

PERCEIVED THREATS AND DIFFICULTIES OF MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN DURING A STATE OF EMERGENCY IN A COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: *The present qualitative study extends and deepens the understanding of psychological response to COVID-19 pandemic of mothers and their children in the age group 0-4 years. Using conceptual cluster analysis the free text answers of 200 mothers were grouped into clusters and subclusters. The main finding of the study is that mothers of young children reported a wide range of perceived threats and difficulties during the early stage of the outbreak. Specific threats and difficulties were observed for the reported group. This finding supports the literature that the current pandemic and the strategies for its management have a substantial negative psychological impact. Young children and their mothers were outlined as vulnerable groups. The perceived threat of the illness was greater than perceived threats concerning the measures and their consequences. On the other hand, all reported difficulties were related to the pandemic containment measures. The greatest perceived threat was connected to getting infected with COVID-19 and the worries were mainly focused on the family and close friends. Other main perceived threats were the duration of the situation, the home confinement and the social isolation of the child, the economic impact and the uncertainty. The most frequently met difficulty was the impossibility for the child to be in the open air, followed by the lack of social contacts and the inability of the mother to go out. Overall, the containment measures seem to have drastically altered the everyday life of young children and their mothers. Some suggestions for mitigating the adverse psychological effect were offered.*

Keywords: COVID-19; worries; difficulties; mothers; children; conceptual cluster analysis.

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