



Examination of Parent-Child Communication in Terms of Various Variables in The COVID-19 Lockdown Process: Sample of Turkey

COVID-19 Karantina Sürecinde Ebeveyn-Çocuk İletişiminin Çeşitli Değişkenler Açısından İncelenmesi: Türkiye Örneği

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This research was conducted to examine parent-child communication in the COVID-19 lockdown process in terms of various variables. **Methods:** The study was conducted as a descriptive, cross-sectional study before the COVID 19 vaccination program in Turkey between May 1 and June 1, 2020. The sample of the study consisted of 1151 parents with children between the ages of 0-18. The data were collected using "Introductory Information Form" and "The Parent-Child Communication Scale (PCCS)". **Results:** It was determined that the PCCS average score of parents who go out every day (109.68±10.32) during the COVID-19 lockdown process was significantly lower than the average score of the parents who never (113.27±8.35) and very rare (113.44±8.80) go out. It was found that the communication level of the parents who spent more than 3 hours with their children was better and more than half of the parents stated that spent more than 3 hours with their child ($p < 0.05$). **Conclusions:** It was found that there was an increase in the time parents spent with their children during the COVID-19 lockdown process.

Key words: Communication, COVID-19, lockdown, child, parents, nursing

ÖZET

Amaç: Bu araştırma COVID-19 karantina sürecindeki ebeveyn-çocuk iletişiminin çeşitli değişkenler açısından incelemesi amacıyla yapılmıştır. **Gereç ve Yöntem:** Araştırma 1 Mayıs- 1 Haziran 2020 tarihleri arasında Türkiye'de COVID 19 aşılama programından önce tanımlayıcı, kesitsel bir çalışma olarak yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini 0-18 yaş arası çocuğu olan 1151 ebeveyn oluşturmuştur. Veriler "Tanıtıcı Bilgi Formu" ve "Ebeveyn-Çocuk İletişim Ölçeği (PCCS)" kullanılarak toplanmıştır. **Bulgular:** COVID-19 karantina sürecinde her gün dışarı çıkan ebeveynlerin (109,68 ± 10,32) PCCS puan ortalaması, hiç (113,27 ± 8,35) ve çok nadir (113,44 ± 8,80) dışarı çıkmayan ebeveynlerin puan ortalamasından anlamlı derecede düşük olduğu belirlenmiştir. Çocuklarıyla 3 saatten fazla zaman geçiren ebeveynlerin iletişim düzeyinin daha iyi olduğu ve ebeveynlerin yarısından fazlasının çocuklarıyla 3 saatten fazla zaman geçirdikleri saptanmıştır ($p < .05$). **Sonuç:** COVID-19 karantina sürecinde ebeveynlerin çocuklarıyla beraber geçirdiği zamanda bir artış olduğu tespit edildi. **Anahtar kelimeler:** COVID-19, çocuk, ebeveyn, iletişim, karantina, hemşirelik

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, epidemic diseases caused by microorganisms and the rapid spread of these diseases in societies have caused massive deaths of people and radical changes in some political and social structures.¹ Humanity is trying to cope with a new coronavirus epidemic which is the biggest pandemic of the 21st century and affects the whole world at the same time, can spread so rapidly and result in death.²

Towards the end of December 2019, a series of pneumonia cases of unknown cause were detected in Wuhan (Hubei, China). In January 2020, analysis of lower respiratory tract samples taken from patients revealed that the causative agent of pneumonia was SARS-CoV-2, a subtype of coronavirus. The World Health Organization (WHO) named the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 as "COVID-19" in February 2020 and declared it as a pandemic on March 2020.^{3,4}

Children; although they do not appear to be the victims of the pandemic, are one of the groups significantly affected by the pandemic.⁵ Because COVID-19 in children is generally asymptomatic and has a mild clinical course, it has a very important role in the spread of the disease. Thus, it is emphasized that the social isolation of children is important.⁶ In many countries, schools were closed to prevent the spread of the disease, education and training continued with distance education. Individuals were called to stay at home, social isolation such as curfew, homework, part-time work, social isolation, and social distance protection.⁷

Communication, which constitutes an important dimension of social life, is a dynamic interaction process that includes verbal and non-verbal messages that enable the exchange of feelings and thoughts between people. The fact that parents have effective and satisfying communication with their children during childhood is seen as an important factor in the development of a healthy personality by supporting all development areas in terms of physical, social, and psychological aspects.⁸⁻¹⁰ Curfews, and providing parents with the opportunity to work from home full/part-time enabled children and parents to spend more time together during the pandemic period. In this process, healthy parent and child communication have an essential role to protect the mental health of children and identifying important problems in advance without ignoring them. This research was conducted to examine parent-child communication in the COVID-19 lockdown process in terms of various variables.

METHODS

The study was designed as a descriptive, cross-sectional study. It was conducted in all regions of Turkey from May 01st to June 01st, 2020. The study sample included 1151 parents with children between the ages of 0-18 in Turkey. In the present study, snowball sampling was applied.¹¹ Inclusion criteria for the study; having a child between the ages of 0-18, enough reading and writing skills, ability to fill out web-based surveys, create parents who agree to participate in the study. The criteria for exclusion from the study; mental retardation, not having enough reading and writing skills, parents who do not have internet usage facilities will not be able to participate.

Data Collection

The data were collected using "Introductory Information Form" and "The Parent-Child Communication Scale (PCCS)". The participants were reached online. The parents were informed that their data would not be used other than the purpose of the study and that they could leave the study at any time they wish. The items in the questionnaires were filled in by the participants. It took about 10-15 minutes to fill out a form.

Data Collection Tools

Introductory Information Form

This form consists of 17 items and was developed by the researchers in line with the literature to determine the sociodemographic characteristics of the parents. 12-14 In the introductory information form, there are questions about the parent's age, education, number, and age of children. Besides, 7 questions such as "How much time did you spend with your child during the COVID-19 lockdown process, did the time you spend with your child increase?" were asked.

The Parent-Child Communication Scale (PCCS):

The 27-item scale was developed by Kahraman and Tanrikulu in 2016 was used to determine communication between parents and their children. It is a 5-point Likert type "5: always, 4: often, 3: sometimes, 2: rarely, 1: never". The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 47, and the highest score is 135. The high score obtained from the scale indicates the high level of communication between parents and their children.¹³ In this study, the Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was found 0.83.

Data Analyses

The study data were analyzed using the SPSS-22.0 computer program. Number, percentage and mean values were used in the statistical analysis of the data. The analysis of variance was used to determine the relationship between the mean scores of the PCCS and COVID-19 variables because it fulfills the parametric test assumptions. The significance level of the statistical tests was established at a $p < 0.05$.

Ethical considerations

The study was performed according to the Helsinki Declaration, and the University's Clinical Research Ethics Board (Ethical approval number: 2020-04/16) approved this study. The participants' online written informed consent was taken and they were reported that they could withdraw from the interview whenever they desired and that all information would be kept hidden.

RESULTS

The mean age of the participants was 36.18 ± 6.39 . Of the participants, 80.0% were female, 97.3% were married, 62.7% were employed, 48.6% were university graduates, 94.4% were lived in the city and 89.9% were lived in elementary families. Of the parents, 46.0% had 2 children, 48.8% had good income (Table 1).

Characteristics		Mean	%
Age Mean \pm SD		36.180 \pm 6.39	
Gender	Female	921	80.0
	Male	230	20.0
Marital status	Married	1120	97.3
	Single	31	2.7
Family Type	Elementary family	1035	89.9
	Extended family	100	8.7
	Single-family	16	1.4
Number of children	1 child	386	33.5
	2 children	530	46.0
	3 children and above	225	20.5
Living space	City	1086	94.4
	Town	45	3.9
	Rural	20	1.7
Employment status	Employed	722	62.7
	Unemployed	429	37.3
Education status	Primary school	85	7.4
	Middle School	75	6.5
	High school	237	20.6
	University	559	48.6
	Postgraduate	195	16.9
Income	Good	562	48.8
	Middle	540	46.9
	Bad	49	4.3

In this study, values that could be obtained from PCCS were in the range of 88.00-131.00 and the mean value was 112.20 ± 9.20 .

The PCCS average score of parents who go out every day (109.68 ± 10.32) during the COVID-19 lockdown process was significantly lower than the average score of the parents who never (113.27 ± 8.35) and very rare (113.44 ± 8.80) go out. The PCCS average score of parents who spend more than 3 hours (114.03 ± 8.97) with their child during this process was significantly higher than the average score of the other parents. The PCCS average score of parents who spend to support the development and communication 3 hours above with their child was 117.19 ± 8.58 and it was higher than others. Compared to before the COVID-19 lockdown process, 69.2% of parents stated that the time they spent on activities that support the development and communication of their child increased. During this lockdown process, the PCCS average score of the parents who preferred to play games with their children was 113.06 ± 8.98 . Parents who spent most of their time doing housework (111.17 ± 9.19) or other (110.52 ± 9.50) activities had a significantly lower PCCS average score than parents who preferred to spend time with their children (114.66 ± 8.51) (Table 2).

Table 2. The variance of the mean PCCS score with COVID-19 variables (n=1151)					
Variables	n	%	PCCS	F	p
			Mean±sd		
How often did you go out during the COVID-19 lockdown period (work, shopping ...)?					
Never ^a	154	13.4	113.27±8.35	8.167 between e and a,b	.00
Very rare ^b	552	48.0	113.44±8.80		
Sometimes ^c	290	25.2	110.52±9.40		
Often ^d	68	5.9	110.05±10.03		
Every day ^e	87	7.6	109.68±10.32		
How much total time did you spend with your child in a day during the COVID-19 lockdown process?					
3 hours above ^a	656	57.0	114.03±8.97	21.769 between a and b, c, d	.00
2-3 hours ^b	205	17.8	110.40±8.78		
1-2 hours ^c	185	16.1	109.22±8.38		
Less than 1 hours ^d	105	19.1	109.51±10.19		
During the COVID-19 lockdown process, how much time did you spend on average in a day for activities that support the development and communication of your child?					
3 hours above ^a	201	17.5	117.19±8.58	43.227 between a ve b, c, d	0.00
2-3 hours ^b	181	15.7	114.06±8.63		
1-2 hours ^c	340	29.5	112.23±8.49		
Less than 1 hours ^d	429	37.3	109.04±9.04		
Did the total amount of time you spend with your child in one day increase compared to before the COVID-19 lockdown process?					
Did not increase	216	18.8	111.43±9.72	2.420	.08
I am undecided	57	5.0	110.33±8.32		
Increase	878	76.2	112.51±9.11		
Compared to before the COVID-19 lockdown process, did the time you spend on activities that support the development and communication of your child have increased?					
Did not increase ^a	239	20.8	110.43±9.43	15.056 between c and a, b	.00
I am undecided ^b	115	10.0	109.23±9.50		
Increase ^c	797	69.2	113.15±8.93		
What is the most time spent with your child during the COVID-19 lockdown process?					
By playing games ^a	469	40.7	113.06±8.98	4.069 between a and d	.00
As an aid to my child's lessons ^b	334	29.0	112.36±8.95		
Doing housework with my child ^c	111	9.6	111.53±9.03		
Other ^d	237	20.6	110.58±9.86		
What do you spend most of your time with in the COVID-19 lockdown process?					
Housework ^a	369	32.1	111.17±9.19	14.215 between b and a, c	.00
I spend time with my child (playing games, doing activities ...) ^b	362	31.5	114.66±8.51		
I continue my business from home ^c	96	8.3	112.52±8.92		
Other ^d	324	28.1	110.52±9.50		

F: One Way ANOVA, $p < .05$

*(social media, computer games, watching TV-movies, listening to music, reading books, doing sports ...)

DISCUSSION

While children and adolescents are not seen as risk groups for COVID-19 disease, the quarantine period can have many adverse effects on them.¹⁵ At the same time, a state of isolation can reduce the difficulties and stress of daily life in some families, possibly facilitating parent-child relationships.^{16,17}

However, the COVID-19 pandemic may be different in the nature of the disaster as it may bring families closer together through lockdown arrangements, increased parent-child communication, and reflection time.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ In this study, the parent-child communication of parents who never and very rarely go out was significantly upper than the parents who go out every day in the COVID-19 lockdown

process. Gambin et al. (2020) had obtained that emphasized a need to focus not only on the negative but also on the positive consequences of the COVID-19 lockdown for children and parents.¹⁸ Low family prosperity is an important risk factor for the negative effects of the COVID-19 lockdown process.¹⁹ In this study, nearly half of the families had a good income and more than half of the parents had a job. This situation may have caused the child-parent communication to be at a better level.

The communication level of the parents who spent more than 3 hours with their children was better and more than half of the parents stated that spent more than 3 hours with their child ($p < .05$). However, the number of parents who spend on average more than 3 hours on activities that support the development and communication of their child was very small. The communication level of these parents was better than the parents who spend less than 3 hours on activities that support the development and communication of their child ($p < .05$). The fact that the number of parents who spend on average more than 3 hours on activities that support the development and communication of their child is less than the number of the parents who spend more than 3 hours with their children and conversely communication levels were better. While no significant difference in terms of communication between parents who say that their time with their children has increased and parents who say that undecided or did not increase, there was a significant difference in terms of communication between parents who say that their time on activities that support the development and communication of their child has increased and parents who say that undecided or did not increase. This shows that the content of the time spent with the child is more important than the duration.

The COVID-19 epidemic, which affects the whole world, brings with it many problems that will have profound effects on families. Coyne et al. reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has left many parents with difficult choices. For example; parents may be struggling with the stress of working outside and cleaning their homes during the pandemic. In addition, some parents may have elderly people who have to look after and ensure their safety. Increased responsibilities and expectations during the pandemic may leave parents with fear and uncertainty about how to keep their families safe.²⁰ In this study, some of the parents stated that was unemployed. Besides, there were parents with poor incomes. More than half of the parents stated that they spent their time with housework, social media, computer games, watching TV-movies, listening to music, and such during the COVID-19 lockdown process. During this process, parents are highly affected by stress factors.^{21,22} Activities such as

housework, social media, computer games can be used as a stress management strategy. The communication level of parents who stated that spent most of their time in this way was lower than those who say "I spend time with my child".

In this research, the majority of parents stated that they spent time playing with their children during the COVID-19 lockdown process. Play is of vital importance for the healthy physical and mental development of children. It helps children and adolescents to play out alternative scenarios and consider the various positive and negative consequences of their behavior in a safe and attention-grabbing context. Play is a natural tool that teaches children to cooperate, share, overcome challenges, and exchange ideas with others, enabling them to develop resilience to survive. Although the game is seen as an activity specific to childhood, it is also available in adults. For this reason, play is one of the important activities that contribute to the development and preservation of physical, social, cognitive, and emotional functions throughout life. Millions of children were face school closure and isolation in their own homes.^{22,23} In this study, the communication level of the parents who preferred to play games with their children was better than parents who stated that they spent their time with social media, computer games, watching TV movies, listening to music, and such during the COVID-19 lockdown process ($p < .05$). Play is an effective tool to be used in communication with children during the pandemic process.

Study Limitations

The results of this research are limited to the parents participating in the research.

CONCLUSION

In a conclusion, it was found that there was an increase in the time parents spent with their children during the COVID-19 lockdown process. Parents are in the best position to provide support to their children through effective communication and interaction, and to protect children from the negative effects of the lock-down process.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests.

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