

The Pandemic's Impact on Family Relationships

By Anahjah Boone

I feel that, before this global pandemic, some families were distant and socially disconnected from each other. Individuals experience a plethora of events that ultimately shape their personal lives, which some individuals, despite being kin, may not agree with. It is natural that relationships fade, and people grow apart. Yet, I believe that this pandemic has led to more distress and a lack of communication between family members. For instance, I think that some may have used this health crisis as an excuse to not maintain or even develop connections with relatives. I've heard stories from my childhood friends whom I met in middle school who vent to me about their family situations, because they feel uncomfortable talking to others about the unhealthy dynamics within their households or families. They would explain that this pandemic has had a huge financial impact on households, which ultimately affects their mental and emotional states. Thus, some families have become adamant about cutting ties with other family members, so they won't feel embarrassed about their financial situation, to relieve the burden of having to support so many people, or possibly even to stay safe to avoid getting COVID-19.

Additionally, the pandemic has impacted relationships between family members in a negative manner. For example, my relationship with my father has grown over the years, but the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted that relationship somewhat, which makes worse the physical barrier of us not being able to see each other due to his incarceration. Before this global pandemic, we talked via phone often. My father would call whenever he had the chance. However, prisons across the nation started to experience increases in COVID-19 cases due to interactions between the guards and the "outside" world. Therefore, my father's prison went on lockdown, and he could only come out maybe once a week, or even once every two weeks, for about an hour. The only other time he would be released was to groom or shower. Generally, the pandemic has been a curse to family interactions and caused family dynamics to be more complicated and divided.

However, although some families were initially distant before and during the early stages of the pandemic -- some by choice and others by chance -- the intensity and power of the coronavirus possibly has stricken some families particularly hard, leading them to shift their priorities. For example, many individuals who were typically preoccupied by life -- whether with children, marriage, school, or work -- felt the urge to prioritize quality time with loved ones, especially immediate and elderly family members. I believe that, once people began to personally witness the strength of this virus, many were frightened by its abilities. They came to realize that, although statistics illustrate the demographics of individuals primarily impacted by the coronavirus, it does not have an age, gender, or religious requirement for whom it will attack. It is best to be as safe as possible and surrounded by love. Therefore, despite the discomfort, financial instability, loss, and sickness that this pandemic has brought, the pandemic has possibly brought some families closer.

Additionally, I've heard about other positive aspects of this global pandemic. For example, a myriad of events has occurred virtually, such as birthday parties and baby showers, due to

COVID-19. Even though families are physically separated, this global health issue has encouraged many families to invest in technology in order to stay in touch with relatives and witness pivotal moments in their lives. Relationships between younger generations and older generations have grown as well due to this pandemic. For instance, children and grandchildren feel the need to protect and entertain grandparents, either virtually or through a screen door or window, in order to get them through this tough time.

Hearing about others' family predicaments motivated me to want to stay connected with as many family members as I could during this time. Consequently, throughout this global epidemic I have spent more time with my younger siblings on my paternal side of the family than I ever have before. My youngest brother is seven years-old and my youngest sister is four years-old. Age reveals a lot, especially regarding memories and time, which I feel that I missed. There were underlying reasons, such as our father's incarceration, why I didn't speak to my younger siblings as much or maintain any contact with them. My father was our main source of communication. Also, our mothers didn't get along for years. However, through this pandemic we have grown closer. We've spent several hours on the phone every day and even spent days at a time together in person.

Similarly, COVID-19 also has improved the father-daughter relationship that I have gained with my dad, because it has given us something to talk about. Currently, health is a very important topic. With him being in an enclosed and easily infected area and me being outdoors, we were both worried about each other, because we each felt powerless to help the other. Also, I began to feel more comfortable talking to him, which improved our relationship, because I began to open up more whenever we had the opportunity to communicate. I am a reserved individual by nature, so when I finally had the chance to talk to him, I would explain in detail what I am experiencing, which has contributed to the development of our relationship. The distance that the pandemic has caused has allowed our bond to ultimately grow stronger.

Overall, this pandemic has either allowed family relationships to grow or to remain stagnant and perhaps even worsen.