

The psychological stress of restricted visitation for mothers of premature infants in NICU during the epidemic

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, the pandemic has cast a daunting shadow over the healthcare system, bringing unprecedented pressures and challenges. To ensure the safety of patients and healthcare personnel, many hospitals have adopted stringent measures, such as limiting or entirely prohibiting visits, to mitigate the risk of disease transmission.

However, in the Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU), a specialised environment typically catering to preterm infants or those with special medical needs, the role of healthcare professionals is undeniably significant. Still, the role of parents is equally paramount. **For parents, providing support and care for their children is at the core of their role. Yet, visitation restrictions can hinder parents from forming close relationships with their newborns and may also have adverse effects on the psychological well-being of parents.**

AIM

This study explores the impact of visitation restrictions on parents' parental role and psychological state in the neonatal intensive care unit.

The objectives of this study include:

- (1)to understand the **stress levels** of mothers of premature infants hospitalised in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) during the pandemic
- (2)to investigate **stress-related factors** of NICU visitation restrictions among mothers of premature infants in Taiwan.

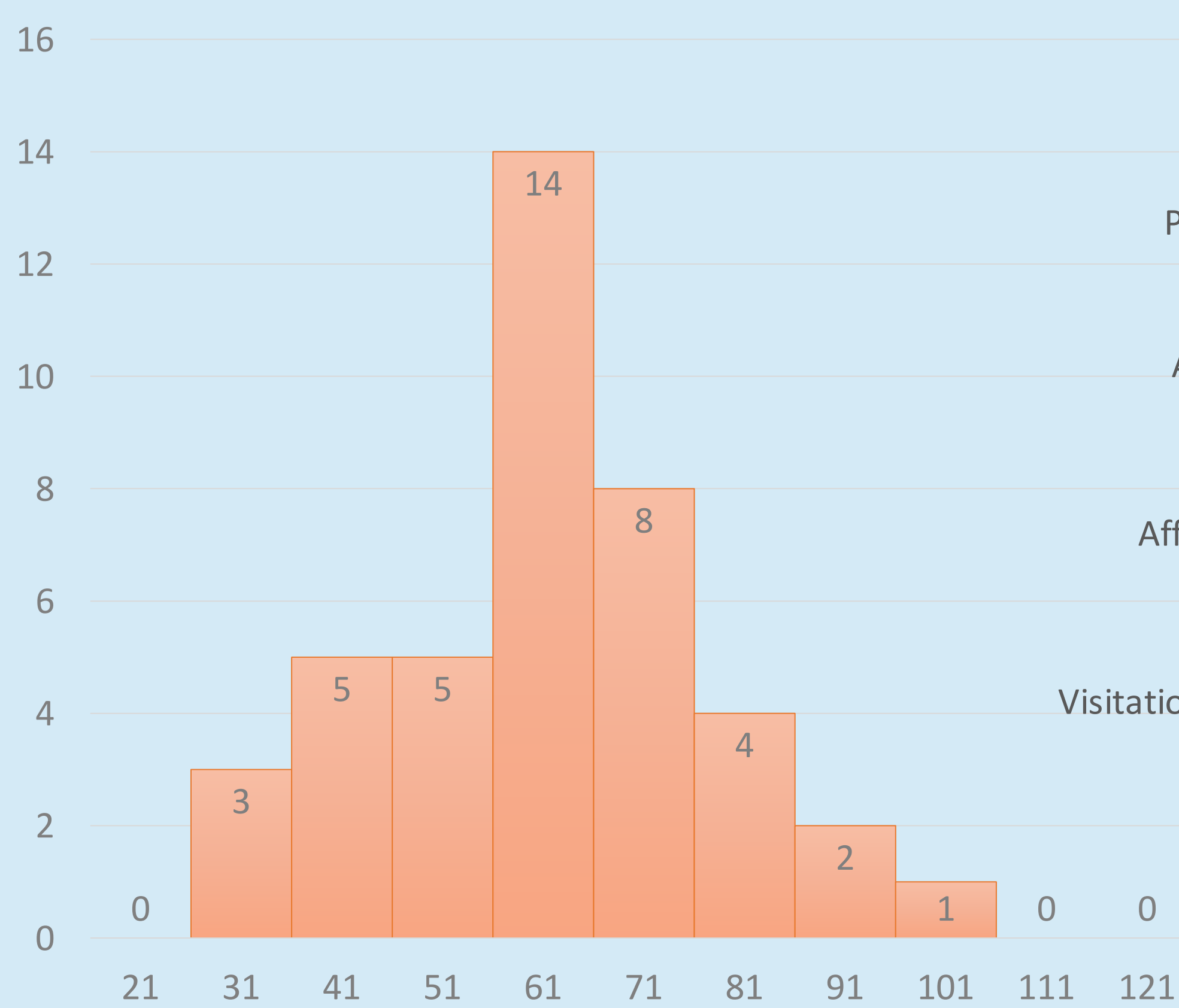
METHOD

- Design: The study was a cross-sectional study with a self-reported questionnaire.
- Sample and sampling: Convenient sampling was used for the recruitment of mother participants. A total of **42 mothers** of premature infants in the NICU were recruited in the study.
- Instruments: The quantitative questionnaire of the study mainly contained a **background data sheet and Parental Stressor Scale: Infant Hospitalization(PSS: IE)**(Chen, 2019). The scale has a total of 21 items, which scored from 21 to 105. The higher scores indicate higher stress levels.
- Data analysis: Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation were conducted for the data analysis.

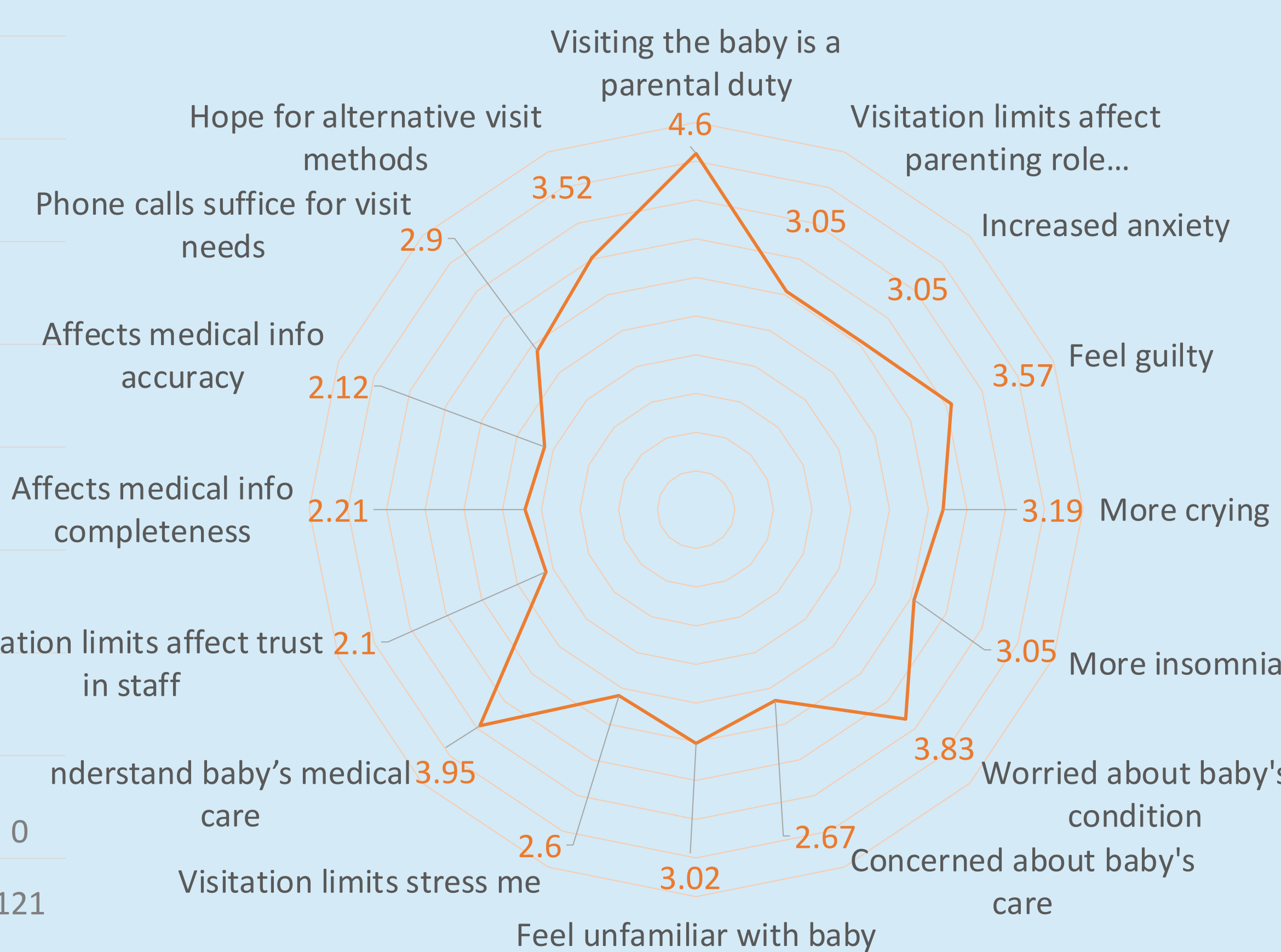
RESULTS

A total of 42 mother participants completed the self-reported survey. The age of mothers' participants ranged from 22 to 43 years old, with an average age of 33.24 years old (SD=5.4). Most participants were married (n=40,95.2 %) and had an educational level equal to or higher than college and university (n=24, 57.1%). The mean **stress level** of mothers with preterm infants admitted to **the NICU was 66.71** (SD: 15.6) (range from 35 to 101).

Distribution of Stress Levels among Individuals



Scores of Items on Mothers' Perceptions of Restricted Visitation (ranging from 1 to 5)



	Visiting the baby is a parental duty	Visitation limits affect parenting role identification	Increased anxiety	Feel guilty
Characteristics				
Pearson correlation	.326*	.466**	.594**	.646**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.035	0.002	<.001	<.001
	More crying	More insomnia	Worried about baby's condition	Concerned about baby's care
Characteristic				
Pearson correlation	.536**	.502**	.552**	.481**
Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	0.001
	Feel unfamiliar with baby	Visitation limits stress me	understand baby's medical care	Visitation limits affect trust in staff
Characteristic				
Pearson correlation	.378*	.543**	-0.285	.317*
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.014	<.001	0.067	0.041
	Affects medical info completeness	Affects medical info accuracy	Phone calls suffice for visit needs	Hope for alternative visit methods
Characteristic				
Pearson correlation	.473**	.500**	-.432**	.458**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	<.001	0.004	0.002

CONCLUSIONS

- The results of this study indicated that the restrictive visitation policy in the neonatal intensive care unit during the epidemic significantly affected the parent-child relationship between mothers and premature infants.
- This policy also had a substantial impact **on the trust between mothers and healthcare providers.**
- In response to the visitation policy restricted by the epidemic, it is recommended to **utilise digital technology equipment** such as video calls.
- Through video visits, mothers can observe the condition of premature infants, **understand their situation** in the intensive care unit through dynamic images, and have real-time conversations with the premature infants using microphones.
- These measures can help in **reducing the psychological stress experienced** by mothers.

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