Daily Life Activities of Children during the Pandemic

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Abstract: The aim of this descriptive study was to examine the views of parents with children between the ages of 3-6 on their children's daily life activities during the pandemic. The study sample was composed of 65 parents, among whom 60 were mothers, and five were fathers, who were selected with the snowball method and who had children between the ages of 3-6 and voluntarily participated in the study. The data were collected through the General Information Form and the Family Interview Form, which were developed in line with expert opinions. The collected data were analyzed using percentage and frequency values. The findings suggested that, during the pandemic, the children's family relationships were positively affected; the duration of using technological tools increased; the children started to wash their hands more carefully; and duration of activities, such as drawing and chores, and plays increased. It was also found that the children mostly preferred piece assembly games; their physical movement needs were not fully satisfied; and there was no change in their health conditions, self-care skills, diet, sleep patterns, interactive book reading, and purposes of using technology. In line with the findings, parents, experts were given specific recommendations.

Keywords: Daily life activities, early childhood, pandemic, parent.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which emerged in Wuhan, China, on December 31, 2019, has found a rapid spread worldwide and gone down in history as the first pandemic caused by coronaviruses. The pandemic has arrived in Turkey, with the first positive case on March 11, 2020 [1]. COVID-19 continues to cause morbidity and mortality in many countries, complicate healthcare services, disrupt education and training activities, and damage economies [2]. Many countries worldwide take drastic measures and impose social restrictions to reduce the effects of the pandemic [3]. State authorities have been making various announcements about not going out unless necessary and staying at home, mandated public service advertisements, and taking several measures by introducing several bans to prevent the spread of the virus in Turkey [4].

Such a compelling process has an adverse impact on individuals of all ages, especially children. Pandemic affects people's lives by changing their daily life activities and behaviors, even causing anxiety and depression and triggering fears [5]. Children also experience significant changes in their daily routines and social activities during this challenging process [6]. Roccella (2020) states that prolonged social isolation can lead to many adverse effects on children, such as frustration, boredom, isolation, fear, insomnia, and concentration difficulty. [7] Di Giorgo *et al*. (2020) reported that the quarantine process was likely to increase emotional symptoms and self-regulation difficulties in children and lead to a general deterioration in sleep quality and time experience in both mothers and pre-school children [8]. They also found that behavioral and psychological changes were more intense, especially for mothers who had to stop working or switch to part-time work. Pisano *et al*. (2020) found that children had a desire to sleep with their parents during the night, began to adopt fears they had never had before, and showed irritability, sleep problems, and intolerance to rules and excessive demands [9]. They recommend that parents should talk with the child calmly, explaining that isolation is necessary to avoid contact with the virus until effective medicines or vaccines are available. Although it is now preferred to reduce COVID-19 and social isolation effects momentarily, it is imperative to examine their long-term effects on children's development and mental health and develop solution strategies accordingly [2].

Interruption of education in schools and the cessation of services in arts, sports, and science centers where people spend their leisure time have led to an increase in the duration of staying at home. For this reason, parents who have children, especially in early childhood, need guidance on which activities to evaluate their time. It can be observed that parents with children have deficiencies in staying at home with their children and producing relaxing, entertaining, and developing activities with them [4]. Therefore, the study aimed to reveal the changes in the daily life activities of their children during the pandemic according to their parents' views.

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MATERIALS AND METHOD

Research Design

The research was carried out descriptively to reveal the daily life activities of 3-6 years children during the pandemic. Descriptive studies examine the distribution of a situation in society according to participant, place, and period characteristics [10].

Sample of the Study

Parents who have children between the ages of 3-6 and accepted to participate in the study voluntarily were included in the study. The parents were selected with the snowball technique within the purposeful sampling method. Purposeful sampling allows for in-depth research by selecting information-rich situations in line with the purpose of the study [11]. The snowball technique focuses on people and critical situations from which rich data can be obtained and reaches the universe by following these people and situations [12]. Accordingly, a total of 65 parents, among whom 60 were mothers and 5 were fathers, were included in the study.

Of the participating parents, it was discovered that 58.5% were between the ages of 31-40, 56.9% held an undergraduate degree, 76.9% were employed, and 70.8% stopped working during the pandemic; of their spouses, 76.9% were between the ages of 31-40, 52.3% held an undergraduate degree, and 95.4% were employed. It was found that 90.8% of the parents had a nuclear family, 58.5% had a family composed of two or three members, 89.2% had an income above the minimum wage, and 81.5% perceived their income at a moderate level. Almost all the participating parents were found to be mothers (92.3%). In terms of their children, 58.5% were girls, 30.8% were 3 years old, 60% were single children, 33.8% did not attend any pre-school education institutions, and 60% did not continue their education via distance education.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected through the "General Information Form" and the "Family Interview Form."

General Information Form

It consists of the questions related to age, educational attainment, employment, and working conditions during the pandemic (parents); age, gender, number of siblings, birth order, and attendance to pre-school education and distance education (children); and type, number of individuals, income status, and perception of socioeconomic level (family).

Family Interview Form

It was prepared in line with field experts' opinions and consists of 28 multiple-choice questions regarding the change in daily life activities of children during the pandemic. The form includes questions about the child's family communication, health condition, nutrition and eating behaviors, self-care skills, play activities, sleep pattern, and use of technological devices.

Data Collection Procedure

Initially, written approvals were obtained for the research from the Scientific Research Evaluation Commission of the Ministry of Health and the Ethics Committee of Ankara University (No: 14/198). The data were collected online due to the pandemic. Parents with children between the ages of 3-6, determined by the snowball sampling technique, were sent informed consent forms electronically. Those who accepted to participate in the study voluntarily were included in the study. The parents were invited to fill out the General Information Form and the Family Interview Form via Google Forms. The ones who did not consent to participate in the study were prevented from seeing the forms. It took about 10-15 minutes for parents to fill out the forms.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to parents with children aged 3-6, children with age-appropriate development, parents' responses to the General Information Form and Family Interview Form, and the dates 20-31 May 2020, that is, 2.5 months from the beginning of the pandemic.

Data Analysis and Evaluation

The percentages and frequencies of the parents' responses are presented in charts.

FINDINGS

The parents' evaluations of their children's daily life activities before and during the pandemic are explained with the help of charts. In the study, parents were able to choose more than one option.

The participating parents gave more than one response to the question related to their children's relationships with their families before and during the pandemic. It was found that the majority of the parents

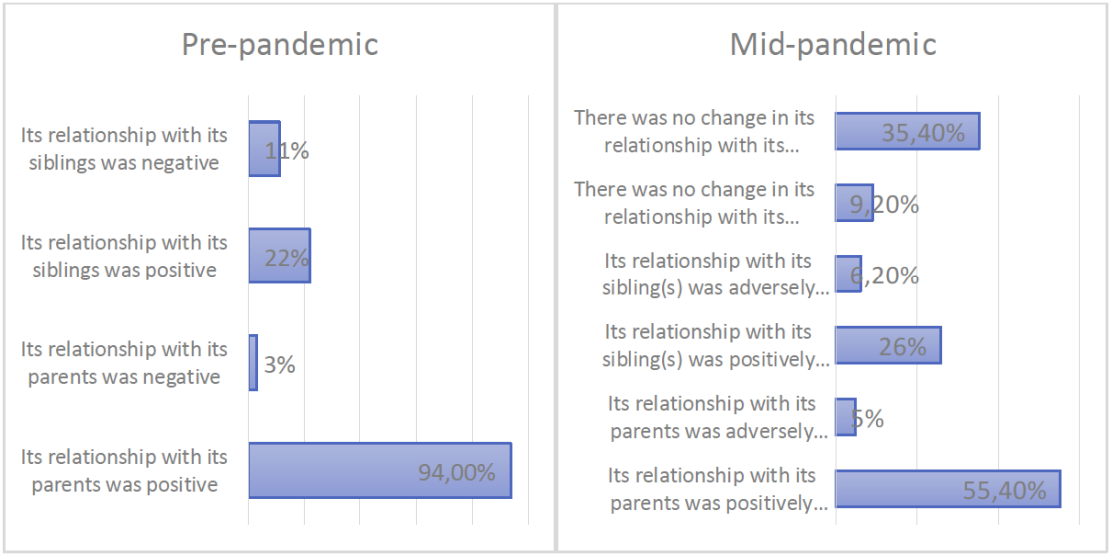

Chart 1: The relationship of the child with its family.

stated that their relationships with their children were positive before the pandemic. Twenty-two percent of the parents indicated that their children's relationship with their siblings was positive. It was also determined that the relationship of children with their parents (55,4%) and siblings (26%) was positively affected during the pandemic. Finally, it was detected that 35% of the children experienced no change in their relationship with their parents (Chart **1**).

According to Chart **2**, most parents expressed that their children did not use to have any health problems before the pandemic. The rate of the parents who

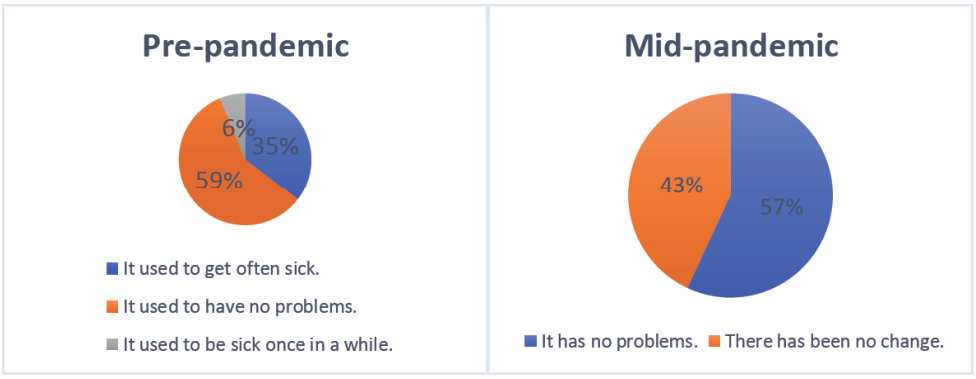

Chart 2: Health condition of the child.

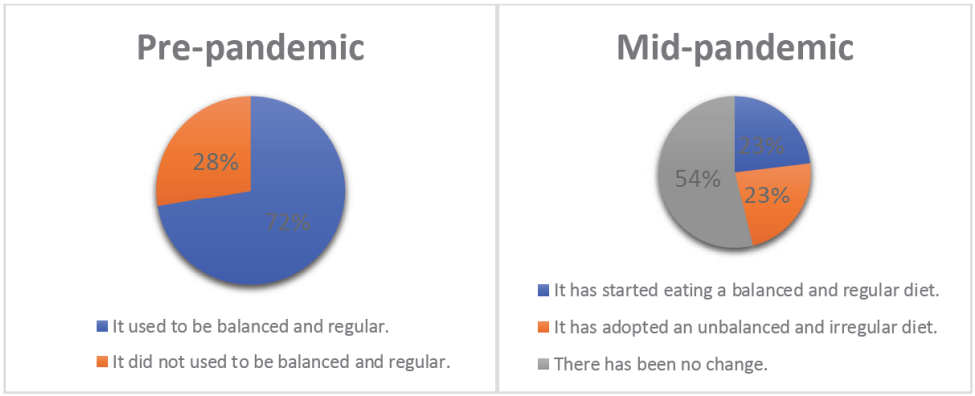

Chart 3: Nutrition and eating behaviors.

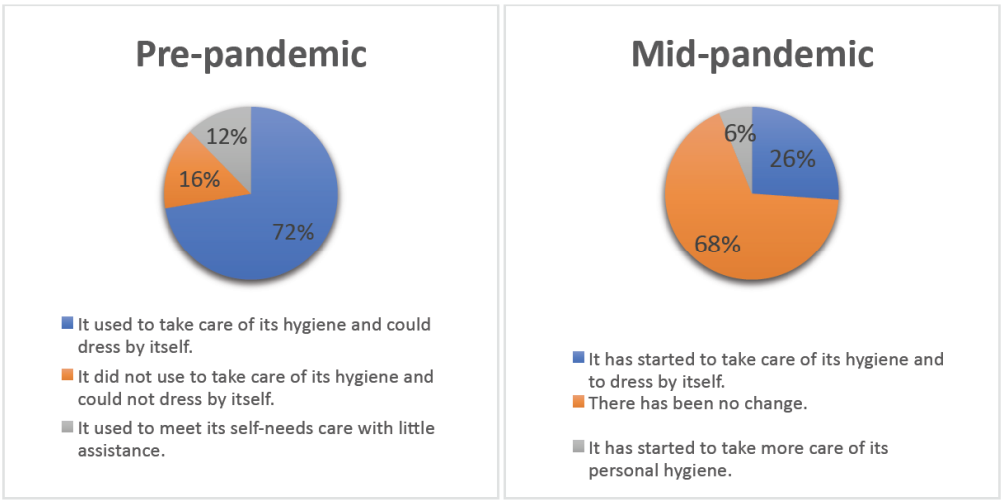

Chart 4: Self-care skills of the child.

stated that their children do not have any health problems during the pandemic was 57%.

Seventy-two percent of the parents stated that their children used to have a balanced and regular eating habit before the pandemic. On the other hand, 54% of them indicated no change in their children's eating behaviors during the pandemic (Chart **3**).

It was stated by 72% of the parents that their children used to take care of their hygiene (hand-face cleaning, mouth-dental health, bathroom habit, clean clothes, etc.) before the pandemic. On the other hand, it was found that 68% of the parents stated that there was no change in their children's self-care skills during the pandemic. Also, the pandemic indirectly led 26% of the children to start to take care of their personal hygiene and to dress by themselves.

Most parents stated that their children used to take care to wash their hands before the pandemic. It was found that 69% of the children started washing their hands with more care with the pandemic.

The parents responded more than once to the activities where they spent the most time with their children. It was found that most of the parents spent time with their children with a "play" activity before the pandemic. However, during the pandemic, it was determined that parents preferred to spend time with their children with “home activities,” such as drawing and helping with chores (Chart **6**).

It was discovered that the children’s active playtime was one or two hours a day with parental involvement before the pandemic, but it was found that such duration increased to three to four hours a day with the pandemic process.

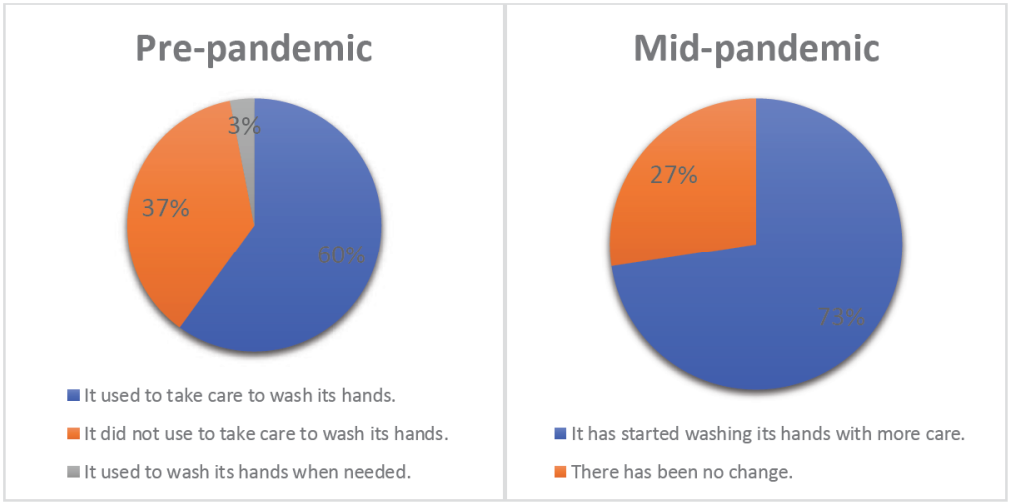

Chart 5: The child’s handwashing habit.

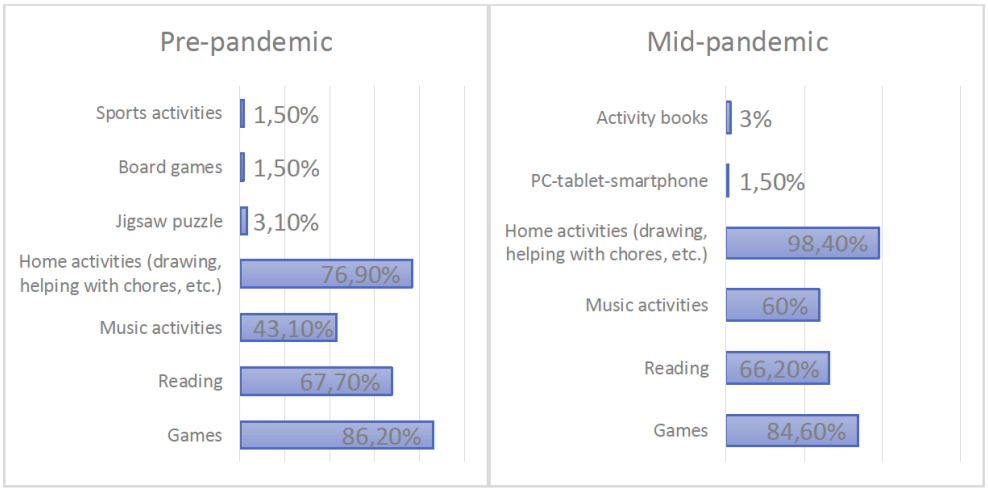

Chart 6: Activities where the parent spends the most time with the child.

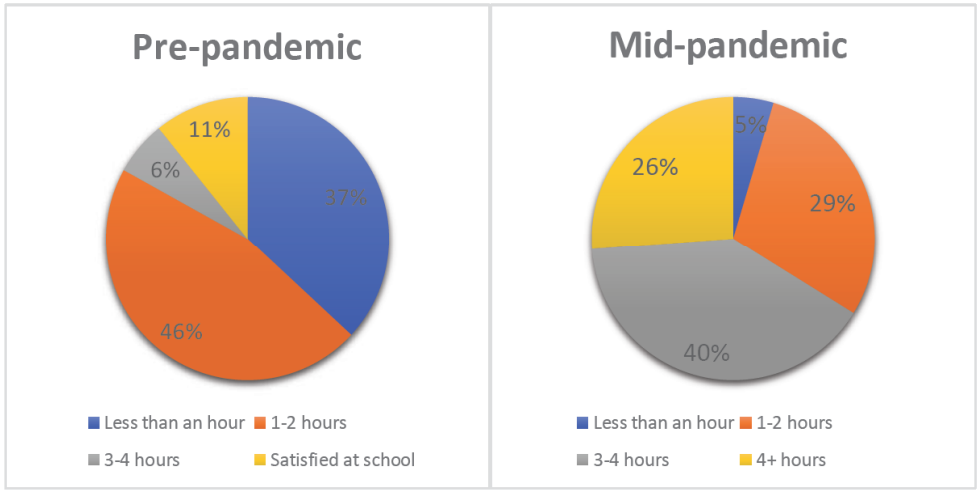

Chart 7: The child's average daily active playtime with parental involvement.

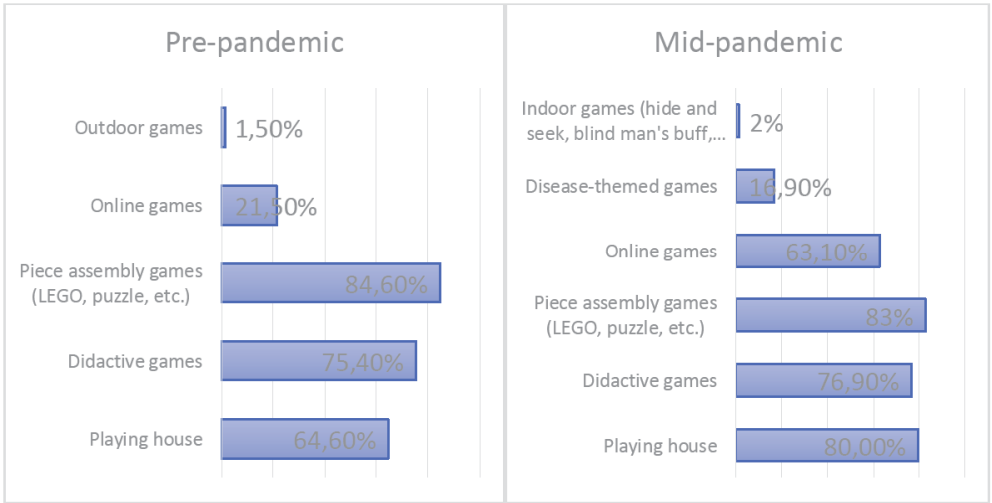

Chart 8: The type of games.

The parents could respond to more than one question about the type of games they play with their children. Accordingly, most parents stated that they played "piece assembly games" with their children

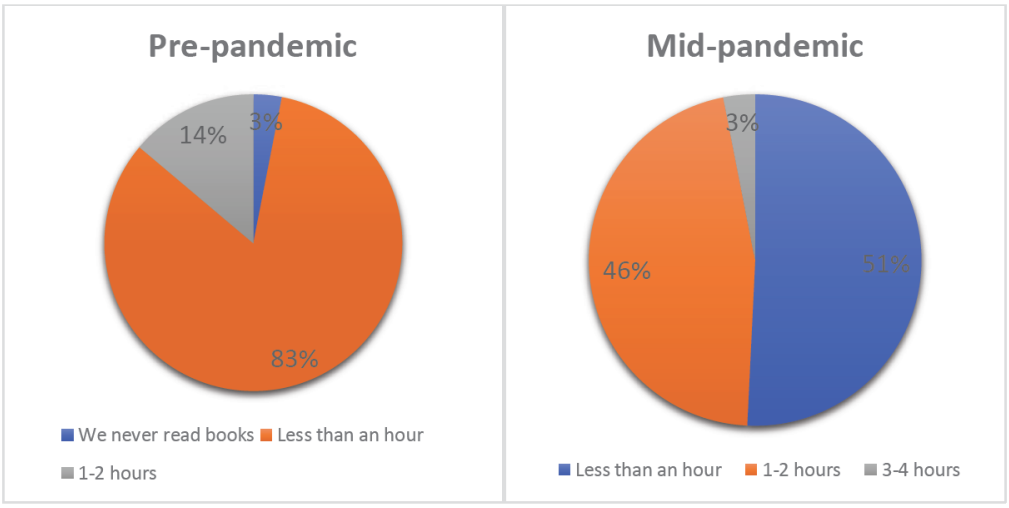

Chart 9: The child's daily interactive book reading time with parents.

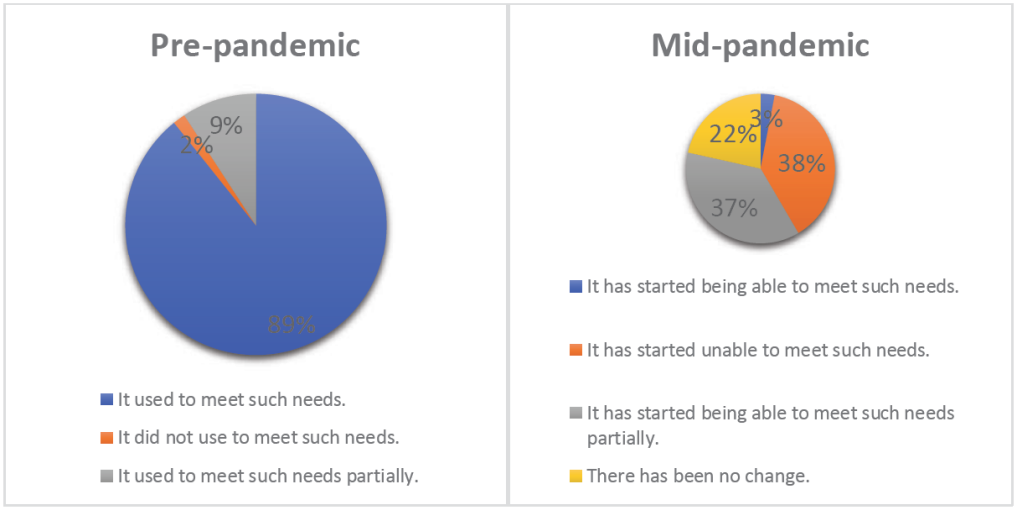

Chart 10: The child's meeting physical movement needs (running, skipping, jumping, etc.).

before the pandemic. It was also seen that piece assembly games were mostly preferred during the pandemic. In addition, it was another important finding that the rate of playing "playing house" increased in this process.

Most parents stated that the time spent reading interactive books with their children was less than an hour a day before the pandemic, which was also the case for 50% of the parents during the pandemic.

Most parents stated that their children could meet their physical movement needs (running, skipping, jumping, etc.) before the pandemic. However, the parents indicated that their children started unable to meet their movement needs (38%) or being able to meet their such needs partially (37%) during the pandemic.

According to Chart **11**, 77% of the parents stated that their children's nights' sleep was eight hours or more before the pandemic. It was found that most of there were no change in their night's sleep time, but 28% started to sleepless due to the pandemic.

According to the participating parents, it was found that 52% of the children did not use to sleep in the daytime before the pandemic. During the pandemic, there was no change in the daytime sleep time of 63%.

Most of the parents stated that their children's exposure time to technological devices (TV, phone, tablet, etc.) in a day was between half an hour and an hour before the pandemic. However, the pandemic led most children to be exposed to such devices more (1-2 hours) in a day (Chart **13**).

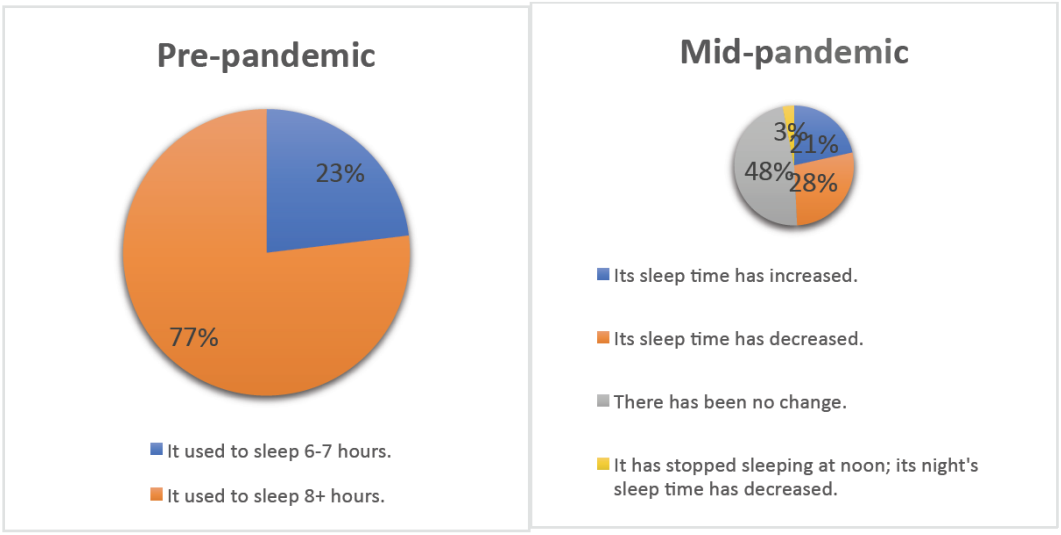

Chart 11: Night's sleep of the child.

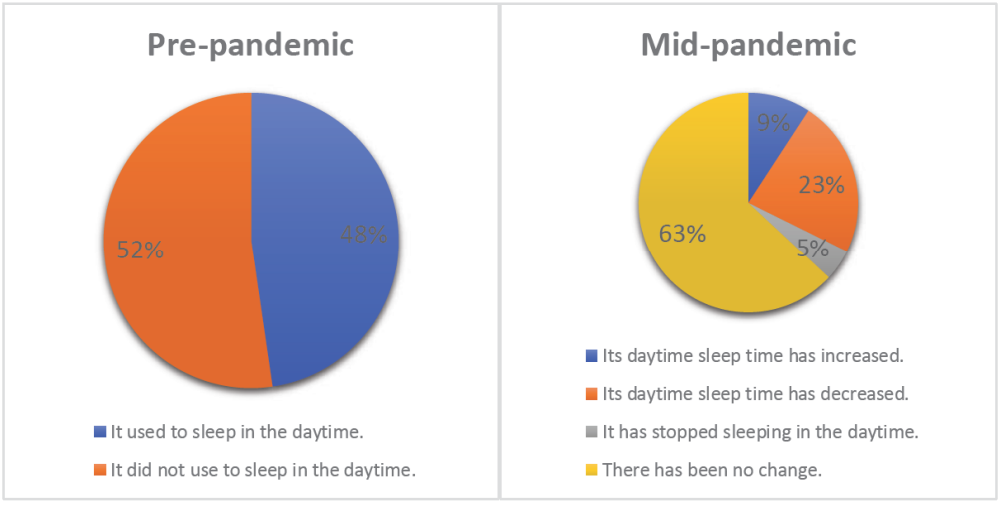

Chart 12: Daytime sleep of the child.

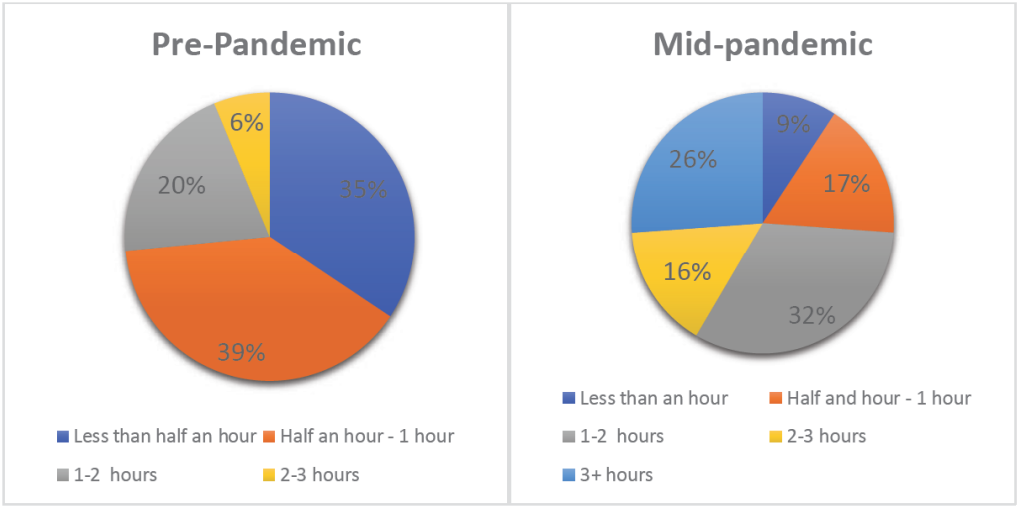

Chart 13: The child's exposure time to technological devices within a day.

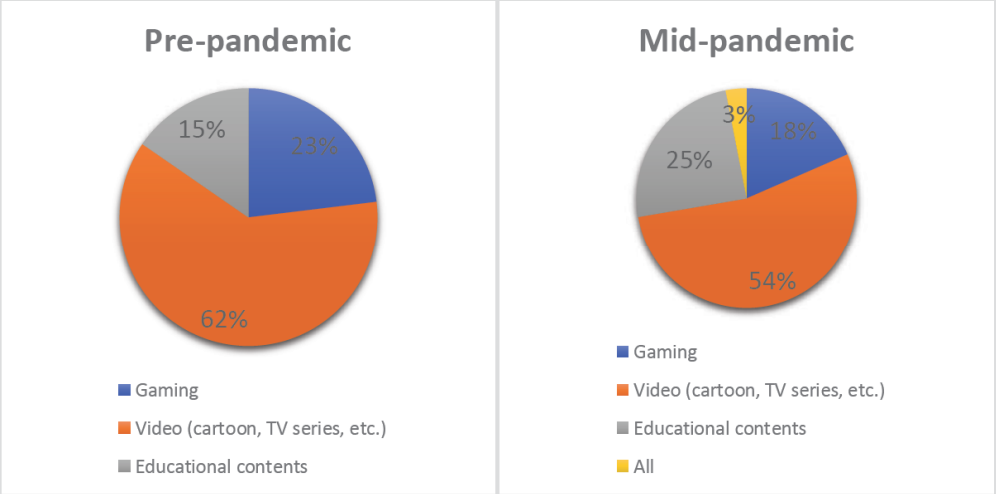

Chart 14: The child's purpose for using technological tools.

Chart **14** reveals that 63% of the children used to utilize technological tools to watch videos (cartoons, TV series, etc.) before the pandemic. Most of the children continued utilizing such tools for the same purpose during the pandemic.

DISCUSSION

In this study, which tried to explore children's daily life activities during the pandemic by the views of their parents, most of the parents stated that their children used to have positive family relationships before the pandemic and that these relationships were positively affected during the pandemic. The relationship established with parents is of great importance for children and adolescents to have a healthy social-emotional development [13]. It is also known that relationships with siblings foster children's development. It is stated that siblings learn social skills, such as imitation, playing, obeying the rules, and sharing, through continuous interaction [14]. In their study with parents, children between the ages of 2-6, Demirbaş and Koçak (2020) found that children became happier during the isolation process due to COVID-19, especially due to the mother's presence and/or father at home. [15] The social isolation process is considered the beginning of a new era in which the house is perceived as the "most reliable place" [16]. In social isolation, one of the most important issues to be considered, after meeting the child's primary needs and feeling safe, is the coexistence of the children with their families [17, 18]. Accordingly, the positive effect of the isolation process on family relationships can be considered a significant finding in the study.

Most of the participating parents indicated that their children used to have a balanced and regular diet before the pandemic and that this situation did not change during the pandemic. It was also emphasized that there was no change in the health conditions of their children. Nutrition is a leading variable affecting growth and development in early childhood. It is a well-known fact that this period has a critical importance for children to develop a positive attitude towards food and adopt positive eating habits [19]. Pietrobelli *et al*. (2020) conducted a study with 41 children and adolescents and found that their fruit consumption increased during the quarantine period, but there was no change in vegetable consumption [20]. The social isolation brought with the pandemic is thought to affect the mood, consequently people's eating habits. Moreover, it is estimated that the increase in the time spent at home, the repetitive news on the pandemic, increased anxiety and desire to consume food, and decrease in physical activity will cause weight gain in children [21]. Therefore, it can be positively understood that the children's eating habits, which were evaluated as balanced and regular by the parents before the pandemic, have been maintained during the pandemic.

It was understood from the parents' responses that there was mostly no change in their children's self-care skills than the pre-pandemic, but their children started to wash their hands more carefully with the pandemic. Self-care skills are life skills and are considered skills that individuals of all ages should have and are also essential for their physical, emotional, and social development to maintain their everyday lives [22]. Self-care skills include toilet training, self-feeding and self-dressing skills, handwashing, tooth brushing, nose-cleaning, and bath-taking [23]. The first six years of life are also called a critical period in which self-care skills are acquired [24]. In early childhood, children can get

sick if they knowingly or unknowingly touch the dirty places around them with their hands and put their dirty hands to their mouths [25]. It can be thought that public spots and posters prepared for proper handwashing, which is one of the measures frequently recommended by the Ministry of Health during the COVID-19, have enabled children to take more care of handwashing [26].

The parents stated that they used to play "games" with their children before the pandemic, and it was also discovered that the pandemic caused an increase in doing activities, such as home activities (drawing, chores, etc.). While the parents mostly played “piece assembly” games with their children during regular times, they indicated that the time spent with interactive games increased with the pandemic. Play is considered to be the child's most natural learning tool. In addition, while playing games, children can express their feelings and needs, gain the ability to solve many problems on their own, learn to relate to their environment, and begin to take the first steps of being a social individual [27, 28]. In the literature, Öztürk *et al*. (2020) determined that children spent more of their time at home by "playing games and doing activities" during the pandemic process, and they spent the rest of their time sleeping, watching TV, doing homework, and drawing pictures. [29] Demirbaş and Koçak (2020) found that the parents preferred activities based on mental, motor, and interaction skills with their children during the pandemic [15]. Considering that the child feels anxiety, worry, panic, and fear for itself, its family, and its immediate circle due to the COVID-19 pandemic; it is invaluable for children's physical and mental development and general well-being when mothers and fathers spend time with them and play games appropriate for their ages [30].

Concerning the question about "interactive reading time with children before and during the pandemic," it was determined that they read "less than an hour" interactive books before and during the pandemic. It is not debatable that environmental stimuli are effective in children's language development, and storybooks suitable for children's ages and developmental levels have an important place among such stimuli [31]. Reading books to children in early childhood is a fundamental support tool for teaching communication and gaining many language-related skills to the child, establishing a proper relationship with it, as well as explaining the meaning of the world to it [32]. In their research, Bao *et al*. (2020) claimed that suspending education due to COVID-19 would cause pre-school children to lose 67% of their early literacy skills [33]. Hence, it is deemed necessary for parents to carry out interactive reading activities with their children in order to prevent such an undesirable result.

The participating parents also stated that their children, who could meet the physical movement needs before the pandemic, became unable to meet such needs with the emergence of the pandemic. Basic movements should be gained to children in early childhood to enable them to maintain their lives independently. Balanced children's basic movements are only possible with creative and supportive environments and activities [34]. However, COVID-19, the social isolation process, and curfews hindered children between the ages of 3-6 from being able to spend their time at school, parks, streets, etc. The pandemic caused an increase in the time spent in front of the screen and led to problems, such as a change in sleep hours and limited physical activities [20, 35]. For this reason, parents can be recommended to play games and to do activities to meet the physical needs of their children at home.

The parents pointed out that their children used to have a night's sleep of eight hours or more before the pandemic, and this period did not change with isolation. There was also no change in daytime sleep compared to pre-isolation. A healthy sleep pattern is vital in children's growth and development, and the recommended daily sleep time for children aged 3-6 years is between 11-12 hours. Sleep disturbances that occur for various reasons can lead to many problems, such as low academic achievement, behavioral problems, psychological problems, and metabolic complications [36, 37]. In their study with the parents of children aged 5-11 years and adolescents aged 12-17 years in Canada, Guerrero *et al*. (2020) found that there were very few changes in the children's sleep times [38]. In light of such background, most parents stated that their children had a night sleep of eight hours or more before and during the pandemic can be regarded as important proof that the children can meet their sleep needs.

The findings suggested that most children used to use technological tools between half an hour and an hour a day before the pandemic, but this period increased to 1-2 hours a day due to the pandemic. The children were found to use technological tools for the purpose of watching “cartoons, TV series, etc.," before and during the pandemic. Today, children are born into technology, and it can respond to their needs, such as

education, communication, and entertainment [39]. The use of programs and games in such easy-to-access technological tools appropriately for children's development can positively contribute to the psychomotor, social, language, and cognitive development and learning processes of children [40]. However, children's use of technological tools without the supervision of their parents may cause speech delay in children, and exposure to violent content may lead them to develop aggressive attitudes. Therefore, the use of technological devices for children aged 3-6 years is recommended as 30 minutes a day [41]. Yet, the social isolation process brought with COVID-19 has disrupted the daily routines of children as well as adults, and the transition to distance education has caused children to be more exposed to technology [42]. In a study carried out by Xian *et al*. (2020) with a group of children and adolescents aged 6-17 years in Shanghai, China, it was found that there was a significant decrease in the physical activities and a significant increase in screen exposure of the participants during the COVID-19 outbreak [43]. Thus, it may be useful to provide support services for parents so that children can spend time with technological tools in a controlled manner.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, it was determined that the children's family relationships were satisfactory before the pandemic and were positively affected by the pandemic. Still, the pandemic did not affect their health conditions. Their pre-pandemic (balanced and regular) eating habits were not affected by the pandemic, and it was found that there was no change in their self-care skills; in contrast, they started to wash their hands more carefully with the pandemic. It was discovered that the pandemic led to an increase in doing certain activities, such as drawing and chores, and that piece assembly games were preferred the most in both periods. The duration of playing games increased in the pandemic. The interactive book reading time, which was less than an hour before the pandemic, did not change during the pandemic. The children were found not to be able to meet their physical movement needs during the pandemic, while they could meet them before it. In addition, their night's sleep used to last eight hours or more before and during the pandemic. It was also found out that they had no daytime sleep before isolation, and this situation did not change during the pandemic. Finally, while the duration of using technological tools was between half an hour and 1 hour before the pandemic, this period increased to 1-2 hours during the pandemic. The children's purpose in using technology was mostly to "watch cartoons, TV series, etc." Based on these findings,

- Children can be introduced to activities orienting to the importance of handwashing, personal hygiene, and self-care to foster the development of self-care skills, which have become prominent with the COVID-19 outbreak;
- During the pandemic, play activities or chores can be done with children, whose physical movement opportunities are restricted, to satisfy their such need;
- Families may be recruited to informative sessions about reading interactive books to prevent their pre-school children from losing their early literacy skills and from supporting their acquired skills during the pandemic;
- Alternative activities can be prepared for children at home to decrease the use of technological tools;
- Online psychosocial support services can be offered to families and children adversely affected by the pandemic, which will adapt them to the normalization process.

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