Concerns and effects of COVID-19 in families with babies: results of a nationwide survey in Finland

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Background:
The COVID-19 has changed the everyday life of families. The aim of this study was to examine the concerns and effects of the pandemic on the everyday life of families with babies.

Methods:
The data consist of mothers (n = 4550) and fathers (n = 2955) with 3-6-month-old babies who participated in the national FinChildren survey in autumn 2020. The results were analyzed separately for mothers and fathers according to the number of children. One-child parents were compared to parents with several children by logistic regression adjusted for parents’ age, education and economic situation.

Results:
The response rate was 50% among mothers and 36% among fathers. Mothers worried about COVID-19 more than fathers and one-child parents more than parents with several children. Mothers reported increased loneliness more than fathers regardless of the number of children (48% vs 21%). Adjusted odds ratio (95% confidence interval) for concern related to delivery during the pandemic was 1.98 (1.74-2.25) for one-child mothers and 1.95 (1.66-2.30) for fathers and for concern to the danger of COVID-19 to the baby 1.66 (1.47-1.89) for one-child mothers and 1.97 (1.67-2.34) for fathers, respectively. Coping with everyday life was less likely to change due to the pandemic among one-child mothers (decrease 0.56, 0.48-0.65 / increase 0.59, 0.49-0.70) compared to mothers with several children. Contacts with grandparents were less likely to decrease among one-child mothers (0.75, 0.65-0.86). The amount of time spent with family was more likely to decrease among both one-child mothers (2.63, 2.11-3.28) and fathers (2.22, 1.51-3.27) compared to the parents with several children.

Conclusions:
The COVID-19 has had both negative and positive effects on the everyday life of families with babies. During and after the pandemic, it is necessary to pay attention to the coping of mothers and fathers, and to the support and services offered to them.

Key messages:
- Mothers of small babies worry more and are more lonely than fathers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Coping in everyday life is more polarised among families with several children than in one-child families.