

COVID-19 Pandemic and Child Psychology

COVID-19 Salgını ve Çocuk Psikolojisi

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 epidemic, which affected the world, both physiological and psychosocial risks negatively have been affected the lives of individuals. As countries closed their borders, they have been organized stay-at-home campaigns to control the pandemic. The closure of the units that have an important place in children's lives such as schools, parks, sports halls among the public areas, causing psychological problems such as anxiety, trauma and depression to be observed more frequently in children; It was determined that they faced problems in both access to education and the adaptation process with the transition to distance education instead of face-to-face education. With the pandemic, the use of online psychotherapy has also increased. It has been observed that there are difficulties in transferring psychological services to the online environment. However it has been determined that maintaining dance and art therapy online with children has been found to be effective. In this article, the problems experienced by children during the epidemic process and the changes in education and psychotherapy are discussed.

Keywords: Child psychology, education, pandemic

Öz

Dünya'yı etkisi altına alan COVID-19 salgını süresince hem fizyolojik hem de psikosozal riskler, bireylerin yaşamını olumsuz yönde etkilemiştir. Ülkeler sınırlarını kapatırken salgını kontrol altına almak amacıyla evde kalma kampanyalarını düzenlemiştir. Toplu alanlar arasında bulunan okul, park, spor salonları gibi çocukların yaşamında önemli yer tutan birimlerin kapanması çocuklarda kaygı, travma, depresyon gibi psikolojik sorunların daha sık gözlenmesine; yüz yüze eğitim yerine uzaktan eğitime geçilmesi ile de hem eğitime ulaşımında sorunlara hem de uyum sağlama sürecinde sorun yaşadıkları belirlenmiştir. Bu süreçte çocuk ve ergen ruh sağlığı sürecinde de aksamalar olmuştur. Salgınla birlikte çevrim içi psikoterapi kullanımı da artmıştır. Psikolojik hizmetlerin çevrim içi ortama aktarılması ile yaşanan zorluklar olduğu gözlenmiştir. Ancak çocuklarla dans ve sanat terapisinin çevrim içi sürdürülmesinin etkili olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bu makalede salgın sürecinde çocukların yaşadıkları sorunlar, eğitim ve psikoterapideki değişimler tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Çocuk psikolojisi, eğitim, salgın

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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) has declared coronavirus disease as an epidemic that threatens public health (WHO 2020). This respiratory tract disease, which has a detrimental effect all around the world, first appeared in Wuhan, China (Zhong et al. 2020). COVID-19 is known to be the seventh member of the CoV family to infect humans (Li et al. 2020). On 08 February 2021, it is reported that 106 million people worldwide were infected and 2.3 million people died (WHO 2021). Large pandemic or epidemic outbreaks are expected to have several negative effects on individuals and society (Duan and Zhu 2020). While the lockdowns in the countries make it difficult to travel, the continuing social distance practice also makes it difficult for non-emergency patients to reach the hospital (Li et al. 2020). Social distance is explained as physical distance, whereas people experience many negativities because they perceive social distance as staying away from their friends (Galea et al. 2020). The prevalence of COVID-19 in children is much less intense than adults due to their relatively immature immune systems; and they are somehow protected from COVID-19. Who (2020b) reports that COVID-19 is milder in children. However, the strong effects of COVID-19 on the lives of adults have also made the lives of children difficult.

Countries have tried to reduce the risk of contamination by closing schools and trying to ensure the isolation of children at home (Bozkurt and Sharma 2020). Due to these reasons, they were deprived of the playing field and being together with their peers. The closure of schools was attempted to be eliminated by the transition to distance education process, which was also called the transition to urgent distance education (Bozkurt 2020). However, the materials required for distance education could not reach every student, which caused a delay in children's education, and the already existing inequality has increased with the pandemic (Bozkurt et al. 2020). In addition, interaction with the teacher in face-to-face education has been quite insufficient in distance education. Stay-at-home has not only negatively affected the education, but also family communication. Parents had to take on new roles in the education process (Bozkurt 2020). Schools include educational activities as well as many critical tasks, such as socializing and receiving guidance (Bozkurt et al. 2020). The stress caused by the pandemic in adults negatively affected the relationship with their children. Children in the older age group show symptoms of anxiety more frequently than younger age groups (Mochida et al. 2021). Many types of social crises are known to be associated with anxiety, depression, nervousness, and even post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) among children. Although their symptoms do not meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD, children exhibit symptoms of fear, anxiety, depression, nervousness, and social isolation. Cooke (2020) et al. stated in their meta-analysis study that post traumatic symptoms are observed at a level of 26.2% in the general population. Many studies have been conducted on stress associated with COVID-19 and psychological problems observed in children (Brown et al.2020, Lee 2020). Stress observed in children is believed to be caused by changing behavior in parents and society, including the closing of schools; strict quarantine procedures such as wearing masks, frequent measurement of body temperature, and mandatory hand washing (Danesa et al. 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak is described

as an undesirable process that causes loss of control for all individuals. In this process, it is of great importance to reveal what children can live through and to carry out precautionary studies. In this article, the problems experienced by children during the epidemic process, and the changes in education and psychotherapy are discussed.

Children's adaptation to the epidemic

The COVID-19 outbreak has led to lockdown in countries and social distancing measures with the stay at home approach. These measures taken to control the epidemic refer to physical distance, which is described as new normals. Schools and businesses were closed. While families adapted to 24/7 interaction, caregivers had to cope with parenting, financial and professional difficulties and uncertainties simultaneously (Dvorsky et al. 2020). Schools and recreational facilities have closed their doors to the vast majority of children, as countries continue their lockdown practices. However, in the midst of these interruptions and uncertainties, there are examples of children around the world adapting to lockdowns in creative ways and preparing their leisure narratives within the boundaries of the home, using the resources available to them. There are many factors that determine how the individual will cope with social crisis situations. Although there are findings in the field that children are negatively affected by the pandemic, psychological endurance has served as a buffer (Dvorsky et al. 2020). When intra-family communication is considered as a combination of the child's feeling of safety and personality traits, it has been observed that they show the ability to adapt to the epidemic.

In Italy, one of the countries worst affected by the pandemic, during the lockdown process, children drew rainbows with the slogan "andrà tutto bene" (everything will be fine) and displayed their paintings on their windows (Otte 2020). A similar approach has been demonstrated in many countries. Among them was the UK. In New Zealand, the "bear hunt" project was made. The children drew a picture of the bear and hung it on their windows, and by announcing their location on the website, they were able to communicate with each other by playing a bear hunting game with other children (Roy 2020). The USA (Alexander 2020), Canada (Desai 2020), Australia (Alba 2020) and Belgium (Johnston 2020) also participated in the "bear hunt" window game. Unlike the usual leisure activities, it can be considered that they adapted to reshaped activities that are suitable for the existing situation. According to this view, children are included as social actors shaped by the here and now and contribute to the social environment in which they live (Mayall 2002).

New approach in education-distance education

Although distance education is not a new approach, it emerges as a quite new approach in young age groups. Countries have closed schools urgently with the COVID-19 outbreak. The playgrounds of children who do not have access to peer groups and entertainment centers, and have to spend time in their homes to a large extent, need to be redeveloped. Children's education, family time and leisure activities are intertwined with digital platforms. This, in turn, has left children intertwined with digital entertainment, which has become

more important than ever before. Distance education models have started to be applied in different ways in various countries in order to ensure uninterrupted education with closed schools (Gewin 2020). Online or distance education has become the new normal form of education. Yet, many teachers and students could not access the necessary material and were concerned about the lack of knowledge and skills regarding this new educational model. Sahu (2020) states that many students and teachers do not have technological equipment such as computers and tablets and/or they experience problems such as internet speed at home or no internet. Education requires a holistic approach. Students, teachers, parents and administrators are all part of the education. For this reason, it is of great importance that each stakeholder has a strong and close communication. Although skill acquisition is provided for using technology within face-to-face training, Cox (2013) notes that this is not enough. She states that the ability to learn technology and use it effectively outside of school is not valid for every child. In addition, the widespread use of distance education in crisis situations revealed the limitations in pedagogy and education policies, which are an important point in education (Schuck et al. 2017). Khaddage et al. (2016) stated that it is not easy to evaluate informal learning outcomes. It is necessary to examine to what extent out-of-school learning is effective. Besides, a school is not an area where students only acquire certain academic skills. Students acquire many skills from the relationship they establish with their peers. In this direction, students want to reach out to support units other than their teachers. Fundamentally, it is proposed to create support networks that students can reach; use different forms of learning together; identify relevant online communities and provide them to students, and for this purpose, use all the opportunities of technology. The ability of students to use technology in the lifelong learning process offers a great advantage for them (Al Salman et al. 2021). Many educators (Zhou et al. 2020) state that distance learning is an indispensable necessity. Despite the positive aspects of distance learning, the sudden transition to distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic has created a shock wave, extreme stress, and an extreme burden between students and teachers. In addition to the psychological instability caused by the pandemic, students experienced many obstacles such as lack of free time, poor foundation, insufficient digital content, etc. (Kyungmee 2020, Zhou et al. 2020). In the study of Al Salman et al. (2021), they found that the burden of parents increased in the face of problems such as the cost of internet, the lack of computers at home, the lack of equipment and many children having classes at the same time. In families with low socioeconomic level, there is no available internet at home, as the cost is high. In addition, some families have more than one child. There is not enough technological equipment in the house to be used during online learning. The lack of compatibility between the number of children and the number of devices causes parents to experience stress (Al Salman et al. 2021). On the other hand, children are prevented from receiving adequate education.

It is imperative for researchers to identify the various possible ways in which the Covid-19 outbreak could have an impact on people's well-being. To this end, the potential impact and consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak on the psychological, social and physical

dimensions of their health, especially during the quarantine period, should be revealed. Inequality in access to educational opportunities is significant in terms of possible psychological problems. In addition, the possibilities of students and the stress and anxiety of being at home should also be taken into account in online or distance education. Al-Sabbah et al. (2020) characterize online education as the new normal education. In this direction, efforts should be made towards improving the quality of education by taking into account the uncertainty of the process and paying attention to the quality of the education rather than the quantity.

School and psychological issues

Additional challenges for children during the Covid-19 outbreak include interruption in academic learning, social isolation, concerns about loss of income in the family, greater childhood negative experiences, trauma, grief, and increased screen time (Golberstein et al. 2020). Joline et al. (2020) state that the negative impact experienced is much greater in children with special needs. With the lockdown, it is observed that the psychological effects of the COVID-19 outbreak are much more severe in special groups. These include racial minorities, immigrant groups, individuals with low socioeconomic levels (VanLancker and Parolin 2020, Yip 2020). In addition, these groups, who may experience similar psychological problems at other times, are prevented from reaching psychological support units with the closure of schools due to COVID-19 (Zhang et al. 2020).

In a study conducted in China, children between the ages of 3 and 18 had high levels of anxiety and reading, digital games and physical activities were found to be effective in coping with stress (Jiao et al. 2020). Another study in China was conducted with 359 children and 3,254 adolescents. 22 of the participants were found to exhibit depressive symptoms (Duan et al. 2020). A study of the impact of quarantine in India found that anxiety (69%), helplessness (66%) and fear (62%) were the most common emotions among children and adolescents in quarantine (Saurabh and Ranjan 2020). In a study conducted in Spain, 86% of participating parents reported changes in their children's emotional state and behavior during quarantine. What is more, it was reported that they experienced difficulty in concentrating (77%), boredom (52%), nervousness (39%), loneliness (31%) and anxiety (30%) (Orgilés et al. 2020). In a study conducted with Italian children, it was found that one in four children displayed regressive behaviors that required physical intimacy with their parents during the night; It has been demonstrated that more than 50% of them showed increased tension, difficulty in obeying the rules and excessive demand (Pisano et al. 2020). General anxiety disorder, panic disorder, PTSD, and depression are considered among the most commonly expected psychological problems (Qiu et al. 2020). Wendel et al. (2020) reported that the symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) increased in children during the COVID-19 pandemic in their interview with the families of children aged between 4 and 5 years. In a study conducted with parents of children between the ages of 2 and 7 in Israel, it was found that the most common stress symptoms in children were nervousness, agitation, aggression, fear of separation and adhesion. In

the same study, it was observed that the difficulties experienced by parents in regulating emotions were associated with the stress level of children. It has also led to the emergence of the skills of parents who have to spend more time at home with their children to play effectively with them. The study in Israel revealed a relationship between fathers' ability to play effectively and the stress response observed in the child. These findings highlight the importance of parental emotion skills for children's emotional adjustment during stressful times (Shorer and Leibovich 2020).

Protective factors include cultural acceptance of face masks, reorganization of school areas and free counseling. The closure of schools caused disruptions in school-based mental health services for students, leading to an increase in negative behaviors and various psychological problems in many children and adolescents (Humphreys et al. 2020). It is also believed that stress, financial problems, and existential anxiety experienced by parents can increase physical and verbal violence towards their children. Women and children are particularly vulnerable as they face an increased risk of abuse (Bradbury Jones and Isham 2020). In social crisis situations that create high levels of stress, such as COVID-19, parents may have difficulties in effectively supporting their children's emotional coping efforts. Parents need to manage their own emotional responses to help the child cope with stress. However, it is very difficult to achieve this in social crisis situations (Cohen and Shulman 2019). The covid-19 outbreak creates many stress factors for young children. These include its invisibility, unknown duration, danger of infection, disappointment, boredom, insufficient information, inability to face-to-face contact with family members, teachers and friends, lack of personal space, and financial losses in the family. These dramatic changes reveal problematic and lasting effects on children (Liu et al. 2020). Young children may be particularly sensitive to these changes, as they have less ability to comprehend and make sense of such changes.

Online psychotherapy in epidemic

Areas such as sports fields and places of worship, shops, schools and nurseries have closed with the outbreak. Quarantine measures have led to major changes in daily routine and usual activities (WHO 2020a). Accordingly, mental health services need to adapt rapidly to changing realities. Countries and regions have reacted differently to the outbreak, yet the general response has been to move mental health care to online platform as much as possible. By staying at home, clinicians kept the effectiveness of psychotherapy and carried the changing needs of the clients or their patients to web-based environments by providing appropriate guidance. Thus, they continued their therapy services with online methods. One of the most important changes regarding COVID-19 is that there is an urgent transition to online psychotherapy following the closure of schools, clinics and community mental health institutions around the world (Callahan 2020). While online psychotherapy is relatively new to school psychology, it has been involved in research and clinical practice for many years as an additional technique (Maheu et al. 2020). The American Psychological Association (Joint Task Force for the Development of Telepsychology Guidelines for Psychologists 2013) has published ethical principles for online therapy. McCord et al. (2020) state that online

psychotherapy is effective in treating psychological problems compared to face-to-face services. In addition, the necessity of developing school-based online therapy applications for individuals of different age groups is also emphasized.

With the pandemic, psychological services had to adapt quickly to the new normal. Countries have adopted different approaches to prevent the epidemic and have brought psychological health services online as much as possible. Clinicians had to change their methods to ensure that their clients continued psychotherapy with appropriate guidance by staying at home. In a qualitative study conducted to determine the difficulties faced by clinicians in Canada, Australia, Russia, and Japan, it was found that despite experiencing many difficulties, they learned to work under uncertain conditions, to be able to use telehealth platforms effectively and flexibly, to manage the online psychotherapy process, and to apply to peer supervision in the problems encountered. (Jurdick et al.2020). A similar study with clinicians was conducted in Switzerland, and researchers have stated that online psychotherapy is effective (Benoit and Kramer 2020). Online psychotherapy is known to be very effective for groups that have difficulty applying to traditional face-to-face therapy. Moreover, previous studies have shown that in addition to traditional therapy, homework assignments, especially in Cognitive Behavioral Therapies (CBT), are transferred to mobile applications in child groups and this method is effective. CBT is defined as an approach that can be easily transferred to the computer environment (Arnold et al.2020). The researchers also added techniques that must be included in the intervention models in question. Online CBT models should include the following steps:

1. Agenda setting and defining avoidance
2. Reacting to difficult news or normalizing reactions
3. Gaining perspective
4. Situational check or acceptance
5. Maintaining a healthy routine
6. Coping with stress
7. Prevention of insomnia
8. Creating psychological endurance and hope

It is recommended that a brochure containing a list of enjoyable activities at home and recommendations for maintaining social interaction should also be given to the patient who is followed up with online psychotherapy (Arnold et al. 2020). Although the model in question is not suitable for small age groups, it is significant in terms of guidance. Besides, it is considered as an application example that can be used in children and adolescents in the older age group.

The tendency to keep it in the same way as the traditional aspects of the psychotherapy environment has led to the cessation of psychotherapy of some patients due to the inability to implement some therapy approaches. The fact that psychotherapy carried out especially with children in the younger age group is play-based, it has prevented the transfer of rooms and toys to the online environment. However, Potash et al. (2020) state that art

therapy can be easily transferred online. They argued that having the computer as a tool between the therapist and the patient would cause non-verbal cues to be overlooked, and that concerns could be solved creatively. It is stated that the toys that the child chooses in his / her environment, which part of his/her body he/she chooses to show, or other sounds in the house coming from the background can be sources of information for the therapist. In addition, creative art is recommended due to the reasons that it spreads knowledge, fosters hope, encourages expression and inspiration, challenges stigma, modulates media input, secures family connections, monitors secondary traumatic stress, develops coping and resilience, maintains and strengthens relationships. It is necessary to take into account many problems such as the client and the therapist carrying psychotherapy to their homes, other voices in the house, violation of the already limited personal space, unexpected interruptions, inadequate gesture observation. Despite the clinical complexity, researchers note that distance therapy creates a space for artistic expression in the client's home and makes it easier to share the therapeutic process with the family. Spooner et al. (2019) contribute to the field about the feasibility and effectiveness of online creative art therapy through a project that includes case studies they have implemented in a medical center in the United States. The results presented show that the use of online psychotherapy as a way to strengthen bonds with the family and society and the possibility of using digital platforms and the ability to provide skills, similar digital platforms create an opportunity for social bonding, giving clients a great advantage. The transition of therapy to digital platform through a computer screen has essentially brought the clinical environment home, providing a new and challenging experience for both the therapist and the patient. Fonagy et al. (2020), in a face-to-face study, the therapist responds to both explicit and implicit communication of the child and interprets them by forming mental models of the client's intentional state in a remarkably fluent manner (Fonagy et al.2020). Children talk about the lack of boundaries in their homes through their chosen location, or about their wounded sense of privacy, as well as their capacity to protect their privacy. Accordingly, as mentioned, online psychotherapy with children in the digital platforms, with distance and physical limitations, often enables children to reveal their primitive sensory expressions. These expressions portray experiences of primary regression in the relationship. The transition from sensory-somatic play to symbolic play is linked to primary developmental processes between mother and child. Body awareness and intentionality, synchronization, and mirroring of movement are a central way to create a sense of intimacy in remote therapy as well. Therefore, researchers state that dance therapy can be used effectively to help children online (Shuper Engelhard and Yael Furlager 2021). As a result of Covid-19, it is argued that art enables the development of new models for social interaction, including the integration of both online and face-to-face models. Potash et al. (2020), in line with the information obtained from other epidemics such as Sar and Ebola, state that the behavior of making art can beneficially change the perspectives of individuals and is a helpful factor in maintaining the bonds between people. Usiskin and Lloyd (2020) emphasized that digital art therapy practices can help clients. The researchers pointed out that dance therapy is not intended to improve psychopathology, but to strengthen psychological endurance, stating that it can be applied in different age

groups in emergencies such as pandemics (Shuper Engelhard and Yael Furlager 2021). In this direction, it is believed that art therapies can be applied for psychological first aid.

Conclusion

During the writing process of this article, the number of infected patients worldwide was 106 million and the number of people who died was 2.3 million. 12% of pediatric patients went to hospital in the USA applied due to covid-19. School psychology has had to adapt to all aspects of research, education, and practice. As we suffer from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, assessment, intervention, consultation and other forms of servicing have begun to adapt and are likely to differ markedly in the foreseeable future. The interruption of treatments, servicing and social support will cause the existing psychological problems to be exacerbated or recurred. Physiological-oriented interventions in this process lead to the disregard of psychological problems. Children constitute the biggest risk group that may have difficulty in adapting to uncertainties and innovations compared to other age groups. Necessary measures should be taken to facilitate children's access to psychological health services. Studies have revealed that children experience emotions such as boredom and anxiety in distance education. Since it is observed that spending time at home, especially with distance education, increase in the time spent in the digital environment and being away from the teacher negatively affect the adaptation process, it reveals that the content of the education should be arranged in a way to protect the psychological health of children. Although an online approach is adopted in psychotherapy during the pandemic process, necessary measures should be taken to eliminate the negativities experienced. It has been observed in the field that dance and art therapy with children can be carried out online. However, there has been no study on which approach clinicians in Turkey and Cyprus can transfer online or what difficulties they face. For art therapy, it was considered that it was necessary to determine whether the clinicians had sufficient knowledge and skills, and to help clinicians who continue psychotherapy with children with supervision support. Developing policies that will facilitate the access of clinicians to children is of great importance for the protection of children. Children live in a triangle of family, school, and society. In this direction, a holistic approach needs to be addressed. For this purpose, it is of great importance to conduct interdisciplinary studies and provide services. It has been suggested that measures and support programs for children should be created, studies and preparations should be made to prioritize the protection of psychological health in educational life.

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