

## Fatherlessness: A Second Look

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### Opinion

While it seems that in the modern era some concepts, ideas or desires may have been changed, distorted or omitted, some of them look to be alive with disregard of time or place. Every motivation that has roots in the instincts of human beings is exempt from obliteration, even if no clear explanation justifies its survival. Among such kinds of drives, there is one impetus which expresses itself insistently. In societies where sexual relationships are not restricted to official marriage or single partners, many infants may be found who may not know their biological father. Though many of them may be assisted and informed regarding that query by their mother or other relatives, some of them may never be informed due to loss, forgetfulness, confusion or disinterest in their mother. In such a situation, though it seems that if the former fatherless child becomes a mature adult, who has an acceptable social position, job or mate, the said curiosity should have lost its significance and subsequently be ignored, the end-result is not always stress-free. On the other hand, it seems that, at least in some cases, the intensity of the said curiosity remains the same, if not more than before, even after personal independence and development. Some catastrophic reactions by such types of explorers, which are usually expressed after their futile attempts, show that, at least for some of them, no decline of the importance of the said unanswered question has ever occurred and it has saved its importance after puberty with the same amount of implication as during childhood. Finding acceptable and functional replies to a lot of questions around us has a great power for reduction of tensions which may arise due to ignorance, obliviousness or illiteracy, an effect that may lessen difficulties and prolong survival, as well. 'Who is my mommy', 'Who is my daddy', 'Who cares me', and 'who are my blood relatives',

are among the first questions with respect to personal identity and social position, which are imposing themselves on the child's mind-set. After that and according to the developmental stage of cognition, other questions, like what my nationality is, arise.

On the other hand, some of the aforesaid characteristics constitute the main data of identification documentation (ID) around the world. So, it is not surprising that the worries of a fatherless child will not be soothed without receiving a reasonable reply respecting his or her initial query or original identity. But, why does not the said query lose its significance, even after puberty and personal development? Maybe, because it is part of everybody's identification, and without that there is a gap in the totality of the character or personal identity. Comparably, through history, human beings have tried ceaselessly to discover their ancestry, families and alterations that have been inflicted on them. Likewise, roots or origins of groups and nations have always been a main subject for historical, nationalistic, sociological and anthropological research, as well. Anyhow, for a childless father, there can be a lot of questions, which may seem nonsense or dismissed from the standpoint of an outsider. For example, is he or she the result of an incestuous relationship? Was his father a qualified person or a jerky and of no use? Was his mother a prostitute that cannot remember his papa among a lot of patrons? Was he or she the baby of a devil, murderer or addict? Did his father care about him or hate him? and so on.

For a desperate or sentimental seeker, each reply may have such a subjective importance that nobody can comprehend that, even his or her own mother. Everybody lives with his own concepts or favorites, and the ideas of a person who does not know how or by the help of who he or she has come into this world, may have unique subjective

meanings for only himself or herself, and nobody may understand his or her inner pain, tension or suffering, except other fatherless individuals. On the other hand, the psychological profile of a fatherless child who has never identified and seen his or her father, is different from a child who knows his absent father. Similarly, the psychological silhouette of an orphan, who does not know both his mother and father, may not be similar to the mentality of a single-parent child. Therefore, for the purpose of research or management, the situation of such a child must be differentiated or classified according to their inner psychological needs or deficits. In child and adolescent psychiatry, loss of a parent is considered as a risk factor for behavioral or emotional disorders, like depression, impairment in school performance, and increased risk of self-harm or hostility. Similarly, the absence of a parent may inevitably lead to more negligence or put the child at higher risk of abuse or accident-prone situations. As said by Carl Gustav Jung, the archetype of father is not an acquired phenomenon and, like the archetype of mother, has roots in the collective unconscious of human beings. So, it is imprinted on the mind-set of people, and the said absences, producing a mismatch between supposed archetypes and real shortages, may induce constant tension, which may not be released without finding an acceptable response. Also, according to Donald Winnicott, problematic parenting, including a shortage of apt minders, may destabilize a child's holding environment and deprive him of good-enough mothering, which seems necessary for evolving of sense of self. Classically, lack of a father may interfere with apt identification for male offspring.

On the other hand, lack of parents, may restrict enough resources for later projection, scapegoating or blaming others for current problems. Essentially, such a fatherless child is prone, as well, to emotional deprivation, which may retard him or her physically and mentally [1,2]. Children need love throughout their childhood, and deprivation of love in their first 3 years may have a profound detrimental effect. It may retard them in their development and in their physical growth and may cause dwarfism with decreased human growth hormone secretion from the pituitary. In later childhood they may display aggressiveness, selfishness, excessive thumb sucking or defective verbal reasoning [3,4]. While children react differently to emotional deprivation and separation from a parent, there may be genetic or constitutional factors which govern a child's response to his environment. Moreover, it is a mistake to suppose that emotional deprivation is confined to institutions. Anyway, like a nation which tries to consolidate its uniqueness, solidarity and characteristics, more and more, by investigating in its historical principles, documents and heritage, parents of a child, too, are social foundations of its essence, whether meaningful or meaningless. It is a subjective issue and does not ask for others' sympathy. But, psychiatrists' empathy or counselors' understanding is necessary if psychopharmacologic or psychological interventions become obligatory. A simple comment, which may label the said personal and psychological urge as an illogical obsession, is

not enough for alleviation of long-lasting inner tension. Maybe, empathic counseling, supportive psychoanalytic psychotherapy or problem-solving strategy can be accounted as appropriate psychological methods for dealing with such a real and conscious, but irresolvable, dilemma, if the said confusion has ended in a psychological problem that demands therapeutic intervention.

While medications, as well, can be helpful in refractory cases, many times such a curiosity is only among non-psychiatric conditions that may demand further attention, without any necessity for psychiatric diagnosis, labelling or implementation of psychiatric treatments [5]. In fact, most of these inquirers do not have any psychiatric complications. In this regard, social stigma, also, may play an important role, which may turn a personal problem into a social problem, too. Therefore, fatherlessness, like orphan hood, may be considered a psychosocial phenomenon, which can be due to the inability of subjects to handle the situation in an inconsiderate society. So, sociocultural issues may have a direct impact on the said problem [6]. For example, by abusing 'orphanage' as dirty words for defaming or insulting rivals, or as jokes and jeers, or supposing them as heartless psychopaths [7]. Accordingly, it can be debated in the field of social psychology, in addition to critical, clinical, cognitive, behavioral and psychodynamic psychology. Anyhow, all fatherless persons and orphans, are respectful persons and honorable fellow citizens, who only want to know their father, and others' duty, whether therapist, counselor, friend or relative, includes helping them, compassionately, to find reasonable answers to their rightful questions.

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