

# Experiences of Turkish Parents of Hospitalized Children With Cancer During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Study

Meltem Gürcan, MSc, RN, Tuğba Çelebi, RN, and Sevcan Atay Turan, PhD, RN

**PURPOSE:** To describe the experiences of Turkish parents of hospitalized children with cancer during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**PARTICIPANTS & SETTING:** Participants were recruited at the pediatric hematology-oncology clinic of a university hospital in Turkey. A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify participants. Parents who had a child aged 0–18 years with cancer were eligible.

**METHODOLOGIC APPROACH:** This study was conducted using a descriptive qualitative research design. Semistructured individual interviews with 14 parents of children with cancer were used for data collection. Data were analyzed using the content analysis method.

**FINDINGS:** Two main themes with related subthemes were identified that revealed the lived experiences of parents of children with cancer: being a parent in the midst of a pandemic and parents' pathways toward coping with difficulties.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING:** Pediatric oncology nurses can develop clinical practices that help parents to cope with anxiety about COVID-19. Nurses should share with parents current and valid information about the child's care during the pandemic. Future research should examine the experiences of children with cancer and their parents from different cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**KEYWORDS** parents; children with cancer; COVID-19 pandemic; experience; nursing  
**ONF, 48(4), 403–411.**  
**DOI** 10.1188/21.ONF.403-411

The cancer treatment process is a substantial burden on children and their parents. In addition, parents suddenly had to face the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic while they attempted to cope with their children's illness and treatment. Children receiving cancer treatment during the pandemic are at a disadvantage (Bouffet et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Unlike their healthy peers, for children with cancer, the pandemic can be life-threatening because of their vulnerability to infection caused by immunosuppression (Bouffet et al., 2020; Kaspers, 2020). In a study of 345 children confirmed to have COVID-19, one of the most common underlying conditions was immunosuppression (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 Response Team, 2020). Therefore, the COVID-19 outbreak causes parents great anxiety as they fear transmission of the virus. The COVID-19 pandemic also causes parents to be more careful as they try to protect their children from infection (Darlington et al., 2020).

Qualitative studies conducted before the pandemic determined that Turkish parents of children with cancer experienced sadness, anger, and depression (Demirtepe-Saygılı & Bozo, 2018; Günay & Özkan, 2019). Some published articles showed that the parents of children admitted to oncology clinics are prone to anxiety (Darlington et al., 2020; Salvador et al., 2020). Parents of children with cancer may be distressed more often now than before COVID-19. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the parents of hospitalized children with cancer may feel greater responsibility and fear than the general population, which may be because the pandemic threatens their children's lives (Darlington et al., 2020).

Before the pandemic, mothers typically had to quit their jobs to care for their child with cancer, even if they highly valued their career (Kim et al., 2017). In