

## **Parents and children during the COVID-19 quarantine process: Experiences from Turkey and China**

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### **Abstract**

This paper reports Turkish and Chinese parents' experiences with their 3-6 year-old children during the COVID-19 quarantine process. Thirteen Turkish and 11 Chinese parents participated in a study that employed semi-structured interviews to examine participant self-perceived experiences. Findings show that the study revealed many commonalities in the experiences of Turkish and Chinese parents with their children during the COVID-19 quarantine process. Cultural differences between parents did not appear to significantly reflect the responses of parents during this extraordinary period. Parents mostly described difficulties with home quarantine. Most parents stated that their daily schedule and routines had changed as a result of home quarantine. Parents also said that they were unaware of their children's developmental progress and the extent to which their children had grown up before the quarantine. Parents shared both positive and negative experiences during the process. Since the quarantine process is an extraordinary experience for all family members, parents should be encouraged to put those positive experiences and acquisitions into their future life.

**Keywords:** parents, preschool children, COVID-19, quarantine, experience

## **Introduction**

Sociocultural perspectives of contemporary early childhood emphasise the significance of familial relationships, particularly parent-child relationships, (Edwards, 2003; Nolan and Raban, 2015), on young children's social and emotional development (Rose et al., 2018). Meanwhile, parent-child relationships are subject to various factors, including child's birth order, prenatal experiences, number of children, child's personal characteristics, family relationships, and the perceived value of the child (Sak et al., 2015; Sidebotham and ALSPAC Study Team, 2001). These factors affect parental attitudes and influencing the quality of the parent-child relationship. Landmark studies by Baumrind (1980; 1991) suggest three types of basic parenting attitudes - democratic, authoritarian and permissive; which may lead to differences in child development outcomes. Democratic parenting can generate compatible, independent, creative, self-confident and responsible children; whereas authoritarian and permissive parenting can lead children to become obedient, aggressive, indecisive, unsocial, insecure, depressed and inadequate (Kuppens and Ceulemans, 2019; Smetana, 2017). The hybrid of parenting attitudes forms dynamic parent-child relationships and contributes significantly to child wellbeing and resilience (Jones and Lagacé - Séguin, 2006; Newland, 2014; Newland et al., 2014; Nomaguchi, 2012).

Although parenting attitudes are crucial for parent-child relationships, several other factors also play an important influential role, including: parent and child mental health, family relationships, number of individuals living within the home, number of siblings, parental educational level, parental employment outwith the home, family income, school attendance, and cultural background (Bornstein et al., 2018; Erkan and Toran, 2010; September et al., 2016; Zhang, 2012). Humanitarian crises (such as war and natural disasters) and extraordinary situations that alter the stability of day-to-day life also affect parent-child relationships. Parents affected by humanitarian crises were observed as being more prone to the development of Post-

Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, anxiety, social problems, hopelessness and fear, and were thus less warm, less attentive, and more non-permissive towards their children (Eltanamy et al., 2019; Van Ee et al., 2012). Natural disasters were also associated with increased parental stress levels and changes in attitudes towards children (Miki et al., 2019). Meanwhile, children who experienced natural disasters faced problems related to adaptation, communication, and mental health, and for which parent-child relationships are vital in tackling (Cobham et al., 2016; Kessel et al., 2019).

The outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic has led to considerable social and political changes across many different countries. The Covid-19 home quarantine process resulted in school closures, parental home-working, and caring for their children 24 hours a day. Lifestyles also changed significantly, affecting family relationships, and particularly parent-child relationships (Miho and Thévenon, 2020). In addition, responsibility for pedagogical routines applied by preschool institutions were assigned to parents. These changes will likely impact parenting skills, parenting attitudes, and parent-child relationships (Cluver et al., 2020). Whilst working parents continue to work from home, they are now also dealing with daily, developmental and academic responsibilities, in addition to caring for their child(ren). That said, mothers are most likely to take on these additional responsibilities (Alon et al., 2020; Di Giorgio et al., 2020; Orgilés et al., 2020; Viner et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020a).

It has been stated that parent-child relationships were affected in pandemics that occurred before the COVID-19. In the study of Lachman et al. (2014), it was noted that the attitudes of parents who were HIV-positive towards their children were negatively affected, and they isolate themselves so they were not able to provide adequate care for their children. In a study conducted by Doku (2010), it was found that children of parents diagnosed with HIV experienced several emotional problems such as anxiety and depression, and their parent-child relationships were negatively affected by this process. Also, it was reported that children's

anxiety and fears were highly correlated with the anxiety and fear developed in parents associated with the H1N1 epidemic (Remmerswaal and Muris, 2011), and that anxiety of family members caused by the H1N1 virus increased (Prati et al. Zani, 2011). Koller et al. (2006) found that emotional confusion occurred between children who were isolated because of SARS and their families, and isolation process negatively affected children both emotionally and socially. Sprang and Silman (2013) noted that the isolation process had negative effects on the parent-child relationship, and also it was quite difficult for parents to manage the process with children. Similarly, Cava et al. (2005) reported that individuals who experienced the quarantine process did not continue their pre-quarantine lives after quarantine, and had a more anxious, fearful and isolated life. These researches show that epidemics affect the parent-child relationship and family relations negatively and also have some psychological effects on children and parents.

Quarantine is usually unpleasant for people who experience it and cause some dramatic results because it means that separation from loved people, the loss of freedom and movement, uncertainty and sometimes some speculations over disease status, and boredom (Brooks et al.). Also, “while actions such as encouraging individuals to adopt *social distancing*, mandating school and business closures, and imposing travel restrictions may reduce the transmission of the infectious disease, unfortunately not all are finding safety in the resulting seclusion” (Campbell 2020, p. 1). Therefore, experiences in the quarantine process are critical but predictions as to how the quarantine process affects parent-child relationships are not based on empirical research. Instead, these are mostly based on inferences from reports determining current situations and/or the findings of previous research. This paper therefore aims to reveal the direction and quality of the parent-child relationship, and efforts to cope with the quarantine process. This study is particularly significant given the absence of research on parent-child relationships in this extraordinary context and because it reveals how working parents built

relationships with their children whilst home-working, undertaking daily household chores, and meeting their children's expectations.

### **Comparing China and Turkey**

Comparison between China and Turkey was justified at two levels: the general discourses of parenting in the two countries, and specific discourses of COVID-19. Firstly, China and Turkey share significant similarities in parenting cultures. Both societies have seen an increasing proportion of working parents (especially working mothers) in their rapidly growing economies, with many parents relying on support from grandparents, sometimes even as primary carers (Hung et al., 2018; Tezel Şahin and Şahin, 2020). Parent-child contact time is thus often limited on a daily basis. In addition, China and Turkey are both experiencing changes in parenting cultures (Bayram Özdemir and Cheah, 2015; Xie and Li, 2019). Whilst traditionally patriarchal and authoritative parenting styles are still prevalent in both countries, more supportive, liberal, and equal parent-child relationships are now emerging. Secondly, China was the first country in the world to experience the COVID-19 outbreak, where lockdown and quarantine policies were actioned before other countries. Guidance was issued from various national and local resources to support parents in caring and educating their children in quarantine, but how this was experienced by families was not much reported in media or empirical research. When the interviews were conducted, China already emerged from the lockdown and parents and children started to return to their normal daily lives. In Turkey, after schools were closed and online education process had started, a distance education system was established to support students academically and socially and a psychosocial support system was developed by Ministry of National Education [MoNE]. Educational Informatics Network was improved for distance education and collaborated with Turkish Radio and Television Corporation to serve effectively. MoNE also aimed to help parents to deal with the negative psychological effects of COVID-19 so a psychosocial support system involving counsellors was established. Moreover, Vocational

and Technical Training Schools [VETS] were supported to produce much-needed materials and equipment in pandemic days (Özer, 2020). When the interviews were conducted, there was still a lockdown in several cities of Turkey at weekends.

By linking the two discourses together, our paper provides an opportunity to examine whether Chinese and Turkish parents were able to rethink their relationship with their children and whether changes have happened/are predicted to happen after spending an unusually long period together during the COVID-19 quarantine. In global contexts of grandparent caregiving (Wang et al., 2019) and changing cultures of parenting (Xie and Li, 2018), our paper indicates possible post-COVID-19 changes in discourses of parenting in China, Turkey and possibly other countries too.

## **Method**

Our paper addresses the research question: *How did Turkish and Chinese parents perceive experiences with their 3-6 years old children in COVID-19 quarantine process?* A qualitative approach framed the design of semi-structured interviews that aimed to investigate parents' accounts of their relationships with children while spending all their time together at home. A comparative dimension was added to the study to understand how parents and children from two different countries were experiencing the global pandemic to enhance knowledge about the impact of COVID-19 on children and families from socio-cultural perspectives. That said, this study does not intend to generalise all parents' experiences in the two countries. Instead, emerging patterns within and across cultures provide new knowledge about the topic and signpost to issues that require attention for the benefits of parents and children during such a special time.

## **Participants**

Twenty-four parents from across China (11) and Turkey (13) were recruited based on three criteria:

- 1) Having a 3-6 year-old child attending a preschool institution;
- 2) Spending all their time at home with his/her child during the COVID-19 quarantine process;
- 3) Not having received training relating to early childhood education and care and not working with young children.

Random and snowball sampling were used to identify suitable participants via online communities and personal networks. The numbers of fathers (6) and mothers (7) in our Turkish sample were balanced, but we failed to get enough Chinese fathers (3 out of 11) - reflecting the gendered pattern of childrearing in Chinese society (Jiang, 2019). Participants were mostly in their 30s or 40s and their occupations vary from marketing, academician, public officer, accountant, teacher to self-employed. The majority (20/24) hold an undergraduate degree or above. The socio-economic status of most participants is relatively affluent and all participants are based in cities, possibly due to class-related interests in parenting and participating in research activities. A table comprising detailed demographic information of the participants and their children is listed in Appendix.

## **Data collection**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted on an individual basis with parents using online communication tools, subject to participant convenience/choice. Eight interview questions were initially developed with reference to the research questions/aims and literature review, and were adapted after a pilot study with one Turkish and one Chinese parent. The questions cover topics of the quarantine process, parents' perspectives of their relationships with the children before,

during and after the quarantine, and parents' perceived positive and negative experiences in the quarantine process. Participants participated in the study voluntarily and they were given the chance to add things not discussed in the eight questions at the end of the interview. Interviews lasted 20-30 minutes each as we were aware of the limited time parents may have had due to caring responsibilities. Nevertheless, participants provided in-depth responses to the proposed topics and beyond, through relaxed online interactions with the interviewers (Xu and Waniganayake, 2018). All names appearing in this paper are pseudonyms and all identifiable information has been removed. We were aware that discussing personal experiences in the time of a health crisis could potentially be emotionally sensitive for participants (Fahie, 2014). Consequently, we emphasized the option for participants to quit at any time and their right to refuse to answer any questions. It turned out that the participants were willing and active in sharing their experiences and opinions and appreciated the opportunity to 'give voices'.

### **Data analysis**

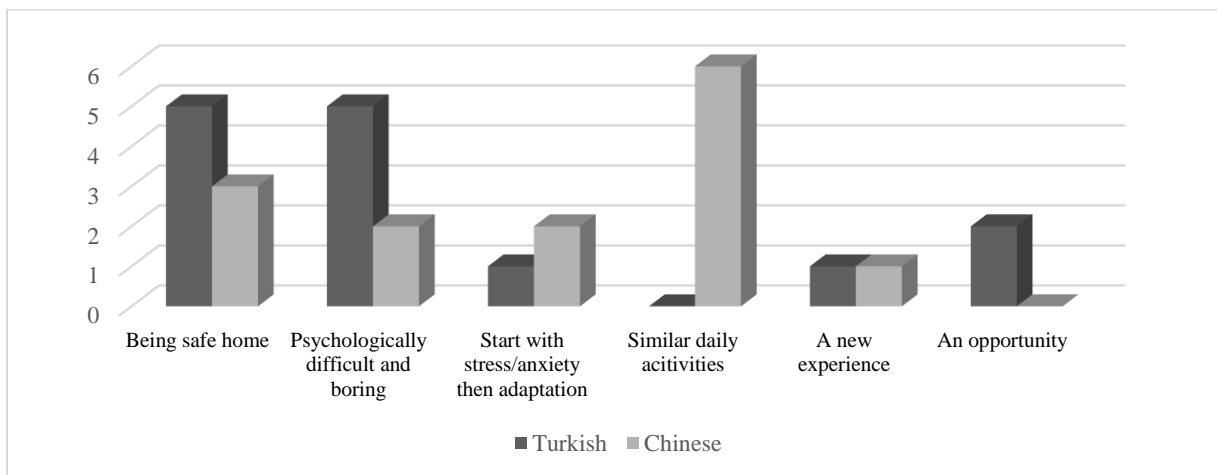
Interviews were transcribed and translated into English by the researchers. The researchers' familiarity with the topic and the social-cultural contexts of China and Turkey minimised the loss of cultural sensitivity both translation and data analysis processes (Xu and Waniganayake, 2018). A combination of inductive and deductive coding and theme development was used in our qualitative data analysis. The thematic analysis yielded seven themes both as related to the research question and as emerging from the data. They are: 1. Description of home quarantine; 2. Relationship with children before and after quarantine; 3. Changes to daily routines during quarantine; 4. Child characteristics that parents had not previously noticed; 5. Positive experiences during quarantine; 6. Negative experiences during quarantine; 7. After quarantine. Inter-researcher check was conducted to ensure consistent coding in the research team. Particular attention was paid to the similar and different reflections by Chinese and Turkish



parents, in order to understand the socio-cultural influences on parents' experiences with their 3-6 year-olds in the time of COVID-19 quarantine.

## Findings

### Description of home quarantine



**Chart 1.** Description of home quarantine

Parents were initially asked to briefly describe the home quarantine process. Turkish parents tried to explain the process using certain words or phrases, while Chinese parents usually focused on what they did during quarantine. When describing the quarantine, the most popular response was *being safe home* (n=8; 5 Turkish, 3 Chinese). Some also added that it refers to social isolation, less movement and less socialization.

Five Turkish and two Chinese parents described the process as psychologically difficult and boring. Two Turkish parents stated that it was especially boring for children and they did not want to stay home, while another parent said:

*Everything was OK and we had fun at the beginning of the process but day by day, we started to fight. Especially psychologically, it was not easy.* (Agit, Turkish father)

Three parents (1 Turkish, 2 Chinese) defined quarantine as a process starting with stress and anxiety, followed by adaptation. For example, Betul (Turkish mother) stated that they were

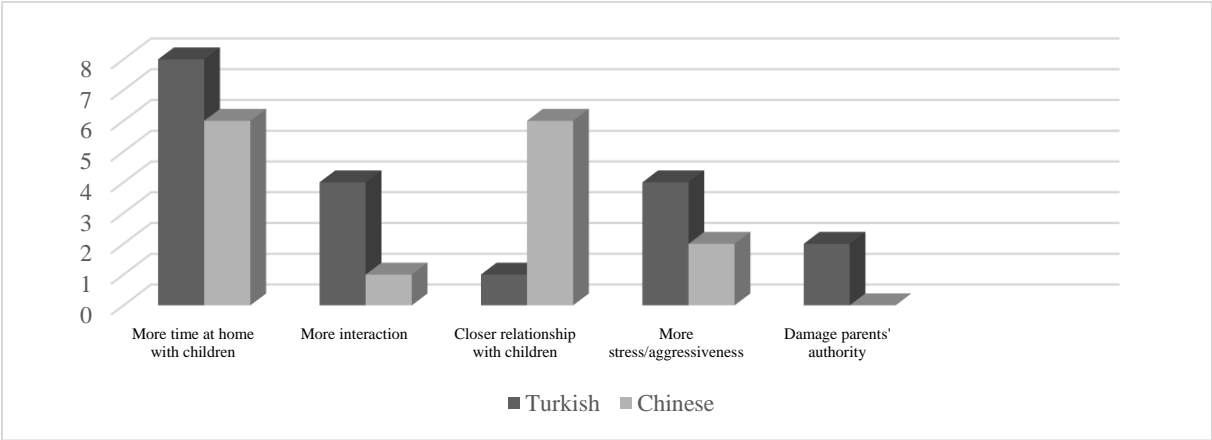
very anxious during the first two weeks and felt as if they were in prison and would never be able to go outside again and would die at home. However, by the end of the second week, all family members had begun adapting to the new system and new rules.

According to six Chinese parents, Covid-19 quarantine meant similar daily activities, such as online children’s courses and parental online working. One of them (Chalis, Chinese mother) said she continued with kindergarten courses, so that she could stay at home and recreate, to an extent, the kindergarten experience. However, circumstances meant this was undertaken without companionship and social interaction.

While two parents (1 Turkish, 1 Chinese) described the process as a new experience, two Turkish parents stated it was an opportunity. However, these parents also emphasized how their work meant they were unable to spend as much time with their children as they would have preferred, with one stating:

*Actually, I thought that it was good because I always wanted to spend more time with my child, and it was an opportunity. However, in time, my son started to get bored because staying at home is boring for children. (Hilal, Turkish mother)*

**Relationship with children before and after quarantine**



**Chart 2.** Relationship with children before and after quarantine

Approximately half the total number participants (n=14; 8 Turkish, 6 Chinese) stated that they spent more time at home and interacted more with their children. Parents highlighted that they normally spent a limited amount of time with their children at home, interacting only in the evenings or at weekends. Betul (Turkish mother) said they had been doing several activities at weekends before quarantine, but did not spend much time together at home. After quarantine however, they started spending more time at home, chatting, playing and reading books together.

Five parents (4 Turkish, 1 Chinese) stated the home quarantine process reduced the pace of life for all family members and increased their levels of interaction, as Hilal, one Turkish mother, commented:

*Before the quarantine process, I always had to hurry up and finish many works. It means that I never had enough time for my child. However, now I feel that the flow of our lives is slower. Therefore, we started to play together more and to recognize each other better. We ask each other what we want to do.*

Seven parents (1 Turkish, 6 Chinese) described having a closer relationship with their children after quarantine, stating that work responsibilities before quarantine meant they were unable to spend enough time with their children to establish a closer relationship. Ali (Turkish father) focused on the importance of physical contact, stating that they were together in the home 24 hours a day during quarantine, which enabled them to be physically and psychologically close. Two Chinese mothers (An Na and Juan) and one father (Rui) also used similar words and said that before quarantine their jobs limited the levels of closeness they could have with their children.

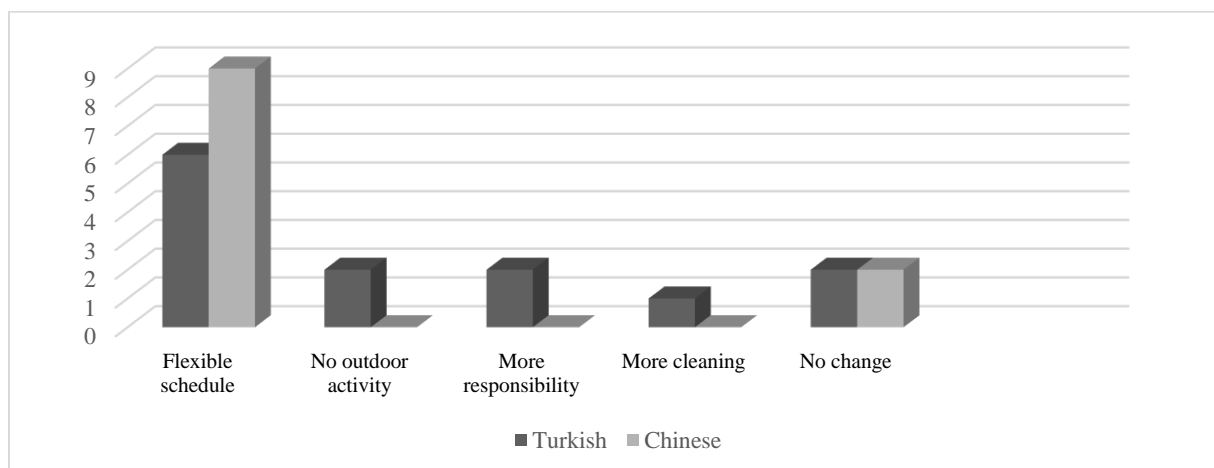
In contrast, some parents (n=6; 4 Turkish, 2 Chinese) focused upon increased levels of stress/aggressiveness amongst parents or children resulting from quarantine. For instance, Sema (Turkish mother) stated that before quarantine she had a positive relationship with her son, but

that he became bored at home during quarantine and subsequently became aggressive. Increased levels of parental stress/aggressiveness, were described by a Chinese mother:

*[...] we are with her 24 hours now, she depends on me completely, even when I go to the toilet, she watches at the door so it's annoying. Because I'm like, 'Oh, can't you just give me a minute?' I am cranky.* (An Na)

Two Turkish fathers talked about the effects of the quarantine process on discipline, with Umut stating that because they spent so much time together, they became more like friends, which damaged his authority.

### Changes to daily routines during quarantine

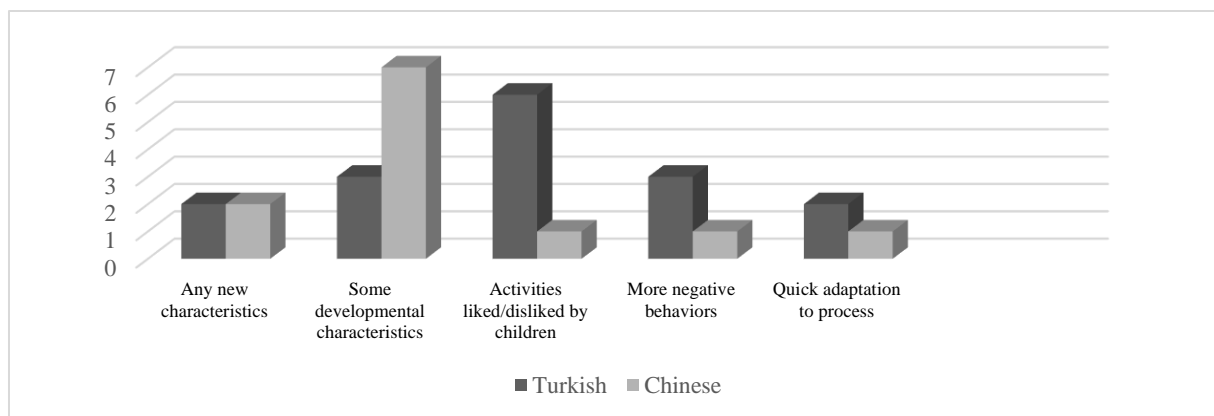


**Chart 3.** Changes to daily routines during quarantine

With the exception for four parents, participants stated that their daily schedule and routines changed with home quarantine. More than half (n=15, 6 Turkish, 9 Chinese) mentioned having a more flexible eating, sleeping and waking schedule. One Turkish parent (Elif, Turkish mother) stated that because all family members were at home during the day, even if they got up early, they did not feel sleepy in the evening and therefore began going to bed late and getting up late. According to Ali (Turkish father), before quarantine, they played together during the evenings, but during quarantine engaged in these activities in the mornings too.

Some Turkish parents stated that quarantine meant there were no outdoor activities (n=2) but more responsibilities (n=2) and more cleaning (n=1). Betul (Turkish mother) mentioned that their routines stayed the same, but that her daughter could not go out. This meant they had to engage in activities at home. Agit (Turkish father) stated that his son started to take more responsibility for helping his parents with simple tasks, such as putting plates on the table. However, four parents (2 Turkish, 2 Chinese) stated that home quarantine did not change their daily routines or schedule.

### Child characteristics that parents had not previously noticed



**Chart 4.** Child characteristics that parents had not previously noticed

When parents were asked about characteristics of their children that they had not previously noticed before quarantine, two Turkish and two Chinese parents stated that they had not noticed any characteristics of the child they were previously unaware of. However, ten (3 Turkish, 7 Chinese) stated that they were previously unaware of their children's developmental progress and the extent of the speed in which their children were growing up. Some parents focused on their children's language development. Ali (Turkish father) noticed how his son grew up, spoke, and expressed himself during quarantine. Chalis (Chinese mother) stated that while her daughter was in kindergarten, she paid particular attention to her daughter's level of separation anxiety

and improvements in her English. However, during quarantine, she noticed that her daughter had a good imagination but a weak ability to express herself. Also, Li (Chinese mother) said:

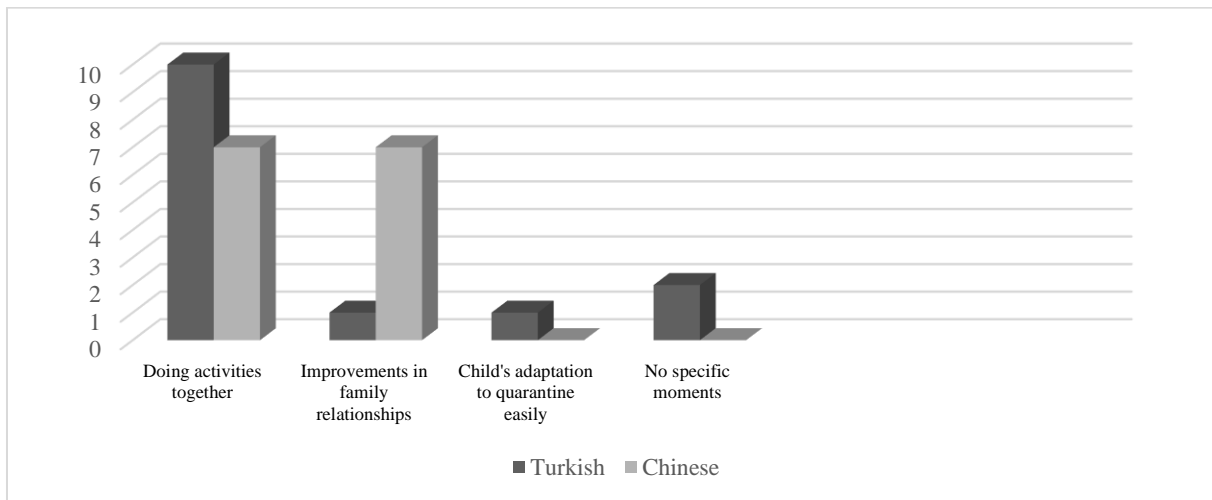
*During the epidemic period, I felt that she had grown so big, but I didn't realise that she had grown so fast. Her feet were unexpectedly so big, and her hands were also so big. I felt that she suddenly grew up. She would talk to you; she would chat with you. [...] Sometimes I do work or do something, and if I don't do it well, I will be angry. But my daughter suddenly said to me one day, 'Mom, you will learn to wait'. My God, I don't know where she learned it, 'Mom, you need to learn to wait'.*

Seven parents (6 Turkish, 1 Chinese) stated quarantine heightened their awareness about activities that their children liked or disliked. Some parents (n=4; 3 Turkish, 1 Chinese) said that they noticed greater exhibiting of aggressive, anxious or rebellious behaviour. Ayse (Turkish mother) said:

*I was more anxious at the beginning of the process and he felt it. He was also anxious, and he did not want to sleep alone. He slept with me for some days. He still doesn't want to go out and says, "I know we should not go out now but later we will be able to go." Even, he doesn't want me to go to the market.*

Two Turkish and one Chinese parent noticed how their children adapted to the quarantine process quickly. One Chinese parent (Feng, mother) said her son was very excited about participating in online school activities. Ali, a Turkish father, explained that although he was worried that his son would want to go out or get bored, he behaved like he already understood the situation and what he could and could not do.

## Positive experiences during quarantine



**Chart 5.** Positive experiences during quarantine

When asked about positive moments/experiences with their children during quarantine, more than half (n=17; 10 Turkish, 7 Chinese) described activities undertaken together, including playing, cooking, painting, reading, watching films/TV, singing, and physical activity. Cooking together was mentioned by only five Turkish parents. However, playing (5:2), paintings (3:1) and reading (3:1) was mentioned by Turkish parents more often than Chinese parents. Singing and physical activity were mentioned only by Chinese parents. One Turkish and three Chinese parents stated that engaging in activities with their children represented positive moments for them during quarantine. Umut (Turkish father) stated how he enjoyed cooking with his daughter, while Elif (Turkish mother) said:

*My daughter was coming home at 4 pm. She was tired and she wanted to take a rest. She was missing us, but the day was not long enough to do many activities together. However, we clean home, cook, and play together during the quarantine process. We wear our good clothes and dance. All day belongs to us and it is unlimited. We like it and have fun.*

Ding, one Chinese father, explained how he persevered in trying to teach his son a finger song and that finally, after a week, his son was able to sing the song smoothly. Another parent said:

*[...] I found that my daughter was a little more sensitive to colour, and more creative. [...] one day she took my crayon and drew a big circle, and said, 'mom, look, this is a big shark', and then she drew a small circle, and said, mom, this is a small shark, the big shark is the mother of the small shark' [...] 'Grandma is your mother, you are my mother', I think she understands some relationships by herself. (An Na, Chinese mother)*

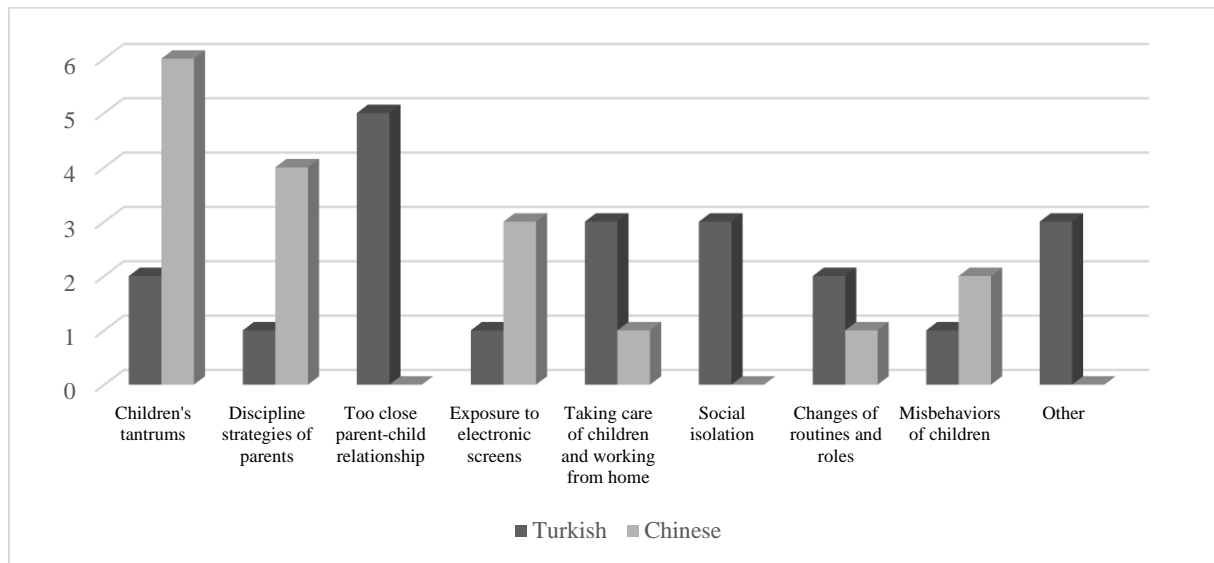
Eight parents (1 Turkish, 7 Chinese) reported improvements in family relationships. Tahir's (Turkish father) ties with his daughter were weak before quarantine but the quarantine enabled them to become closer. Chinese parents emphasised improved relations amongst all family members, with Juan (Chinese mother) explaining that a new link was established between her husband and son during quarantine, during which they began taking walks together. Two parents said:

*I think the relationship with my family members, including the relationship with my husband, is a little better. To be honest, I saw too much separation and death, and I felt that the relationship was more harmonious. During that time, there was basically no quarrel, the family stayed together, and to be honest, I just worry about whether the children can be taken out. [...] Sometimes I look at them on the side, or help them to adjust some contradictions, and they don't quarrel for a day, and they seem to learn slowly together, and the quarrels become less. (Qiqi, Chinese mother)*

One Turkish mother mentioned that her child adapted easily to quarantine, which she felt was a positive outcome. Only two Turkish parents said they could not remember any specific positive moments.



## Negative experiences during quarantine



**Chart 6.** Negative experiences during quarantine

When parents were asked about negative moments, six Chinese and two Turkish parents discussed their children's tantrums, with Fan (Chinese father) mentioning how his daughter often cried to solve problems, and that he and his wife usually let her cry alone. Chen (Chinese mother) also said:

*It's strange, suddenly, for example, it's possible that she doesn't particularly like people talking about her. For example, [...] if she heard it in another place, she would be very angry and go into the room as soon as she threw it at the door. And then let us think, what's wrong with us? In fact, we didn't talk about her inappropriate behaviour, but just about her lovely behaviour. (Chen)*

Five (1 Turkish, 4 Chinese) mentioned discipline strategies they had to use, including shouting at the child, using corporal punishment, or leaving the child alone. Chalis (Chinese mother) stated that most parents transferred their anxiety onto their children through questioning, blaming, and punishment. An Na (Chinese mother) described how she punished her child:

*[...] sometimes I would spank her when she made me angry. It was not the kind of fight. Then one day, I felt it was useless. I say you go to the dark room. We had a neighbour who did so. My daughter kept crying in the room and said, "Mom, I'm afraid I don't want to be in the dark room'. She would rather choose to be beaten than be closed in the dark room. After I let her out, I said: 'Did you admit it? Were you wrong? (Reproaching tone)' Then she said: 'I was wrong, I admit it.' (Children's angry voice) After I regained my calm, I asked her if she knew the switch in that room. The switch in my house is within the reach of a child's hand but at that time, she was too collapsed to think about turning the light on.*

Five Turkish parents, said the quarantine process resulting in the child and parents becoming too close. Tahir (Turkish father) said that they were stressed because they were not used to such a close relationship. He also added that his child generally needed attention during the quarantine but he was not used to focusing on her so much. Therefore, his wife and he sometimes said *"It is enough! We hope it will finish soon and we will go to work."*

Enhanced exposure to electronic screens was another issue mentioned by four parents (1 Turkish, 3 Chinese), with Agit (Turkish father) and Feng (Chinese mother) stating that their children always wanted to play with mobile phones during quarantine. Rui (Chinese father) said:

*[...] because the Internet and mobile phones are particularly developed now, you are easily involved in the information of the Internet and mobile phones sometimes unconsciously. I think the worst thing is that sometimes I tell my daughter to watch TV for a while, and I will go to watch the mobile phone for a while. I think it may be a long time sometimes.*

Three Turkish and one Chinese parent said that taking care of the child on their own when working from home was a negative experience. One Turkish mother, Betul said that while

working from home, it was too hard to deal with her child. When she had a meeting, her daughter sat in front of the TV or stood behind her. Her child could not play or do some activities alone because she had stayed with someone such as grandmother or babysitter since she was born. Therefore, it was not easy for Betul to concentrate on her work.

Three Turkish parents found social isolation very difficult. Hilal (mother) said she wished she could have taken her son to a park or a market because she normally was unable to spend as much with him as during the quarantine.

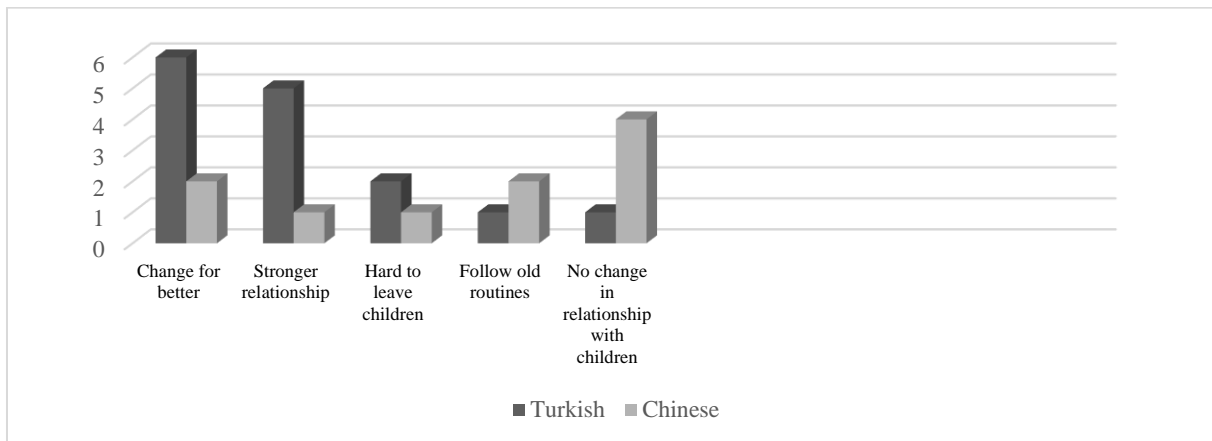
Two Turkish and one Chinese parent stated that changes to routines and roles within the home was especially challenging. A Turkish father, Tahir mentioned how his daughter sometimes woke up at five or six am and required her parents' attention until 12:00 am. He also thought that he had not been attentive enough to his children before quarantine, with the result being that they lacked common interests to undertake together during quarantine.

Two Chinese and one Turkish parent said that their children misbehaved. For example, Juan (Chinese mother) stated that she and her husband got angry with their son because of his poor behaviour.

Three Turkish parents emphasised their child's boredom, fear of going out, and experiences of missing friends as being particularly negative. Ilay (Turkish mother) said:

*Nowadays we video chat with our friends and sometimes my son is near to me. For instance, some days ago I said, "come and chat with your friends", but he refused and responded, "I don't want to see my friends on the screen. Then, he cried and went to his room.*

## After quarantine



**Chart 7.** After quarantine

When parents were asked if their relationship with their children would change after the period of quarantine had ended, eight parents (6 Turkish, 2 Chinese) believed it would change for the better. Zeynep (Turkish mother) said she would work less, do more outdoor activities, spend more time with her child and other family members. Ayse (Turkish mother) wished to send her child to kindergarten for half-days rather than full-days to spend time with him, as he found school tiring and was more energetic during quarantine.

Six parents (5 Turkish, 1 Chinese) thought their relationship would be stronger after quarantine. Betul (Turkish mother) thought she and her child understood each other more after having spent so much time together, and that their relationship was more compassionate and calmer. Ali (Turkish father) said:

*I think that I always tried to be a good father and I had a strong relationship with my child. However, after spending so much time and staying for so long together, our relationship will get stronger.*

For two Turkish and one Chinese parent, leaving their children will be hard after quarantine. Ilay (Turkish mother) believed she and her son had become too attached to each other.

Three parents (1 Turkish, 2 Chinese) stated that they would follow their old routine and five (1 Turkish, 4 Chinese) believed their relationship with their children would not change. For example, Li (Chinese mother) mentioned that when the quarantine was over, she would have to return to work and be less attentive to her daughter's needs than during quarantine. Lily (Chinese mother) said:

*I don't think there is a big change, because there are close relationships since childhood and much time of companionship so when I return to work and they return to school, we get along with each other after school, maybe we will be tired of training classes, but we will also have Saturday and Sunday off, and the time is loose and tight. It should still be the same.*

## **Discussion**

Parents described quarantine as being safe at home, but with lower levels of movement, and lower levels of socialization. Turkish parents were more likely than Chinese parents to describe the process as psychologically difficult and boring. Psychological effects such as anxiety, depression and fear, have been reported as more being more likely to occur in parents during the early stages of quarantine (Wang et al., 2020b). According to Brooks et al.'s (2020), psychological factors such as loneliness, isolation, anger and stress directly affect the lives of the individuals and families during quarantine. Previous research also found that extensions of quarantine processes are associated with the intensification of post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety (Hawryluck et al., 2004; Pancani et al., 2020). Comparative studies during and after quarantine, demonstrated changes to daily routines and priorities (Cava et al., 2005). This current study however, shows that both Turkish and Chinese parents focused on the difficulties associated with quarantine when asked to define the process, particularly with staying at home, and the negative psychological effects. Chinese parents also stated that quarantine meant doing similar activities every day. This may stem from families having had to stay at home for so long

that they had to incorporate a variety of activities into their daily routines, such as school activities, cooking, and playing.

The study also revealed that quarantine resulted in parents spending more time at home, interacting with their children. Parents described many positive experiences associated with the quarantine process, with more than half describing undertaking activities with their children and improved family relationships as being positive outcomes. These positive outcomes may be result of that parents had the opportunity to spend time with their children and recognize some characteristics of them. Also, considering the positive experiences mentioned by parents, it can be said that the presence of children may be a psychologically protective factor, and the parent-child relationship can be significant for dealing with the process. This is supported by Filgueiras and Stults-Kolehmainen's (2020) study of the COVID-19 quarantine, which reported that individuals with children were protected from negative psychological factors such as depression and anxiety.

Twice as many Turkish parents as Chinese emphasized increases in stress/aggressiveness of parents and children during quarantine. Several studies reported parallel findings: during the COVID-19 quarantine, Italian and Spanish parents observed emotional and behavioural changes in their children, such as concentration difficulties, boredom, anxiety, restlessness, irritability, and loneliness (Orgilés et al., 2020). Another study conducted by Sprang and Silman (2013) found that quarantine increased levels of depression and anxiety in children. Jiao et al. (2020) reported that quarantined 3 to 6-year-olds were more anxious, too attached to their parents, and more worried about losing one of their family members. Di Giorgio et al. (2020) also found that children's emotional symptoms and self-regulation difficulties increased during quarantine. Taken together, these findings suggest children are more affected by the application of quarantine processes during the pandemic. Also,

greater aggressive, anxious, or rebellious behaviours exhibited by children may be results of spending too much time with adults at home and being have to change their daily routines.

More Chinese than Turkish parents reported using negative discipline strategies, such as shouting at the child, using corporal punishment, or leaving the child alone. Several other studies have reported family relations being reshaped by the quarantine process, which was difficult for both parents and children, thus negatively affecting their relationship negatively (Di Giorgio et al., 2020; Orgilés et al., 2020). Domestic psychological and physical violence were commonly observed not only between parents, but also between children and parents, highlighting the need for social support to be available to both children and parents during quarantine (Brooks et al., 2020; Campbell, 2020; Cluver et al., 2020; Miho and Thévenon, 2020). At this point, it should not be ignored that the quarantine reduces the transmission of coronavirus but it also restricts people's movement (Telles et al., 2020). Moving less but spending too much time together with children may direct parents to choose easier discipline strategies such as punishment because they do not know how long time it will continue and they may not keep their patience to be able to use more democratic strategies.

Concern over children's tantrums and increased amount of time spent looking at electronic screens were shared by Chinese parents more than Turkish parents. This parallels the findings present in the literature. In particular, it was reported that during the epidemic, all age groups spent more time using digital media tools than normal (Cellini et al., 2020). Some of the children's physical activities were restricted and limited space was offered to them at home, children had to stay in front of screen for long periods of time (Wang et al., 2020a; Xiang et al., 2020). Guan et al., (2020) found that levels of physical play and movement undertaken by children decreased considerably, whereas their screen time increased. It is thought that the routines and dynamics within the home may have influenced the demands and insistence of the children in the current study to spend more time in front of a screen.

Most parents stated that their daily schedule and routines changed during quarantine. The work of Cellini et al. (2020) supports this finding, as they found that daily routines within the home, such as sleeping, feeding and doing housework, changed during quarantine. Working from home, whilst simultaneously taking care of children, dealing with discipline problems and tantrums, and changing routines and roles within the home, were negative experience for parents. Other studies also found that mothers were more emotional during the quarantine process, and that their responsibilities such as working from home, caring for children, and doing housework, made their daily lives difficult. The quarantine process itself has also been linked to self-control, discipline, and hyperactive problems in children (Di Giorgio et al., 2020). Some Turkish parents added that social isolation at home and spending more time with their children than they perceived as optimal were negative experiences. According to Sprang and Silman (2013), the isolation process negatively impacted the relationship between parents and children and was challenging for parents with children to carry out. Similarly, Orgilés et al. (2020) found that both Italian and Spanish families experienced difficulties with family relations and relationships with their children during quarantine.

When thinking about life after quarantine, Turkish parents were more likely than Chinese parents to believe everything would be better and their relationship would be stronger post-quarantine. It may be related to that parents raised awareness of importance and positive sides of spending time with their children. However, Cava et al. (2005) found that individuals who experienced quarantine did not continue their life as normal after quarantine had ended, and instead became more irritated, fearful and isolated. The findings of the current study could therefore prove helpful for developing a strategy for parents to help deal with the process of adjusting to life after quarantine.

In conclusion, the study reveals many commonalities in the experiences of Turkish and Chinese parents with their children during the COVID-19 quarantine process. Cultural



differences between parents did not appear to significantly reflect the responses of parents during this extraordinary period. Furthermore, differences in ways of defining the quarantine process may result from Turkish parents having been at the start of the quarantine process when the interviews were conducted. It was observed that during the quarantine, children were more aggressive, anxious, hyperactive, and displayed greater behavioural problems. Moreover, children spent more time with mobile devices and in front of electronic screen during the process. Examination of experiences of parent-child relationships showed that both Turkish and Chinese parents developed more positive relationships with their children. However, some parents experienced difficulties dealing with housework, while working from home and simultaneously taking care of children. A number of parents reported negative psychological experiences, such as anxiety, fear, and boredom, which were sometimes reflected in physical and psychological violence against the child. The quarantine process was found to have changed the lifestyles of parents and children, particularly their routines for sleeping, feeding and undertaking household chores. The expectations of Turkish parents paralleled those of Chinese parents for the post-quarantine process, with working parents being particularly keen on building stronger relationships with family members.

Based on the findings of current study and also suggestions of Brooks et al. (2020), it can be said that there is an association between longer quarantine process and psychological problematic outcomes. Therefore, the process should be kept as short as possible. Uncertainty makes people more stressful so ministries, social service staff or other authorities should often inform them about the virus, the process and possible future plans. Also, they should guide especially parents to reduce boredom, to plan enjoyable activities and to promote effective communication with each other and their children. Since the quarantine process is an extraordinary experience for all family members, parents should be encouraged to put those positive experiences and acquisitions into their future life.

In this study, Turkish and Chinese parents' experiences with their 3-6 year-old children during the COVID-19 quarantine process were examined. In further research, experiences of parents can be explored based on several variables not being included in this study such as whether parents completely stopped working in quarantine days, or continued working from home, they were supported for childcare by some people such as grandparents or other family members and children continued to get distance education during quarantine or not. Also, after the quarantine process, a research can be conducted to determine if parents can reflect their experiences into their lives.

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## Appendix

Pseudonyms	Code	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Number of ch	Age of ch	Gender of ch	Duration of quarantine	Country
Ali	T1	Father	40	Graduate	Marketing	2	4, 11	Boy	24 days	Turkey
Betül	T2	Mother	38	Graduate (Ms)	Marketing	1	3.5	Girl	1 month	Turkey
İlay	T3	Mother	37	Undergraduate	Artist	1	5	Boy	1 month	Turkey
Zeynep	T4	Mother	40	Graduate (PhD)	Academician	1	3.5	Boy	1 month	Turkey
Ayşe	T5	Mother	32	Graduate (PhD)	Academician	1	4.5	Boy	1 month	Turkey
Umut	T6	Father	41	Undergraduate	Store manager	2	5.5, 11	Girl	21 days	Turkey
Sema	T7	Mother	36	Undergraduate	Accountant	2	4, 6	Boy	20 days	Turkey
Agit	T8	Father	34	High school	Public officer	3	3, 7, 9	Boy	21 days	Turkey
Tahir	T9	Father	36	Undergraduate	Attorney	2	4.5, 5.5	Girl	1 month	Turkey
Kemal	T10	Father	42	Literate	Cook	5	18, 17, 10, 8, 4.5	Boy	1 month	Turkey
Yusuf	T11	Father	46	Graduate	Academician	3	13, 6, 14 (month)	Girl	1 month	Turkey
Hilal	T12	Mother	32	High school	Customer representative	1	3	Boy	1 month	Turkey
Elif	T13	Mother	32	Undergraduate	Attorney	1	4	Girl	1 month	Turkey
An Na	C1	Mother	30	Graduate (Ms)	Accountant	1	3	Girl	44 days	China
Ding	C2	Father	36	Undergraduate	Government official	1	6	Girl	about 40 days	China
Fan	C3	Father	32	Undergraduate	Senior Management, Insurance Company	2	5, new born	Girl	about 20 days	China
Juan	C4	Mother	29	Graduate (Ms)	English Teacher	1	3.5	Boy	60 days	China
Chen	C5	Mother	31	Undergraduate	Government Official, City Council	1	4	Girl	21 days	China
Li	C6	Mother	34	High School	Self-employed	1	5	Girl	30 days	China
Chalis	C7	Mother	34	Undergraduate	Full time mother	1	3	Girl	70 days	China
Lily	C8	Mother	31	Graduate (Ms)	Management, International School	2	5, 2.5	Girl	75 days	China
Feng	C9	Mother	32	Undergraduate	Self-employed	1	5	Boy	24 days	China
Rui	C10	Father	45	Undergraduate	Consultancy	2	14, 4	Girl	30 days	China
Qiqi	C11	Mother	32	Undergraduate	Self-employed	2	6, 3.5	Girl	30 days	China