while my mother has severe lung disease, sarcoidosis and I have acute asthma so we decided to be extra cautious and carefully handled all foreign items entering the house. Moreover, my cat, Minerva, is weak and if she gets sick, it will create an abysmal situation since there are no available vet clinics nearby in this time of crisis. We have to live like this; in fear of getting infected, while spending quality time with our families.

Unfortunately, not all families are all loving or comfortable with each other. I have observed my friend, Zarin trying to find solace while being with her friends, out all day and reluctant to be at home. Her father is abusive towards her mom and her because of his uncontrolled alcoholism and short-temper. She and her mother have been suffering from domestic violence, both verbal and physical from a very long time. We were always there when she needed us, cheering her up as we were her only option to some little happiness. During this pandemic, she is forced to stay at home at all times and face brutality. The torture of beating and thrashing has always taken a toll on her mental health and the risk of her losing sanity is now even more. I try video-calling her every day and ask everyone else to do too, cheering and motivating her up to keep patience until it is all over. Mental health is no joke so we asked her to keep constant checks on some important apps (like Maya app that has online chat counselling facilities) or websites (like Online Counselling Bangladesh to talk to psychologists and counsellors) to stay healthy. And if things get too out of hand or unbearable to stay at home, it may be helpful to reach out to relatives, friends and neighbours and to seek support from a hotline. The government of our nation, Bangladesh has kept many toll free helplines open via the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, even during this pandemic: 109, 10921 and so on. No one is alone and we shall not feel vulnerable either.

A distant relative of mine, my aunt, is a victim of polygamy. Her husband remarried and we heard that she is facing physical abuse every day. Firstly, the man has committed several crimes: according to section 16 of the Special Marriage Act, 1872 and section 494 of the Penal Code 1860, he shall be punished for marrying again midst his current marriage and also violated the Women & Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 by torturing a woman, let alone his wife. According to this Act, the word 'woman' implies to, a woman of any age and 'child' means any personage under the age of sixteen. 'Repression' suggests violence which is all kinds of assaults to woman and children, whether in forms of physical or mental. It was prefaced with great expectation to diminish and eradicate brutality against women and children.

We have been trying to contact her to take actions immediately because the judiciary matters are open and she can always seek for help from the law. The concern of women and children are sophisticated in our legal system.

The times are challenging but not impossible to conquer. Since vaccines have been created, prevention of corona virus is to stay at home. But this does not mean that we shall forget humanity and our morals. We should help anyone we can within our limitations; be it financially or just a simple phone call to remind them "it's okay and you can do this!"

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