



Sources of support in the systems we inhabit: an exploration for Covid times

The Context

The second wave of Covid in particular has placed us in a situation where anxiety about the risks to the health and lives of ourselves and our loved ones engulfs us. Unlike other illnesses where the danger is to a specific person, in this pandemic the risk is not limited only to the person affected or the immediate caregivers. In instances where multiple members within a family or in one's local support system have contracted the infection, the lines between givers and receivers of care are blurred. It is often the case that those affected by Covid have to manage their own symptoms while providing care for others, particularly in the overwhelming number of home management cases. While there is concern for the other, worry for oneself also doesn't quite go away, and navigating the two is complex, and at times choiceless. In those instances where people are grieving the loss of their loved ones, the ability to deal with loss becomes critical.

The nature of the pandemic has made the role of families and that of the immediate social communities that we live in, an important vector in our ability to cope with the disease and recover, and to provide support wherever possible. The second wave of Covid in India, with its high transmissibility; soaring rate of infections; increasing death rate; newer health complications that are emerging; the unrelenting burden that these place on the healthcare system and on common citizens amidst a state that has all but abdicated its leadership responsibility, has even more sharply compelled us to think about the system as a whole, and question existing models of illness, support and care; and our place and role in them. Whether our individual choices are made with concern for the system is another question that stares at us.

Dialogue on using GR framework to respond

As GR practitioners, we ask ourselves whether we can use the GR framework to help us cope with this complex reality to do what we can do: to manage our complex feelings and contain our anxiety; find the roles that we can take on to provide as well as receive support; and also accept the limitations of this support. To acknowledge the collective trauma that we are undergoing, and yet not be so traumatized individually by it that we're unavailable to the world outside of us.

With this idea in mind, the GRI Programmes Committee proposes that GR associates engage in a dialogue on "Sources of support in the systems we inhabit: an exploration for Covid times", with a view to developing a shared framework as GR practitioners which we can then apply in our own local contexts. Our hope is that we can put to use our understanding of GR; our experience of its application in different contexts; and our immediate experience of providing care to those impacted by Covid in our own families or communities, or of having recovered from it ourselves, towards this task. It calls for the deployment of many key concepts of the GR framework: the unconscious, role, leadership, task, containment, boundaries, and more.

Proposed Primary Task

Explore the role of family¹ and community as systems in providing care and support to those impacted by Covid, using the lens of group relations.

The idea is that such exploration will deepen and strengthen our ability to respond to the needs in times of covid within the systems we inhabit. We're envisaging this dialogue to be a space for co-creation of a response to the pandemic that is informed by GR theory and practice, which we can then apply in our respective settings to respond to the needs of those affected by Covid.

Methodology

The dialogue would happen on Zoom. We are envisaging it to be for three sessions of 90 minutes each, once a week.

In the spirit of co-creation, there is no pre-determined design to the dialogue, except for starting the first session with a 25-minute social dreaming matrix event, as a way to tap into the collective unconscious, to help begin the dialogue. While each of the three sessions will have a convenor, they will also take on the role of participants in the dialogue.

Dates and time for sessions

1900-2030 on June 4 (Friday), June 10 (Thursday) and June 17, 2021 (Thursday).

Participation

There are a total of 24 places available for this dialogue, which is open to all GRI associates. As a way of expanding the circle of exploration, we encourage associates who decide to participate to also invite one other person of their choice (outside the circle of associates), and encourage that person to apply. Please let us know in advance the name of the one person that you are extending the invitation to.

Applications would be accepted on a 'first come first served' basis.

Since this is an exploratory dialogue offered in the spirit of co-creation, there'd be no fee for participation. Applicants are required to commit to participating in all 3 sessions of the dialogue.

Applicants may write to programmes@grouprelationsindia.org, briefly stating the reasons why they wish to participate in the dialogue. The programmes committee would confirm acceptance of applications by email. Zoom link would be sent to all confirmed applicants.

¹ defined here as the web of significant social relationships that an individual relies upon, which includes, but is not restricted to family of birth or marriage.