

Exploring the Meaning of Home Spaces of Married Couples in COVID-19 Pandemic

Nikita Bhagat*, Ishita U. Bharadwaj**

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it a new 24*7 pattern of living for the couples. The home spaces would have acquired a different meaning as couples adjusted to a drastically changed global scenario. The study explored the meaning of home spaces of married couples during the pandemic period from the lockdown in end-March till August 2020. Semi structured interviews were conducted online with 11 couples with both the spouses together. Couples from Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida, Chandigarh, Mumbai, and Chennai participated in the study. Thematic analysis was used and the themes identified are: redesigned spaces of comfort and confinement, and rediscovered time for coupledom. As the world compressed into a small space within the boundary of couple's home, the redesigned spaces emerged out of a tussle between confinement from outside world and efforts to make the inner spaces livable, flexible and comforting. The spaces of couple interactions i.e., bedroom, living room and kitchen were perceived positively, where couples engaged in conversations, working and cooking together, and leisure activities. Some spaces were given special labels indicating exclusivity of couple's shared space. Yet at times, these same spaces also became walls that held the unfulfilled needs and desires, with sense of being caged, frustration, and unease. This novel time afforded a chance to rediscover each other from the relational lens, as intimate partners again. The greater time available was perceived to be beneficial for the relationship as indicated by the positive outcomes such as enhanced emotional and physical intimacy, feeling of closeness, greater knowledge about the spouse, finding a new or interesting side of the spouse, realizing the presence of spouse as a companion and appreciating a new routine with her or him. In revealing the positive aspect of couple relationship, this study showed a kind of resilience people can have during crises. This comes by creating conditions of well-being with in their own circumstances through efforts to reshape their living spaces, mutual support and enjoyable interactions.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, married couples, home spaces, intimacy, thematic analysis