



Pandemi Döneminde Çocukların İyi Oluşları ve Aile İletişimi

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

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Öz

Bu çalışma, COVID-19 sırasında aile iletişim stilleri ile okul öncesi çocukların duygusal iyi oluşları arasındaki ilişkiyi analiz etmektedir. Türkiye'de Mart-Haziran 2021 tarihleri arasında okul öncesi çocuğu olan 243 ebeveyn ile çevrimiçi anket yapılmıştır. Araştırmada Korona virüs Anksiyete Ölçeği, Sosyal ve Duygusal Baş Etme Ölçeği, Ana baba Tutum Ölçeği, Okul Öncesi Sosyal Sosyal Duygusal Beceriler ve Dayanıklılık Ölçeği ve Duyusal iyi oluş bilgilendirme formlarından yararlanılmıştır. Araştırma, ebeveynlerin, kaygıları kontrol altına alabildikleri durumda ancak demokratik tutuma sahiplerse çocuklarını COVID-19'un olumsuz etkilerinden koruyabileceğini göstermektedir ($r=-.113$; $p<.05$). Bu süreçte, bu tutuma sahip aileler, ev içi ($r=-.140$; $p<.05$) ve açık hava aktivitelerinden ($r=-.133$; $p<.05$) faydalanabilirler. Diğer yandan, dijital faaliyetlerin bu süre zarfında çocukların refahı üzerinde zararlı bir etkisi olması durumu, yalnızca otoriter tutumların düşük olduğu ailelerde ön plana çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Aile içi iletişim,
pandemi,
çocukların iyi oluşları.

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Family Communication Styles and Preschool Children's Emotional Well-being

Abstract

The relationship between family communication styles and preschool children's emotional well-being during COVID-19 was analyzed. An online survey conducted with 243 parents of preschool children from March to June 2021 in Turkey. Coronavirus Anxiety Scale (CAS), Coping Response Inventory (CIS, Social- Emotional Well-Being and Resilience Scale and Emotional Well-being Information Forum and Ad-hoc questionnaire were conducted in the study. The study shows that only an authoritative attitude can protect children from the negative effects of COVID-19 when the anxiety of these parents is controlled ($r=-.113$; $p<.05$). They can benefit from indoor ($r=-.140$; $p<.05$) and outdoor activities ($r=-.133$; $p<.05$) as their correlation with behavioral problems in children is negative. Digital activities had a detrimental impact on children's well-being over this time, but its prediction is only limited to families where authoritarian attitudes are low.

Keywords

Family communication,
pandemic,
children's well-being.

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Introduction

The first reported instance of COVID-19 was discovered in China on November 17, 2019, and within two years, more than 500 million cases had been verified, including minimum 6 million fatalities. Health and economic problems were not the only ones that families face during this period. Lockdown measures have mostly invited vulnerability and risk within families. Parents are not left to fend for themselves, not only in terms of assisting their children for their online education but also in terms of housekeeping (Spinelli et al., 2020). Schools were closed, many babysitters had to quit their jobs, contact with peers and grandparents were not allowed due to health concerns. In addition to this, many parents had to work from home. All these for sure has increased the burden on parents' shoulders (Spinelli et al., 2020).

Previous research suggest that Pandemic has higher influence on children's emotional and social development (Singh et al., 2020). For children, the pandemic era was a time when the outer world was packed with illness dangers. Children are not allowed to walk outside, touch anything outside, attend kindergartens since they have been closed, or participate in social contacts with their classmates. There were also several directions from the families, such as washing their hands, keeping a safe distance from other people, and wearing masks outside.

While the direct actors influencing the children decreased their impact throughout this time, indirect factors influencing the child, such as the parent's employment condition, have gained in importance. During this time, many parents either lost their jobs, struggled to adjust to working conditions from home, or were unable to get the assistance they had previously received (caregiver, family help, etc.). In brief, a stressed parent, and a bored children as never before are left alone together. When children are restricted at home, without access to outdoor activities or social interaction, efficient communication within families becomes especially important (Wang et al., 2020).

Here, not all children are affected the same and might show differences in families with different communication styles. Some children even are not being affected negatively during this psychical distancing under the protection of their families. According to a study conducted by Gimenez-Dasi et al., (2020) in Spain, approximately 20% of children were pleased to be able to spend more time with their parents. Even though they were not the majority, they made up a considerable portion of the population, and it's important to investigate how children were protected by their families throughout this time. Parents were their children's only source of emotional guidance, and it is critical for parents to understand that they can safeguard their children's emotional well-being and prevent emotional dysregulations even when they are subjected to high amounts of stress. For this reason, family communication styles, which could either create a risk or create an opportunity to establish better bonds with their children.

Family Communication Styles

Families differ not only in how they are structured such as extended, nuclear, or single parent etc. but also in how members interact and communicate with one another (Cole et al, 2005). Families create and maintain a wide range of communication patterns. According to Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2006), one

theoretical approach to addressing this range of various communication patterns is to develop a typology of families, which suggests core characteristics of family life. The typology is noteworthy because, in addition to being descriptive, it correlates family types with a variety of essential family processes and outcomes (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2006).

Conversation orientation and conformity orientation are two key dimensions in family communication (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2006). Four distinct family communication styles are defined by these two dimensions. First, families with a high level of conversation and conformity orientation are defined as authoritative. These parents are deeply concerned about their children's opinions. They devote time and effort to ensuring that their children understand the reasoning behind their actions, and children typically grow to value family conversations and to embrace family values and ideas. Second, the main thing in permissive families, where conversation is high and conformity is low, is open communication and equal participation of the children in decision-making. However, the control and/or discipline is low in these families and children are mainly the bosses of the family. Authoritarian families are the opposite of permissive families, with high conformity and low conversation. Parents value obedience because they believe they should make all decisions. They see no point in explaining their reasoning to their children. Finally, families with low scores on both dimensions are labeled as *laissez-faire*, as parents show little interest in their children's decisions or value communication with them (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2006).

This research has gathered information from only parents. Thus, it not practical to include neglectful attitude in this study as no parent can easily admit that their relationship with their child is poor. On the other hand, "parenting occurs within a cultural belief system that influences attitudes towards parenting practices" (Durrant et al., 2003 cited in Kuppens and Ceulemans, 2019). Therefore, overprotective attitude which is widely been used by Turkish studies is added to the scale.

Emotional Well-being

In terms of well-being, despite different descriptions, a common theme has emerged from them which is "feeling good and functioning well". It has two dimensions; (1) objective well-being, which includes the basic needs and rights such as food, physical health, education, and safety and (2) subjective well-being, which focuses on how people feel about their lives, their life satisfactions, and positive emotions (Martiono, 2017). How children are adjusting to these altering circumstances during COVID-19 and how they are coping with it is being analyzed to examine the children's subjective well-being.

The process of successfully adapting despite challenging and threatening circumstances is called resilience, which refers to people adapting well (normal adjustment) in the face of considerable adversity or trauma (Holte et al., 2018). Though there are some perspectives, which see resilience as a personality trait that individuals are born with, it is more probable that this can be emerged from protective processes and qualities such as self-regulation abilities, good parenting, community, and successful schools," (Holte et al., 2014).

What children require is good family functioning and family communication, which can help them build resilience and protect their emotional well-being during these uncertain times. In terms of family

functioning, leisure is one of the most essential elements in developing cohesive and healthy connections among family members (Zabriskie & Mc.Cormick, 2001). The Core and Balance model of family leisure functioning is founded on the idea that family leisure serves family systems' needs for balanced stability and change (Smith, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2009). There are two types of family leisure activities: core and balance.

Core family leisure, are the activities which everyone can easily access such as playing games, board games, spending time together at home etc. These are mostly the ones at home and with low budget (Smith, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2009). On the other hand, balance family activities include family holidays, outdoor activities etc. It was suggested that core leisure activities build stability and create bonds among family members whereas balance leisure activities address novelty and change where families can develop their adaptive skills and greater family flexibility (Smith, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2009). However, previous research suggest that core activities are the most powerful predictor of all elements of family functioning (Townsend, Puybroeck, & Zabriskie, 2017).

This is also crucial for this research as during COVID-19 period, balance family leisure activities were dramatically diminished, and families are left alone with only core leisure activities. It is comforting to acknowledge that families can use basic, daily activities to create flexibility and adaptability to new challenges.

Previous Research

There have been several studies in the literature that illustrate the consequences of social isolation, psychical detachment, and confinement on the subjective well-being of adults and children. First outcome of these is that when caregivers experience grief, stress, it effects directly young child's emotional well-beings and a trauma at their developmental stage may have long term consequences. Gaussman-Pines et al., (2020) conducted research with a vulnerable family (hourly service workers) with little children of aged 2-7 and reported deterioration on both adult's (negative mood has increased from 36,6 % to 41,2 %) and children's emotional well-being (child daily uncooperative behavior increased from 41,7 % to 45,1 %) since the start of the crisis.

Pisano and colleagues (2020) performed study in Italy by asking ad hoc questionnaires to 6510 parents about the probable emotional and behavioral correlations of COVID-19 in children aged 4 to 10 years during quarantine. This research is significant since Italy was one of the most impacted countries in the world, and the government promptly imposed restrictions. According to the study, half of the youngsters displayed "increased irritability, intolerance to rules, whims, and excessive requests", while the remaining 20% displayed mood swings, sleep issues, and anxiety. What is surprising is that, even though more than 90% of the children appear to be adapting to the pandemic's limits, half of these children displayed signs of worry that they had not before shown (Pisano et al., 2020).

Morelli et al. (2020) did another study in Italy to evaluate the relationship between parental stress and emotional well-being of children. A total of 277 parents with children aged 6 to 13 were polled online. The study's findings revealed that the COVID-19 risk index (infected relatives, friends, and family

members, living in high-risk areas for COVID-19, working as a health worker) and the family risk index (lower SES, worsened working situation, being a single parent) have a partial influence on the parent's distress levels. Like this, Whittle, and colleagues (2020) found that low socioeconomic status and single parent households are also affecting the parental distress, thus indirectly children's well-beings during the pandemic.

On the other hand, Morelli et al., (2020) propose that even when parents are stressed, they can safeguard their children's well-being if they manage to regulate their emotions and carry out parental tasks properly. Similarly, Wang et al., (2020) emphasize the significance of good parenting during confinement, arguing that with the correct family communication practices, family relationships may be reinforced during these periods and children's psychologies can be safeguarded.

For instance, Gimenez-Dasi et al. (2020) administered the SENA questionnaire to youngsters aged 7 to 17 years. To reduce participant burden, the study selected only specific scales related to psychological adjustment, including Attentional Problems, Depression, Challenging Behaviors, Emotional Regulation, Hyperactivity, and Willingness to study (for Primary Education version). Children indicated that they were mostly bored (61%), worried (36%), and afraid (16 percent). Surprisingly, 45 percent of them answered that they are happy during these weeks of confinement since they get to spend more time with their families. Similarly, 40 percent of families said that their children were unaffected or even improved throughout this period, even if their children had minor behavioral issues. Thus, the second outcome is that communication and relation with parents is critical in protecting children from the detrimental effects of pandemics.

The effects of actors such as schools, teachers, grandparents, peers, who affect the development of children in a normal time, have decreased a lot during the COVID-19 period, and many of them have even been zeroed. On top of the school closures, Turkey is an important case study for demonstrating the impacts of COVID-19 on children's emotional well-being because it is one of the few countries that imposes curfews on children. Curfews exclude actors such as friends in the neighborhood in children's ecosystem. As a result, the pandemic has offered researchers with a once-in-a-life time opportunity to study the relationship between parents and child well-being.

Methodology

Research Design

The major purpose of this study is to investigate the link between family communication methods and children's emotional and behavioral well-being during times of psychical distancing. There is a scarcity of scholarly evidence on the relationship between family communication strategies and children's well-being during a pandemic. Despite several studies demonstrating the worsening of children's mental health throughout the pandemic, there are few sources that focus on the effects of parents, who remain the sole sources of reference and education for their children during this time.

As a result, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature on family communication by conducting a correlation analysis between communication methods and children's emotional well-being

during times of crisis and uncertainty. To examine children's emotional well-being, this study will focus on how they adjust to this shifting circumstance (schools closed, no interaction with classmates, etc.) and look at their emotional well-beings through a resilience perspective, taking COVID-19 as a phenomenon that tests children's ability to manage. As previously said, resilience refers to the ability to adapt successfully in the face of extreme adversity or tragedy. In this situation, whether youngsters have behavioral issues that they didn't have before during pandemics will be examined.

COVID-19 is not the first disease to threaten the humanity and will unfortunately not be the last. If the relation between family styles and they are coped with lockdown process is better understood, lessons will be taken for further situations. The following questions were researched to be answered:

The following questions were researched to be answered:

1. How are children's emotional well-beings is affected by psychical distancing and how does parenting related to this?
2. How families with different communication styles are affected by COVID-19 in terms of anxiety and how do their coping skills change?
3. Is there a family communication style, which protects children from the negative effects of pandemic? How?

In this regard, the study was carried out in Turkey in March 2021, approximately a year after the outbreak of COVID-19. An online survey (Google Forms) was conducted through a snowball sampling procedure with 243 Turkish parents/careers (aged 18 years and more), who have children from 2 to 6 years old. Finally, The SPSS v.27 program was used to perform correlation analysis on the data acquired in the study. As Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) recommended that all scores were recognized as normally distributed because Skewness and Kurtosis values were between ± 1.5 for all scales.

Instruments

To analyze the emotional well-being of children and how they are related to parental attitudes, this study first examines the anxiety levels of caregivers with four different scales and ad-hoc questions (Covid-19 Related risk, Coronavirus Anxiety Scale, Coping Response Inventory, and 5 Likert -scale questionnaire). Then, this study gather information from parents regarding their family communication styles with Parental Attitude Scale. In addition to this, this study further gathered further information regarding how caregivers spend their times with their children in this physical distancing period. Finally, we examine the emotional well-being of children within the resilience perspective by using Social, Emotional Well-being of Children, and Resilience Scale and 5 Likert scale questionnaire, focusing more on the behavioral problems of children, specifically noticed during this period.

1- The emotional impact of COVID-19 and anxiety levels of caregivers due to COVID-19 were evaluated with the four different scales and ad-hoc questionnaires.

a. **Coronavirus Anxiety Scale (CAS)**, with one dimension and 5 items, developed by Lee (2020) and found valid and reliable for Turkish participants (Akkuzu et al., 2020; Biçer et al., 2020) is used to assess the anxiety levels of caregivers due to COVID-19. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency

coefficient of the scale was found to be .745 for the sample of this study. It should be mentioned that this scale is only is not enough to analyze how caregivers were influenced by the Pandemic. In this regard, this study further analyzes the emotional status of caregivers with the following scales.

b. **COVID-19 related risk** is evaluated by asking whether participants are health professionals or sharing a household with one of them, whether they got infected and stayed in a 14 day of quarantine, whether they lost one of their family members because of the disease and whether they lost anyone from their close circle (relative, neighbor, close friend, etc.)

c. **Coping Response Inventory (CSI)**, developed in 1993 by Moos, and found reliable and variable for Turkish people (Ballı and Kılıç, 2016), is administered to determine the overall coping skills of caregivers. There are six factors to cope with stress in the scale: (1) Religious Coping, (2) Problem Solving, (3) Cognitive Avoidance, (4) Positive Reappraisal, (5) Seeking Professional Support, and (6) Seeking Support from family or friends. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .854 for the sample of this study.

d. 5 Likert scale questionnaire was performed to ask parents whether they have received any help and how they cope with their stress during COVID-19 (to create routine for my child, to be able to spend more time with my child, my partner's support, nanny support, elder family member support, do yoga or sports, to create me time and try to cool down, to get professional support and to get support from close circle). This questionnaire was important for us to further analyze the coping strategies of parents with different family communication styles.

2- The family communication styles were analyzed with Parental Attitude Scale, which was specifically created for pre-school children. To further analyze how caregivers, spend their times with their children during this period, leisure activity questionnaire was performed.

a. **Parental Attitude Scale (PAS)**: Developed by Demir and Şendil (2008), consists of 46 items and determines four different types of family communication styles. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .764 for the sample of this study.

b. **Leisure Activities**: 20 different core activities under 5 main titles (outdoor, indoor, educational, digital, and social), which can easily be conducted with children during a pandemic were determined. Indoor activities consist of reading or telling stories, hugging, or sleeping together, playing games together, dancing or doing sports, and cleaning the house together. Outdoor activities contain walking outside or with a stroller, going to the playground and cycling. Educational activities are attending a course, online education, and studying together. Social activities contain not only socialization with humans (playing with friends, going to a play group or kindergarten, playing with brothers) but also animals (playing with stray animals or playing with domestic animals). Finally, digital activities are talking on the phone with loved ones, playing games on phone, tablet or computer and watching TV.

3- Emotional well-beings of children during COVID-19 were analyzed with Social Emotional Well-being and Resilience Scale and 5 Likert-scale questionnaires, focusing on the behavioral problems what were mentioned in the previous studies during this period.

a. **Social Emotional Well-Being, and Resilience Scale (PERIK)** (Mayr & Ulich, 2009) is administered to assess the overall well-beings of children. The scale was validated and confirmed trustworthy for Turkish children aged 48–72 months in 2018 by Saltalı et al. PERIK is made of six variables and is centered on three concepts: mental health, resilience, and school preparedness. The first is self-regulation, which refers to one's ability to guide, regulate, and control one's own activities (Saltalı et al., 2018). For this study's sample, the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .878.

b. 5-likert scale questionnaire is created to understand the overall emotional well-beings of children during COVID-19. 10 most witnessed behavioral problems for children during COVID-19 were determined (Unrest, crying crises, appetite problems, lack of energy, sleep problems, worry (to lose parents, not able to stay alone), anger problems, susceptibility, attention, and concentration problems and wetting at night or during the day).

4- Finally, the general questions of the demographic information forms consisted of age, gender, education level, relationship status, monthly income, child's age, and number of children. In addition, how their work status is influenced with the COVID-19 is also being investigated (Continue as usual, start working at home, had to quit, or not working).

Study Group

Among 271 participants, 243 of them, who were 221 female (90.9%), and 22 male (9.1%) were found eligible. The ages of the participants ranged from 26 to 51. The mean age of female participants is 36.76 (sd=4.271) and the mean age of the male participants is 37.95 (sd=4.445). The ages of the children of the participants ranged from 2 to 6. The mean age of children is 3.78 (sd=1.326). The demographic information of the participants is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants

| | | n | % |
|---------------------------|---------------|-----|------|
| Gender | Female | 221 | 90.9 |
| | Male | 22 | 9.1 |
| Marital Status | Married | 237 | 97.5 |
| | Single | 6 | 2.5 |
| Number of children | 1 Child | 160 | 65.8 |
| | 2 Children | 74 | 30.5 |
| | 3 Children | 8 | 3.3 |
| | 4 Children | 1 | 0.4 |
| Education | Primary | 1 | .4 |
| | Lyceum | 6 | 2.5 |
| | Undergraduate | 132 | 54.3 |
| | Graduate | 104 | 42.8 |
| Health Employee | No | 185 | 76.1 |
| | Yes | 58 | 23.9 |

Findings

Among 271 participants in the online survey, 243 of them, who were 221 female (90.9%), and 22 male (9.1%) were found eligible. The ages of the participants ranged from 26 to 51. The mean age of female participants is 36.76 (sd=4.271) and the mean age of the male participants is 37.95 (sd=4.445). The ages of the children of the participants ranged from 2 to 7. The mean age of children is 3.78 (sd=1.326).

COVID-19 Anxiety of Caregivers

49% of the participants reported they had pandemic exposure (tested positive, went through quarantine, lost one family member or one in close circle). Anxiety levels of participants who were exposed to the pandemic were found to be significantly higher than those who were not (Table 2).

Table 2. Mean scores of Coronavirus Anxiety Scale according to pandemic exposure and the results of independent samples t test

| Pandemic Exposure | N | M | SD | t | p | Cohen's <i>d</i> |
|-------------------|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| No | 124 | 8.42 | 2.983 | 2.684 | .008* | .34 |
| Yes | 119 | 9.55 | 3.572 | | | |

* $p < .05$

Most of the participants working (70%) and among them, 43% continued their work as usual whereas the rest continued from home. A non-negligible (5.3%) percentage of the participants had to quit their job. One-way ANOVA analysis shows that there is no significant difference between mean scores of anxiety levels according to work-life change during COVID-19 (Table 3).

Table 3. Mean scores of Coronavirus Anxiety Scale according to work life change and the results of one-way ANOVA

| Work Life Change | N | M | SD | F | p |
|---|----|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Yes, I had to leave the job or the jobs I was working in decreased | 13 | 10.77 | 3.961 | 1.655 | .177 |
| No, I continued to go to work (office, factory, etc.) in the same way | 74 | 9.14 | 3.616 | | |
| Yes, I continued working from home | 97 | 8.86 | 3.112 | | |
| I am not working | 59 | 8.58 | 3.081 | | |

* $p < .05$

Finally, 23.9% of the participants declared that they are either health professionals or share the same household with them and their COVID-19-related anxiety levels are found to be significantly more affected by the COVID-19 compared to other participants ($t = -3.249$; $p = .001$; Cohen's $d = .50$) (Table 4).

Table 4. Coronavirus anxiety, Pandemic Exposure, Health Professional, Work-life Change

| | Health Employee | N | M | SD | t | p | Cohen's <i>d</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----|-------|-------|--------|-------|------------------|
| Coronavirus Anxiety | No | 185 | 8.59 | 3.156 | -3.249 | .001* | .50 |
| | Yes | 58 | 10.19 | 3.586 | | | |
| Coping Response Total | No | 185 | 80.54 | 9.405 | .714 | .476 | |
| | Yes | 58 | 79.55 | 8.533 | | | |

* $p < .05$

**ANOVA

Family Communication Styles

Protective attitude ($r = .127$; $p < .05$), and authoritarian attitude ($r = .126$; $p < .05$) are found to be positively correlated with COVID-19-related anxiety. On the contrary, an authoritarian attitude is found to have worse coping skills compared to others whereas caregivers with a higher authoritative attitude have better-coping skills. Similarly, Parents with a higher authoritative attitude have more coping strategies during COVID-19 (Table 5).

This study goes on to examine the coping strategies of various parenting styles, and it was discovered that creating a routine for children, partner support, spending more time with children, and

exercises such as yoga are the most important strategies when authoritative parents are coping with this process (Table 5).

Table 5. Pearson correlations between parental attitudes and COVID-19 anxiety, Coping Strategies

| | Permissive Attitude | Authoritative Attitude | Protective Attitude | Authoritarian Attitude |
|--|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Coronavirus Anxiety | .109 | .034 | .127* | .126* |
| Coping Response Total | -.027 | .388** | .001 | -.162* |
| Coping strategies during COVID-19 | | | | |
| <i>Creating a Routine for My Child</i> | -.232** | .169** | .088 | -.123 |
| <i>Spending more time with my child</i> | -.031 | .202** | .108 | -.268** |
| <i>My partner's support (if any)</i> | -.057 | .139* | -.112 | -.121 |
| <i>Caregiver assistance</i> | -.035 | -.161* | -.119 | -.016 |
| <i>Parent help</i> | .111 | .077 | .053 | -.043 |
| <i>Activities such as sports, yoga</i> | -.147* | .170** | -.197** | -.198** |
| <i>Being able to take time for myself</i> | -.141* | .060 | -.240** | -.142* |
| <i>Psychological support from close circle</i> | -.108 | .104 | -.095 | -.018 |
| <i>Professional psychological support</i> | -.112 | -.041 | -.046 | -.009 |

Children's Emotional Well-being

The most seen behavior problems during this period in children are restlessness, anger, worry and sleep problems (Table 6).

Table 6. Mean scores and standard deviations of children's emotional well-being during the COVID Pandemic

| | N | M | SD |
|--|-----|------|-------|
| Unrest | 243 | 2.55 | 1.009 |
| Crying crises | 243 | 2.19 | 1.026 |
| Appetite problems | 243 | 2.23 | 1.111 |
| Lack of energy, reluctance | 243 | 1.87 | .951 |
| Sleep problems | 243 | 2.30 | 1.130 |
| Worry (not being able to leave your parents, afraid of being alone, afraid that something will happen to your parents) | 243 | 2.30 | 1.231 |
| Anger problems | 243 | 2.33 | 1.174 |
| Susceptibility | 243 | 2.09 | 1.056 |
| Attention and concentration problems | 243 | 2.21 | .992 |
| Wetting the bed at night etc. | 243 | 1.43 | .812 |

Most of the problems during COVID-19 that children face is mostly correlated with authoritarian and protective attitude of their parents (Table 7).

Table 7. Family Communication styles and Children's Emotional Well-beings during Pandemic Times

| | Permissive Attitude | Authoritative Attitude | Protective Attitude | Authoritarian Attitude |
|--|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Unrest | .110 | -.170** | .171** | .250** |
| Crying crises | .044 | -.130* | .158* | .310** |
| Appetite problems | .105 | -.153* | .171** | .216** |
| Lack of energy, reluctance | .019 | -.162* | .130* | .174** |
| Sleep problems | .032 | -.008 | .136* | .166** |
| Worry | .057 | -.090 | .167** | .063 |
| Anger problems | .096 | -.077 | .189** | .324** |
| Susceptibility | .074 | .017 | .314** | .238** |
| Attention and concentration problems | .116 | -.072 | .188** | .252** |
| Wetting the bed at night or peeing or pooping during the day | .013 | -.029 | -.002 | .163* |
| Behavioral Problems Overall | .018 | -.117 | .256** | .309** |

*p<.05; **p<.01

Regarding protective attitude, the indirect effect of protective attitude via Coronavirus anxiety is positive and significant (Table 8).

Table 8. Regression Analysis for Mediation of Coronavirus Anxiety between Overprotective Attitude and Behavioral Problems of children during COVID-19

| Variable | B | 95%CI | SE B | p | R2 |
|---------------|---------|------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| Step 1 | | | | | |
| Constant | 10.0987 | (6.1545-14.0428) | 2.0023 | <0.01 | |
| Protective | .2807 | (.1464-.4151) | .0682 | .0001 | .0161 |
| Step 2 | | | | | |
| Constant | 6.4720 | (2.3764-10.5675) | 2.0791 | .0021 | |
| Protective | .2422 | (0.1121-.3723) | .0660 | .0003 | .0657 |
| Covid-Anxiety | .5277 | (0.3015-.7538) | .1148 | <0.01 | |

On the other hand, most of the problems are negatively correlated with authoritative attitude. Furthermore, when the Coronavirus anxiety is controlled, the correlation between all the behavioral problems of children and authoritative attitude becomes negative (Table 9).

Table 9. Pearson correlations between parental attitudes and Children’s Emotional well-beings

| | Permissive Attitude | Authoritative Attitude | Protective Attitude | Authoritarian Attitude |
|---|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Overall Well-being (PERIK) | -.125 | .565** | .024 | -.139* |
| Total Behavioral Problems during COVID-19 | .018 | -.117 | .256** | .309** |
| <i>Unrest</i> | .110 | -.170** | .171** | .250** |
| <i>Crying crises</i> | .044 | -.130* | .158* | .310** |
| <i>Appetite problems</i> | .105 | -.153* | .171** | .216** |
| <i>Lack of energy, reluctance</i> | .019 | -.162* | .130* | .174** |
| <i>Sleep problems</i> | .032 | -.008 | .136* | .166** |
| <i>Worry</i> | .057 | -.090 | .167** | .063 |
| <i>Anger problems</i> | .096 | -.077 | .189** | .324** |
| <i>Susceptibility</i> | .074 | .017 | .314** | .238** |
| <i>Attention and concentration problems</i> | .116 | -.072 | .188** | .252** |
| <i>Wetting the bed at night etc.</i> | .013 | -.029 | -.002 | .163* |
| *p<.05; **p<.01 | | | | |
| Total Behavioral Problems during COVID-19, controlling Coronavirus Anxiety | .079 | -.113* | .230** | .286** |

Leisure Activities

The analysis shows that behavioral problems that children have due to COVID-19 are negatively correlated with outdoor and indoor activities and positively correlated with digital activities (Table 10).

Table 10. Children’s Emotional Well-Being and Leisure Activities

| | Permissive Attitude | Authoritative Attitude | Protective Attitude | Authoritarian Attitude | Behavioral Problems Overall |
|---|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Digital Activities | .187** | -.115 | .261** | .344** | .165* |
| <i>TV, Watching cartoons</i> | .211** | -.125 | .161* | .366** | .127* |
| <i>Playing digital games</i> | .187** | -.124 | .277** | .278** | .141* |
| <i>Talking on the phone/video with loved ones</i> | -.026 | .023 | .091 | .070 | .076 |
| Outdoor Activities | -.142* | .160* | -.128* | -.159* | -.140* |
| <i>Walk/stroller ride</i> | -.156* | .265** | -.166** | -.236** | -.117 |
| <i>Cycling</i> | -.098 | .067 | -.137* | -.071 | -.148* |

| | | | | | |
|--|----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| <i>To go to the park</i> | -.088 | .070 | -.007 | -.088 | -.065 |
| Indoor Activities | -.166** | .386** | -.080 | -.348** | -.133* |
| <i>Play games together</i> | -.145* | .326** | -.025 | -.374** | -.077 |
| <i>Painting or singing together</i> | -.160* | .327** | .018 | -.294** | -.063 |
| <i>Playing sports or dancing together</i> | -.127* | .328** | .016 | -.253** | -.123 |
| <i>Hugging, sleeping together</i> | -.066 | .101 | -.060 | -.151* | -.046 |
| <i>Reading and telling stories together</i> | -.183** | .211** | -.132* | -.241** | -.114 |
| <i>Collecting the house together, cleaning the house</i> | -.038 | .303** | -.150* | -.168** | -.124 |
| Social Activities | -.087 | .080 | -.057 | -.046 | -.012 |
| <i>Playing with friends</i> | -.075 | .033 | .004 | -.070 | -.085 |
| <i>Playing with his brother</i> | -.047 | -.117 | .082 | .134* | .059 |
| <i>Playing with your pet</i> | -.037 | .184** | -.030 | -.137* | .005 |
| <i>Feeding & playing with stray animals</i> | -.058 | .217** | -.186** | -.168** | .013 |
| Educational Activities | -.075 | -.057 | .083 | .110 | .019 |
| <i>Going to playgroup or kindergarten</i> | -.019 | -.057 | -.048 | .058 | -.049 |
| <i>Going to a course (music, sports)</i> | -.070 | -.119 | -.102 | .010 | -.022 |
| <i>Online education</i> | -.103 | -.072 | .085 | .122 | .048 |
| <i>Study together</i> | .006 | .047 | .161* | .091 | .006 |

*p<.05; **p<.01

However, when the authoritarian and overprotective attitude is controlled, there is no correlation between COVID-19 related behavioral problems and leisure activities (Table 11).

Table 11. Children’s Emotional Well-Being and Leisure Activities when family communication styles are controlled

| Behavioral Problems during COVID-19 | Digital Activities | Outdoor Activities | Indoor Activities | Educational Activities | Social Activities |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Controlling authoritarian | .065 | -.097 | -.029 | -.016 | .003 |
| Controlling authoritative | .153* | -.124 | -.096 | .012 | -.003 |
| Controlling permissive | .148* | -.127* | -.118 | -.027 | -.003 |
| Controlling overprotective | .105 | -.112 | -.117 | -.002 | .003 |

*p<.05; **p<.01

Furthermore, the results of moderated regression analysis, conducted by Process Macro by Hayes shows that there is a significant interaction between digital (B = 2.18, t (243) = 2.93, p < .01) and authoritarian variables (B = 1.4439, t (243) = 2.71, p < .01) to behavioral problems of children.

Johnson-Neyman Technique section further defines the slopes as 16.38, 21 and 25.6 for authoritarian attitude. Only the low group is found to be significantly related (30.43% below) (B = 0.5744, t (243) = 2.58, p < .05) to behavioral problems of children (Table 12)

Table 12. Moderated Regression Analysis Results

| Items | B | SEB | t | p | Sample within the Johnson-Neyman significance region (%) |
|---------------|----------|------------|----------|----------|---|
| digital | 2.1888 | .7453 | 2.9369 | <0.01 | |
| authoritarian | 1.4439 | .3886 | 3.7151 | <0.01 | <i>Low authoritarian attitude 30.4%</i> |

| | | | | | |
|-------------|--------|--------|---------|-------|-------------------------------------|
| | | | | | $b=0.5744, t(243)=2.5,$ $p=0.01$ |
| Interaction | -.0985 | -.0355 | -2.7761 | <0.01 | |

Discussion

It is, of course, not possible to observe that children do not experience any difficulties in these times of period. Studies conducted during COVID-19 already show that children face unrest, boredom, irritability, anxiety, sleep and appetite problems, anger tantrums, attention problems and so on (e.g., Morelli et al., 2020; Gimenez Dasi et al., 2020; Jiao et al., 2020). Furthermore, children are left alone with parents, who are significantly more stressed and unhappy because of sickness, economic troubles, job losses, or the loss of a loved one during this time. However, past research suggest that some children were more badly affected than others in regards of behavioral problems that they have faced. both past research and this study's findings, some children were more badly affected than others. In fact, in some households, children's behavioral troubles appear to be modest or nonexistent. In this regard, the correlation between behavioral problems that children have and parent's anxiety levels, their coping skills, family communication styles and how they spend their time with children were analyzed.

In the literature, authoritative communication style is associated with better well-beings of children in several aspects including resilience while it is the opposite with authoritarian and permissive communication styles. This study provides a similar result, showing that not all the children are being affected negatively during this psychical distancing under the protection of their families with higher authoritative attitude.

According to the literature, SARS-COV-2 infection is associated with a considerably higher incidence of low mood and anxiety-like behavior (Pedrosa et al., 2020). Özdin & Özdin's study on Turkish people also find higher depression scores among individuals, who has COVID positive friends or relatives (2020). Consistent with these, our study also finds positive correlation with pandemic exposure and Coronavirus anxiety. On the other hand, parenting stress and anxiety were identified as a key risk factor in children's mental health by Crea et al., (2016) and Lohaus et al., (2017). (Seguin et al., 2021). Similarly, research done during COVID-19 by Spinelli et al., (2020) found that parenting stress is linked to lockdown, which has worsened children's psychological situations (taken from Morelli et al., 2020).

First, keeping with these findings, this study revealed a positive relationship between COVID-19 anxiety levels of caregivers and their children's behavioral problems during this period. Overprotective homes did not have it easy, particularly during the pandemic as they are already stressful in nature and have weaker ability to cope with their own stress. When overprotective families are unable to control their own stress, they may have removed love and warmth from their communication. It may even be argued that their relationship with their children has degraded into frequent warnings and rebukes, making them more prone to act like authoritarian households. As a result, this analysis finds a positive link between these two-family types over this period. That is why, it is very crucial for families to be aware of their own anxiety, to seek help if necessary, and to spare time for themselves.

Secondly, evidence suggests that parental attitude and coping practices affects children's post disaster mental health (Golbham et al., 2016 taken from Sign et al., 2020). Morelli et al., (2020)'s study also found

a strong opposite relation between parents' regulatory emotional self-efficacy and children's emotional control during COVID-19. This study reveals that parents with higher authoritative style tend to cope better with stress compared to others. Getting help became crucial at this time of period for parents as we cannot talk about children's emotional well-beings without addressing the well-beings of the family members. For instance, the ones who were getting their spouse's help could spend more time with their children, could take some own time to for themselves and make activities such as yoga and sports. What is important is that children of parents, who could find time for themselves and calm down, showed fewer behavioral problems in this study.

Another important point determining this difference is without a doubt, the communication patterns within the family. Secure familial bonds and efficient communication can be a protective factor for children's mental well-being during times of great stress and uncertainty. During the pandemic time, it is more important than ever before for family communication to ensure that children build resilience and emerge out of this phase with the least amount of emotional damage. As expected, studies during COVID-19 also show that both parental warmth and higher family cohesion are related with fewer trauma symptoms since COVID-19 outbreak (Whittle et al., 2020). Though, the research does not specifically determine the family communication styles such as authoritative, authoritarian, overprotective or permissive, these features (warmth and affection) are mostly found in authoritative family communication styles. Consistent with literature (e.g., Baumrind 1991, Lamborn et al, 1991, Steinberg et al., 1994), this study reveals that family communication styles are significantly related to emotional well-beings of children.

Among four family communication styles, negative correlation between authoritarian and protective communication patterns and well-beings of children were found. The two patterns focus more on the conformity or discipline, which expects all family members to look at the same to the topic. Thus, they would expect their children to respect their rules and does not take their time to explain the reasons behind. As these two patterns are also related with higher COVID-19 related anxiety, it is possible that they have taken more measures to prevent being caught and expect their children to obey with respect. Parents expectation from their children to obey their rules without questioning, probably not answering properly to the questions might create anger, frustration. Furthermore, these are quite sensitive times and children need positive and open communication more than ever.

What differs authoritarian from protective attitude is that this analysis reveals that Coronavirus anxiety is mediating the relation between protective attitude and behavioral problems of children. In this regard, this study can suggest that when overprotective families are unable to regulate their own stress, especially during a pandemic, they may have lost love and warmth from their interactions. It may even be claimed that their relationship with their children has degraded into frequent warnings and rebukes- even they were all with the intention to protect their children-, making them more prone to act like authoritarian households.

As expected, studies during COVID-19 show that both parental warmth and higher family cohesion are related with fewer trauma symptoms since COVID-19 outbreak (Whittle et al., 2020). Though, the

research does not specifically determine the family communication styles, these features are mostly found in authoritative family communication style. this study also reveals that there is a negative correlation between most of the behavioral problems that children face and, the authoritative attitude. What is also more interesting is that when the coronavirus anxiety variable is controlled, authoritative attitude becomes negatively correlated with all the problems that children have during this time. This is extremely important as it shows even in extreme stress, parents with authoritative attitude have the potential to protect their children from the negative effects of COVID-19 if they can manage their own stress.

What children need is to spend more family time, which could help them build resilience and protect their emotional well-beings from these times of uncertainly. Leisure activities (e.g., playing games, singing etc.) are one of the most important forces to develop healthy relationships and create effective communication among family members. During COVID-19, balance family leisure activities are dramatically diminished as families are left alone only with core leisure activities. These are the low budget, daily activities which can easily be accessed such as playing games, singing, spending time together etc.

Literature suggests that family communication patterns have a substantial impact on practically all techniques that parents use to provide their children access to digital technology (Eastin et al., 2006). Similarly, Scharly et al. (2012) discovered that an authoritative parenting style is related to less screen use in preschool children (Seguin et al., 2021). This study also revealed that family communication styles are significantly related with the choice of these activities. Starting with digital activities, many studies have previously shown that excessive use of digital media may lead to a variety of health difficulties such as depression, social isolation, and self-esteem issues, as well as attention deficiencies, aggressiveness, addictive behaviors, hunger issues, sleep problems, obesity, and impaired moral reasoning (Kaya et al., 2018). Unfortunately, with lockdown measures, children are exposed to digital media more than ever (Pandya and Lodha, 2021). According to the Seguin et al., (2021) study, average screen usage has grown from 2 hours per day in the months preceding the pandemic to 6 hours per day. Recent research (Mc Daniel and Radesky, 2020; Walton et al., 2014) indicates that parental stress may be a substantial risk factor for increased screen use in children (Seguin et al., 2021). Because there is a significant association between overprotective attitude and COVID-19 anxiety, parental concern may expose their children to more digital activities might be anticipated.

According to the findings, the more toddlers are exposed to screens, the more likely they are to develop behavioral issues such as attention deficits, a lack of energy, discontent, and sensitivity. Children's emotional well-being is revealed to be negatively correlated with their digital activities. Digital activities are associated with anxiety, eating issues, a lack of energy, sensitivity, and concentration problems. However, one thing should not be missed is that the simple slope analysis found that digital activities have a conditional effect on emotional well-beings of children as it is moderated by authoritarian attitude. In simpler words, only for low authoritarian attitude (up to only 30% in the sample), digital activities are significantly related to emotional well-beings of children. Therefore, what matters the most is the family communication styles.

Similarly, indoor activities and basic outdoor activities (cycling, strolling in nature) are favorably associated to children's emotional well-being. And as predicted, and these activities are usually chosen by caregivers with higher authoritative attitudes. However, when the authoritative attitude is being controlled, there is no correlation between indoor and outdoor activities and children's well-beings during COVID-19. Thus, without the family's communication style, one cannot fully understand the time spent with the child, even it includes activities that contribute to the child's well-being, such as singing and reading a book. For example, the family may have stated that they have had wonderful activities with their children during this period, but if the way they talk to their children always includes imperative words, if there is frequent scolding and humiliation, the child will probably not develop resilience. As a result, activities with children are not significant in and of themselves. The most crucial aspect of these activities, especially those done jointly, is how parents interact with their children while they are being done.

Limitations of This Study and Recommendations

This study has several strengths; however, it falls short in that it solely employed self-reports of parents to determine family communication patterns. Children's perspectives on family communication techniques may differ greatly. However, because the respondents were preschool children, it was unable to obtain their input for the study's family communication patterns. Moreover, children are being influenced by the combined communication practices of both parents and sibling relationships, can have an impact on children's emotional well-being and should be considered in further studies.

Second, because social distancing was still present, we conducted these surveys online using snowball sampling methods (from March to June 2021). We circulated the survey to several mother groups on Facebook to reach people from a variety of socioeconomic levels. Participants who have access to technology and are comfortable with online surveys may differ from those who do not have access or are not comfortable with online surveys. This study's current sample, on the other hand, is rather homogeneous. As a result, the current findings may not apply to the entire population. This is an issue that should be addressed in future research.

Despite all, this study contributes to the field by empirically verifying family communication patterns' association with children's emotional well-being throughout the longest psychical separation phase caused by COVID-19. This era presents a unique opportunity for academics because all other agents impacting children's well-being have reduced their significance throughout this process. Furthermore, it provides practical information, guiding parents on how to cope with their own stress during these times of extreme stress, as well as what they can do as leisure activities to build resilience in their children and minimize behavioral problems that occur during these times.

Conclusion

Authoritative attitude is recognized as the one that gives the most benefit to children's developments, academic achievements, well-beings and so on, indicating both setting norms and obedience, as well as displaying compassion and open communication. However, most of this research were conducted within "normal" times. Normally, a typical 4-year-old child socializes with friends, teachers, family elders,

neighbors and so on. However, this study is significant in that it demonstrates that the emotional well-being of children in authoritative households increases with time, even when all other socializing tools are removed from the child's life. Strong family communication is more crucial than the total of all other actors for children of this age.

This study is valuable in that it demonstrates how they can do so in terms of coping skills and leisure activities. To begin, parents with strong authoritative attitudes had higher coping abilities than others during this period. As parents' obligations grow and their circumstances deteriorate, they require additional assistance from loved ones, particularly spouses. Parents with a strong authoritative attitude are also likely to receive more assistance from their spouses, allowing them to devote more time to themselves and engage in hobbies such as yoga while remaining cheerful. Parents, who are aware of their own stress, seek help, when necessary, take time to calm themselves and see this period as an opportunity to strengthen the bond with their children, have helped their children develop resilience against the negative effects of the pandemic.

Leisure activities are critical for spending quality time with children and supporting them in developing resilience. The third significant conclusion of this study is that low-cost indoor and outdoor activities are useful in maintaining children's emotional health since they were found to be adversely associated to behavioral issues in children. Families with a high authoritative attitude encourage their children to not only establish a healthy routine for their children, but also encourage them to engage in indoor or outdoor activities, where they can spend more time together and communicate, instead of digital activities. These activities are beneficial to children's well-being; however, it should be noted that leisure activities should not be separated from family communication styles.

The children of households with strong authoritarian tendencies fare worse than the others in terms of emotional well-being. It is important for families to realize the importance of family communication styles on their children in such periods and to act accordingly. An interesting issue may be the association between children with parents with high authoritarian attitude and digital activities. It is quite interesting that, in households with a strong authoritarian mindset, the influence of digital activities on predicting children's well-being vanishes. In other words, more crucial aspects enter the picture at this moment, which should be investigated in further studies.

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