

Abstract

Background and purpose: In addition to the physical effects, COVID-19 has also caused psychological distress, such as anxiety among mothers. Since maternal anxiety can have lasting impacts on children's mental health, it is important to explore strategies to cope with it. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the relationship between mothers' emotional self-disclosure and their COVID-induced anxiety, as well as their children's anxiety, in elementary schools in Borujerd, Lorestan, in 2022.

Materials and methods: In this analytical cross-sectional study, we included 305 mothers and their children, who were selected by a multi-stage random sampling method. The mothers completed demographic questionnaires, emotional self-disclosure scales, coronavirus anxiety scales, and Spence parent-child anxiety scales. The children completed manifest anxiety scales. Data were analyzed using independent t-tests, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and multivariate regression at the significance level of $P < 0.05$.

Results: Of the 305 children who participated in the study, 50.8% were boys and 34.4% were in the third grade of primary education. Most of the mothers (64.9%) had university education, 85.2% were housewives, and 70.5% lived in the city. There was a strong positive correlation between the mothers' COVID-induced anxiety and their children's manifest anxiety ($r = 0.861$, $P < 0.001$). Similarly, there was a strong positive correlation between the mothers' COVID-induced anxiety and their children's Spence anxiety ($r = 0.897$, $P < 0.001$). On the other hand, there was a strong negative correlation between the mothers' emotional self-disclosure and their COVID-induced anxiety ($r = -0.871$, $P < 0.001$). Likewise, there was a strong negative correlation between the mothers' emotional self-disclosure and their children's manifest anxiety ($r = -0.921$, $P < 0.001$) and Spence anxiety ($r = -0.890$, $P < 0.001$). The mothers' COVID-induced anxiety had a direct and significant effect on their children's manifest anxiety ($P < 0.001$ and $\beta = 0.139$) and Spence anxiety ($P < 0.001$ and $\beta = 0.730$). The mothers' emotional self-disclosure had an inverse and significant effect on their children's manifest anxiety ($P < 0.001$ and $\beta = -0.148$) and Spence anxiety ($P < 0.001$ and $\beta = -0.301$).

Conclusion: Our study found that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused anxiety among many mothers. There was a negative correlation between the mothers' emotional self-disclosure and their COVID-induced anxiety. In other words, the more the mothers shared their feelings with others, the less anxious they felt about the pandemic. Our study also found that there was a positive correlation between the mothers' COVID-induced anxiety and their children's anxiety. This means that the more anxious the mothers were about the pandemic, the more anxious their children were as well. Therefore, it is recommended that mothers use emotional self-disclosure as a coping strategy to reduce their own and their children's anxiety.

Keywords: Emotional self-disclosure, Anxiety, COVID-19, Mother, Child