

‘Succession syndrome’ prevalent among wealthy households, psychiatrists warn

An addiction centre says the dynastic struggles of the TV show are indicative of struggles faced by powerful families



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As the hit HBO drama show Succession draws to an end, one of the world’s leading addiction treatment centres has warned of the prevalence of “Succession syndrome” whereby successful and wealthy households “create a deep-rooted fear of weakness and failure” in children.

Paracelsus Recovery is an international centre in London and Zurich that offers medical help, therapy and counselling for up to \$132,000 (£107,000) a week. It said almost 40% of their patients struggle with Succession syndrome – a term used to refer to a range of mental health conditions and addiction problems affecting children of extremely affluent households.

The Golden Globe and Emmy-winning series, which tells the story of billionaire patriarch Logan Roy and his power-hungry children, has been hailed as one of the best television series of all time. Its themes, including battles between the Roy children over control of his media empire, have echoes of dynastic struggles over wealth and power throughout history.

But according to Paracelsus, it is also indicative of the real-life afflictions faced by wealthy and powerful families like the Roys. While children of wealthy parents grow up with many privileges, Paracelsus said, many suffer

from what psychiatrists have termed “[affluent neglect](#)”, where their parents are physically and emotionally absent.

Wealth, the centre added, made a person about 27% more likely to abuse alcohol, and narcissistic personality disorder was also common among patients. In *Succession*, this is demonstrated by Kendall’s constant shifting from grandiose to vulnerable narcissism, Shiv’s disregard for other people’s feelings, and Roman’s inability to connect with others.

“We see so many children of affluent families suffering from mental health and addiction problems that we’ve started calling this *Succession* syndrome,” said Jan Gerber, founder and CEO of [Paracelsus Recovery](#). “It is characterised by anxiety, depression, narcissistic personality disorder and sometimes other conditions like bipolar, and alcohol and substance abuse.

“The success of *Succession* has highlighted the complicated and potentially damaging effects of coming from an extremely successful family. The Roy children are all very damaged individuals.”

Modern parallels of the *Succession* story can be found in family dramas of global media and other business tycoons. Ahead of the series finale on Sunday night, [Showrunner Jesse Armstrong wrote in the Guardian](#) that “for Logan Roy, [Rupert] Murdoch, [Sumner] Redstone and [Robert] Maxwell were my holy trinity of models”. And the inspiration for Logan’s children, he added, “were the children of these magnates”.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that countless articles have called [Succession the King Lear of the media empire age](#). Shakespeare’s tragedy delved into the power struggles and conflicts that arose within a family, as Lear decided to divide his kingdom among his daughters based on their public declarations of love for him.

This theme has always attracted fascination from artistic creators and consumers alike – Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane* also [drew inspiration from the life of media mogul William Randolph Hearst](#) and the succession battles for his media empire.

By way of explaining the causes and impact of these battles, Paracelsus said there was a [link between attachment disruption in childhood, subsequent feelings of inner loneliness, and narcissistic personality traits](#). Studies have also shown that [the more wealth one acquires, the less empathic and more ethically ambiguous they become](#). Children are then raised in households that permeate pressure, isolation and a sense of superiority, the centre said.



“Although this syndrome affects a relatively narrow section of society, these people can go on to wield positions of real power and authority – employing thousands of people in many cases – so we all have an interest in their mental wellbeing,” Gerber said.

“These families typically function more like a business than a community, making bonding hard. For parents and children alike, these internal issues can set the stage for conditions such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse and codependency.”