

Gloomy Possibilities in the midst of a pandemic

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As someone who comes from a working family, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit my family particularly hard. Both of my parents work minimum-wage jobs, and they're among the essential workers who had to leave the house every day during the full swing of the pandemic. When CUNY transitioned to remote learning in March, I was not particularly comforted because both of my parents were still working outside the house, and they were at risk of contracting the virus. I was torn by anxiety as I watched my dad get ready for work every day. I felt helpless and worried, knowing that my dad was at high risk due to his older age, his status as a smoker and his underlying conditions that make him particularly susceptible. Disappointment soon set in; there was nothing I could do to protect him. We needed the money and he needed to go to work, but the risk was too great and I couldn't help but think that my dad was potentially sacrificing his life for us. News about the novel coronavirus fed my anxiety but what hit me the hardest was the fact that a number of our church and family friends had tested positive for COVID-19. My dad, being the kind person he is, was running errands and buying groceries for our friends who were sick so that they would stay home and protect others.

One afternoon my dad received a phone call from work notifying him that one of his coworkers had tested positive for COVID-19. My heart sank, and a million thoughts cluttered my mind. My background in health sciences triggered in me an intense fear of what that might mean for my dad and for my family as a whole. At the moment, I suspected that we had all probably got infected since we'd been interacting with my dad this whole time. I immediately told my dad to isolate himself in a room, but I thought it might have been too late for that. My anxiety went through the roof because I knew we didn't have the resources nor the support we would need if he were to test positive. Being an immigrant family, we barely have any relatives to take care of us. That same day, I called a COVID-19 testing center and made an appointment for my dad. As I slept on the couch in our small apartment, my mind wandered to the gloomy possibilities we'd have to face. First, it was very tough to quarantine my dad properly from the rest of us given the size of our apartment. Secondly and most importantly, my dad could suffer serious complications if he had contracted the virus.

My dad left in the morning and got tested. After two days, as I was staying up late to study, it occurred to me to check if my dad's test results would be available. My hands were trembling. I was scanning the top of the webpage when my eyes fell on the line that would finally put an end to my negative thoughts. It read, "Not detected". I gave a sigh of relief and immediately sprang up from my seat and woke my mom up. I said, "Thank God. He tested negative." Then, I went into the room where my dad was sleeping and looked at his face. I was truly grateful to have my dad by my side."

While this is only my personal experience, I think my story touches on many aspects of the pandemic. First, my story represents the circumstances of so many working families who put their lives at risk by going to work to keep society running. Many don't have a

choice but to continue working amidst the dangerous conditions. Here's the reality, the pandemic has disproportionately affected those with low socioeconomic status either because they're unable to stay safely at home or because they lack access to healthcare and other resources, which contribute to poorer health status overall. As someone studying health sciences, I'm interested in looking at the association between socioeconomic determinants and health outcomes. The pandemic has shed light on certain inadequacies that we could hopefully remediate in the future. This experience has taught me to appreciate my loved ones more than ever, and it has shown me that we should stand with each other in times of adversity like my dad did with his neighbors. While I was lucky that my family and I were healthy, the panic of a potential loss gave me a taste of what my community has been going through. My heart aches for the families that lost loved ones to the pandemic and particularly for those who had scarce resources to protect and support themselves.