

Strategies for Mindful Parenting During COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Context: Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has affected people's lives in all aspects. One of the most critical yet neglected features is parenting and the experience of mindful parenting for kids and their parents.

Objectives: This study systematically reviewed the strategies for mindful parenting during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Methods: In this systematic review, all related databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, Google Scholar, and SID (Persian), were used to explore and search for the most relevant articles that had addressed mindfulness in parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic. A content analysis approach was applied to categorize the data. Codes were specified to every helpful strategy, and the codes were put in different themes and subthemes subjectively using a framework thematic analysis.

Results: Three studies were included in our review. The two dimensions of mindfulness were considered as two subgroups for strategies identified to improve mindfulness in parenting in the final articles: (1) being in the moment, which means concentrating on the living moment and not worrying, thinking, or ruminating about other problems; and (2) non-judgmental approach, which means avoiding cognitive biases, such as pre-judgment. All suggested strategies could be classified into the mentioned categories.

Conclusions: Strategies such as mindfulness in parenting are becoming more necessary for enhancing the quality of life for kids and their parents. Consequently, there is a need for policymakers and planners to facilitate parenting through social support systems and adjusting to the new situation, which will be on the agenda for a while.

Keywords: COVID-19; Mindfulness; Parenting; Strategy

1. Context

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), officially recognized as a pandemic, has affected people's lives (1, 2), an essential group of whom is pupils, especially first-graders and elementary school children (3), who are not able to cope with new situations as adults do. Given the highly contagious nature of the novel Coronavirus, it has strongly been recommended to stay at home and avoid gatherings, including in classrooms, particularly for kids who are supposed to be careless about taking measures, washing hands, or using hands sanitizers (3, 4). Moreover, many schools have small classrooms where social distancing is somehow, if not impossible, hard to be implemented. Therefore, precautionary actions are not options for school kids (5).

On the other hand, playing is the primary concern of children and is of great importance in their physical and mental growth (6). It is imaginable that locking children in the houses and prohibiting playing outside, going to

school, and playing especially with their peers, brings about a burden on parents' shoulders to amuse their kids and raise them normally (7). There is a scary trend in the era of COVID-19 declaring an increase in mental problems, namely stress, anxiety, depression, and other disorders (8). In this regard, there is a concern for the kids (9) who, as mentioned before, are more complicated to manage as their logical thinking is not as developed as adults, and they want to go out and play with other kids. Therefore, parents are worried about taking care of their kids in both areas: raising a normal competent kid and at the same time protecting him/her from COVID-19. Both duties are exhausting, energy-consuming, and require much effort and concentration (7, 10).

Having these challenges in mind, a growing body of evidence suggests interventions and taking actions for encountering COVID-related problems in terms of mental disorders, among which are interesting psychology-



based actions, including but not limited to executive functioning (11), play-based interventions (12), and mindfulness enrichment (13) interventions. One of the most important and valuable approaches introduced to parenting practice is mindful parenting stating. If parents use these strategies, which are, in short, treating the kid consciously and not with the impulses and emotions, there will be better outcomes for the kid, such as higher self-esteem and higher life satisfaction for both the parent and kid (14). This strategy helps parents grow the ability to live the moment and the skill of responding rather than reacting in which the element of thinking and contemplating is a vital factor and helps the kid to nurture and experience. Moreover, the parent controls the kid without being constantly worried, which causes the kid not to be stressed, and the parent will not be obsessed (15).

Mindfulness in parenting is not a new phenomenon and originates from Buddha’s teachings and even maybe earlier. In addition, there is a trace of this subject in ancient Persian prophet Zoroaster, which is in line with Islamic teachings emphasizing the importance of living in the moment and treating kids based on contemplating and morals. The mindfulness theories originating from the very early days in history mainly stress two dimensions: (1) being in the moment as a present-oriented approach; and (2) avoiding reactivity and judgment (16, 17). However, in the recent century, mindfulness in parenting has been stressed more than ever in the scientific literature and is considered a good style of parenting that helps both parents and kids in the journey they have together in the family (17).

As mentioned before, the COVID-19 pandemic is a whole new situation, and we do not know the dimensions this phenomenon had and is having and will have on our lives. Among the consequences, mental disorders are hard to detect and even manage. This condition is more

complex and more complicated for children as their psychological symptoms are different from adults and, as a result, could be misled by parents and even therapists (1, 3, 10).

2. Objectives

There are many unknown areas about COVID-19 consequences and mindfulness in parenting, which is a young debate in scientific society. Therefore, there is room for investigating its dimensions and bringing the question to the policy agenda of policymakers and planners and, more importantly, the authorities of the education system for the kids. With this background in mind, this study aimed to review the literature about practicing mindful parenting during COVID-19 and provide a basis for other researchers to have these strategies all in one package, as well as help parents become more familiar with this phenomenon.

3. Methods

This systematic review was completed following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses-2020 (18).

3.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The present study aimed to comprehensively search and find articles that addressed mindful parenting strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic in the world. To this aim, a primitive search of some related keywords, including “mindfulness”, “parenting”, and “COVID-19” - all MeSH terms- was performed by the researchers. Next, when some basic articles and publications were found, the keywords were checked, and the databases and search engines were searched comprehensively to find the highest possible number of articles related to the topic (Table 1).

Table 1. Search Strategies and Resources

| Row | Database/Search Engine | Search Strategy | Records | Considerations |
|-----|------------------------|--|---------|----------------|
| 1 | PubMed | ((mindfulness[MeSH Terms]) AND (covid-19[MeSH Terms])) AND (parenting[MeSH Terms]) | 16 | |
| 2 | Web of Science | Mindfulness(topic) AND parenting(topic) | 8 | |
| 3 | Psych Info | ((mindfulness[MeSH Terms]) AND (covid-19[MeSH Terms])) AND (parenting[MeSH Terms]) | 18 | |
| 4 | Scopus | ((mindfulness[MeSH Terms]) AND (covid-19[MeSH Terms])) AND (parenting[MeSH Terms]) | 3 | |
| 5 | Science Direct | ((mindfulness[MeSH Terms]) AND (covid-19[MeSH Terms])) AND (parenting[MeSH Terms]) | 2 | |
| 6 | Google Scholar | ((mindfulness[MeSH Terms]) AND (covid-19[MeSH Terms])) AND (parenting[MeSH Terms]) | 1340 | |
| 7 | SID | The Persian word for mindfulness, Covid, parenting | 23 | |

3.1.1. Language

Only publications in English or Persian were included in our study.

3.1.2. Year of Inclusion

Only publications since 2019 were included because of the emergence of COVID-19 in 2019, as it is apparent from the name of the virus.

3.1.3. Publication Status

Exclusively scholarly published articles belonging to peer-reviewed journals were considered for the final analysis.

3.1.4. Exclusion Criteria

Letters to editors, editorials, and other publications

which had not been peer-reviewed were eliminated. Publications that assessed mindfulness strategies not focusing on COVID-19 were excluded.

3.2. Sources of Information and Search

The searched engines and databases were Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, Google Scholar, and SID (Persian).

4. Study Selection

As mentioned above, PRISMA-2020 was applied for collecting data. Out of 2036 records, 45 had the potential to be considered for full-text screening. However, at the end of the screening process, as shown in Figure 1, three final articles met the pre-defined inclusion criteria (19-21). More about including and excluding studies can be found in Figure 1.

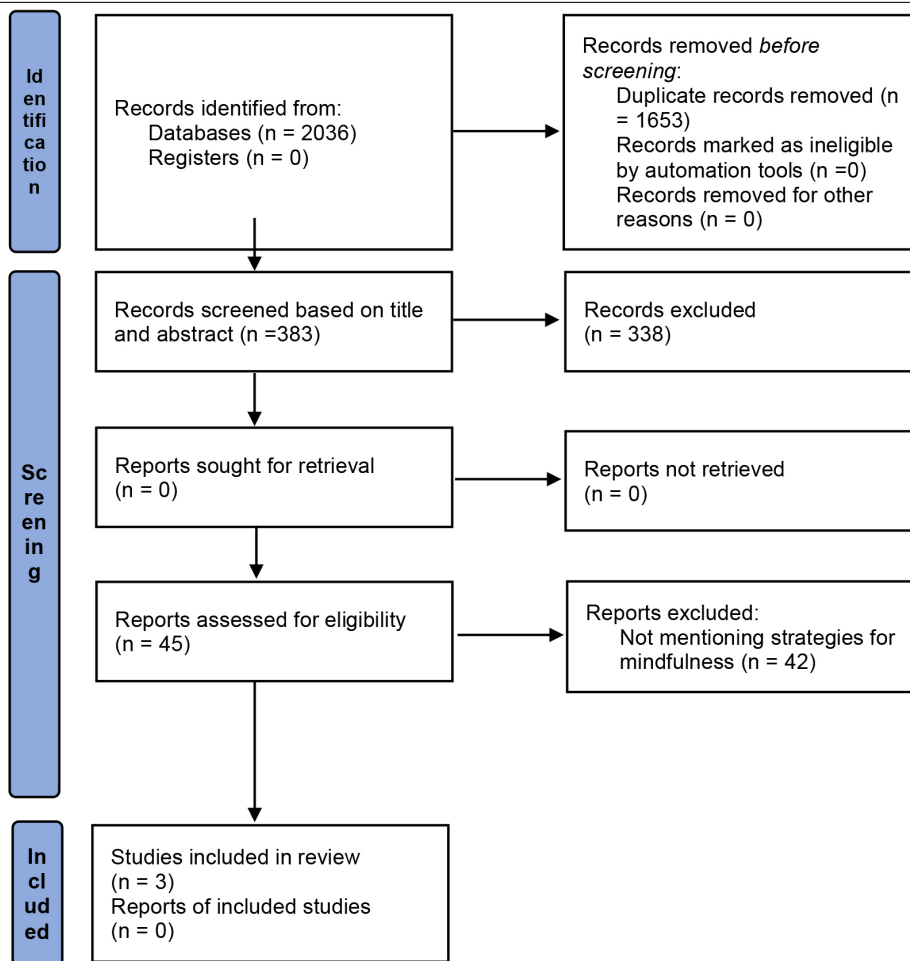


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of study selection

4.1. Study Characteristics

Out of three final articles, two were narrative reviews, and one was a cross-sectional survey accomplished via online questionnaires. All three final articles were in Eng-

lish, and just the original survey had ethical approval as the other two did not seem to need this kind of approval. All characteristics of the final included studies can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Extraction Table of Mindfulness Strategies in COVID-19 Pandemic

| Row | Author/Date | The Strategy of Mindfulness Improvement | Type of Article | Outcomes | | Year | Data Collection | | Ethical Approval | Quality Appraisal (W, M, G) |
|-----|-----------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|-------------|-------------|----------------------|--|------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | | Desirable | Undesirable | | Methods | Tool(s) | | |
| 1 | Coyne et al. (19) | Strategies to support parents' psychological flexibility: Step 1: Mindfulness and Acceptance; Step 2: Valued and Committed Action; Step 3: Self-compassion | Discussion and review | n/a | n/a | 2020 | Review | Review | n/a | M |
| 2 | Fernandes et al. (20) | Listening with full attention to the child, emotional awareness of the child, self-regulation in the parenting relationship, a non-judgmental acceptance of parental functioning, and compassion for the child | Original cross-sectional (survey) | Decrease in anxious and depressive symptomatology, decrease in Parenting stress, improvement in mindful parenting, improvement in mother-infant bonding | - | 2019 - 2020 | Online questionnaire | Portuguese interpersonal mindfulness in parenting scale (IMP-infant version) | Yes | G |
| 3 | Fuller & Fitter (21) | 1- Meditation on the soles of the feet (SoF); 2- Mindful S.T.O.P.; 3- Surfing the urge; 4- Self-monitoring | Review-debate | Decrease in the psychological distress; increased quality of life | - | 2020 | Narrative review | Review | n/a | M |

4.2. Quality Appraisal

Two independent researchers (E.B.B. and F.S.) assessed the quality of the final articles included in the study using CASP checklists (22). The checklist consisted of ten questions with a range of 1 - 10. In times of disagreement

between two researchers, a third author's opinion was considered the final decision (T.S.T.). The average score of the researchers was calculated, and articles were categorized as follows: 1 - 4: weak, 4 - 7: moderate, and > 7: good.

5. Results

The whole debate is still young, and not to mention COVID-19 and its effects, no RCT was found. As a result, given the nature of the research for presenting valuable strategies to improve mindfulness for parents during the COVID-19 pandemic, other types of scholarly publications were considered to be included. The content analysis approach was applied to categorize and analyze the data. Codes were specified to every helpful strategy, and when

coding was finished, the codes were put in different themes and subthemes subjectively using a framework thematic analysis. As stated, a framework thematic analysis was used to categorize and make sense of the data. The two dimensions of mindfulness were considered as two subgroups for strategies identified to improve mindfulness in parenting in the final articles: being in the moment and non-judgmental approach (16). Results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Synthesis of strategies of mindfulness in parenting

| Row | Author/Date | Being in the Moment | Non-judgmental Approach |
|-----|-----------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Coyne et al. (19) | 1. Mindfulness and acceptance | 1. Valued and committed action; 2. Self.compassion |
| 2 | Fernandes et al. (20) | 1. Listening with full attention to the child; 2. Emotional awareness of the child; 3. Self. regulation in the parenting relationship | 1. A non.judgmental acceptance of parental functioning; 2. Compassion for the child |
| 3 | Fuller & Fitter (21) | 1. Meditation on the soles of the feet (SoF); 2. Mindful S.T.O.P.; 3. Surfing the Urge; 4. Self.monitoring | 1. Meditation on the soles of the feet (SoF); 2. Mindful S.T.O.P.; 3. Surfing the Urge; 4. Self.monitoring |

5.1. Discrepancy

Two independent researchers searched and extracted the articles. Firstly, the article titles were read, and irrelevant ones were crossed out. Next, the abstracts were checked for suitable articles. In the final stage, the full texts of the included articles were read carefully and extensively. When the two researchers did not agree on an article, a third author's opinion was used.

6. Discussion

COVID-19 emerged in the last months of 2019 in Wuhan, China, and attracted the interest and resources of many researchers in different aspects, medically and non-medically. It has affected the lives of people in diverse ways. Among all groups of people, children seem to be more in danger as the milestone of the formation of their character and personality (23) has been intervened by this virus, pandemic, and the bizarre situation caused for people (24). On the other hand, parenting is a primitive duty of every parent, which is being more addressed in educational psychology, and various strategies are being developed and presented these days for improving this function. Mindful parenting means concentrating on the nurture of the child, using entire focus, and avoiding cognitive bias to improve the experience of developing and growing up for the child and parenting for the parents. It has been of interest to scholars in the field of psychology (25).

In order to help parents to overcome the challenges of parenting during the pandemic, and due to the problems of COVID-19 situation children and their parents' experience, different strategies have been presented by research-

ers. In the current study, those strategies were divided into two categories that concentrate on: (1) living the moment and dedicating whole mind and attention to living the moment; and (2) avoiding judgments that could sabotage the positive rapport between the child and parents for building a constructive relationship in which the child can use the guidance and passion of parents without worrying about being blamed or intimidated.

6.1. Conclusion

As demonstrated in Table 3, the essence of mindfulness in parenting is based on two primary duties to which parents should oblige themselves: (1) be in the moment with the child and avoid imaging experiences in mind or future mind-made images that are mostly unreal exaggerated cautions; and (2) be compassionate with the child and avoid any judgmental actions that are primarily reactive unconscious and often hurt the child physically or mentally.

6.2. Limitations and/or the Quality of Reviewed Research

Two included articles were assessed as medium quality, and one was evaluated as good quality. However, all three final papers were included in the synthesis of information. Regarding limitations, the research focused on the different needs of health practitioners, while other vulnerable, voiceless groups and communities, such as parents and families, are experiencing a unique situation. Limited articles have addressed the needs of parents and other communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore,

the whole debate on mindfulness in parenting is relatively young, and there is a lack of research in this field, resulting in few eligible articles being included in a systematic review. Therefore, there is a need for follow-up review articles to enhance the data provided in this manuscript.

Overall, it seems that strategies, such as mindfulness in parenting, are becoming more and more necessary for enhancing the quality of life for kids and their parents. As a result, there is a need for policymakers and planners to facilitate the practice of parenting and adjusting to the new situation through social support systems which will be on the agenda for a while.

Authors' Contribution:

All authors' contribution is equal.

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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