

The Role of Parents on Fear Acquisition of Children in COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract : The aim of this study is to examine the role of parents' emotional and behavioral reactions on fears of children in the COVID-19 pandemic considering Rachman's Three Pathways Theory. For this purpose, a phenomenological qualitative study was conducted. Thirteen participants living with their children were utilized through criterion and snowball sampling. In semi-structured interviews parents were asked about their own and their children's behavioral and emotional reactions in the COVID-19 pandemic, and they were expected to give detailed information about fears of their children before and in pandemic. Firstly, parents were asked about their behavioral and emotional reactions in the COVID-19 pandemic. As behavioral reactions, precautions taken by parents to protect the rest of the family from negative physical and emotional impact of the pandemic were mentioned, while emotional reactions were defined as acquisition of negative emotions like fear, anxiety, and worry. Secondly, parents were asked about their children's behavioral and emotional reactions. Some of the parents talked about positive behavioral changes such as gaining self-control, while some others explained negative behavioral changes like increased time spent with technological tools. In the emotional changes section, all of the parents explained at least one negative emotion. All of the parents stated that their children had COVID-19 related fears. According to parents' expressions, fears of children in pandemic were examined in two dimensions. Fears directly related to COVID-19 were fear of virus/microbes, illness or death of someone in family and death and fears. Fears indirectly related to COVID-19 were fear of going out, sleep alone at night, separation, touching stuff outside the home, and cold. Considering existing literature and based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that children's modelling experiences have impact on acquisition of negative emotions, especially fear, therefore, preventive interventions involving caregivers should be provided by mental health professionals working with children.

Keywords : children's fears, COVID-19 pandemic, modelling experiences, parents' reactions

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