

well as how long it will or is supposed to last. Reminding people what is the purpose of the measures and stressing their contribution for the common good could reduce the adverse effect through a sense of meaning. Availability of supplies to cover basic needs as well as readiness to provide care for children whose parents are unable to look after them due to the disease have to be ensured. Further research is recommended to verify the effectiveness of these strategies and recommendations.

LIMITATIONS

The present study has some limitations. Firstly, it outlines the hardships of a specific group – mothers of young children – and cannot compare with or present the hardships of the entire population or other specific groups. Secondly, the sample is not balanced and a convenience sample was used. The conditions of lockdown limited sampling opportunities and the invitation to participate reached only people who have access to the internet, which may have resulted in a sample with higher socio-economic status. Furthermore, participation was voluntary and people who had more extreme experiences might not have wanted or been able to devote time to participate in the study.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the results of this study suggest that the current pandemic and the responding containment measures created conditions that were perceived as threatening, hard and even traumatic by many mothers and children. The findings indicate that mothers of young children had to deal with an abnormal situation that was connected to a wide range of perceived threats and difficulties to themselves, their young children and the entire family. The greatest perceived threat was connected to getting infected with COVID-19; the worries were mainly focused on the family and close friends. However, during this initial stage the experienced difficulties were mainly connected to the containment measures, which seem to have drastically altered the

everyday life. The functioning of mothers and their young children was thus influenced significantly, which may compromise parenting and childcare practices. It could be concluded that mothers of young children are a vulnerable group. There were specific perceived threats and difficulties among them. There is evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to contain it affect children more severely than adults and that they could have a negative impact on their development. Taken all together these findings highlight the importance of creating and implementing intervention and prevention well-being programmes for families with young children during the pandemic.

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