



***The changing face of motherhood in Western Europe:
Greece***

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Contents

1.1 Greece	4
1.1.1 Introduction	4
1.1.2 Historical perspectives	4
1.1.3 Demographics of motherhood	5
1.1.4 Defining ‘motherhood’ in the Greek context	5
1.1.5 Motherhood and Employment	6
1.1.6 Childcare	7
1.1.7 Values and popular representations	8
1.1.8 Single motherhood	8
1.1.9 Motherhood and sports	9
1.2 Greek national survey	9
1.2.1 Introduction	9
1.2.2 Free time	9
1.2.3 Generational comparisons	10
1.2.4 Perceptions of change	10
1.2.5 Impact of the economic downturn	11
1.2.6 The ideal decade	11
1.2.7 Active time with children	12
1.2.8 Help in the home	13
1.2.9 The role of the father	13
1.2.10 Maternal guilt	14
1.2.11 Maternal isolation	14
1.2.12 Support and advice	15
1.2.13 Improving the quality of life	15
1.2.14 Sport	16

Table of Figures

Figure 1. Free time in an average week	9
Figure 2. Free time by number of children	10
Figure 3. Free time compared with own mother at same life-stage	10
Figure 4. Free time compared with own mother at same life-stage by number of children	10
Figure 5. Mothers’ perceptions of changes since the previous generation	11
Figure 6. Perceptions of the impact of economic conditions on ability to be a ‘good’ mother	11
Figure 7. Ideal decade in which to be a mother	11
Figure 8. Extent to which labour-saving devices have made life easier and richer	12
Figure 9. How time saved using modern appliances and products is spent	12
Figure 10. Hours per day of active time spent with children	12
Figure 11. Hours per day of active time spent with children by number of children	12
Figure 12. Hours per day of active time spent with children by age of youngest child	13
Figure 13. Main source of help with childcare	13
Figure 14. Hours of help per week from husbands/partners	13
Figure 15. Hours of help per week from husbands/partners by age of youngest child	13
Figure 16. Involvement of fathers in childcare compared with previous generations	14
Figure 17. Reasons for increase in fathers’ involvement in childcare	14
Figure 18. Levels of guilt reported by Greek mothers	14
Figure 19. Levels of guilt reported by Greek mothers by employment status	14
Figure 20. Greek mothers’ sense of isolation	15
Figure 21. Greek mothers’ sense of isolation by age of youngest child	15

Figure 22. Sources of advice for Greek mothers..... 15

Figure 23. Channels used to communicate with sources of support..... 15

Figure 24. Ways of improving the lives of Greek mothers..... 16

Figure 25. Importance of sport for child’s development and well-being 16

Figure 26. Satisfaction with amount of time available to encourage sports participation by employment status..... 16



1.1 Greece

1.1.1 Introduction

According to *Save the Children*, Greece is the 19th best country in the world to be a mother.¹ As in other Mediterranean countries traditional, conservative family values are still strong forces in Greek culture. Divorce rates remain low, as do female employment rates. Greece also has one of the lowest fertility rates in Europe. Lack of formal childcare and the often inflexible nature of the Greek working day have been cited as reasons for dwindling fertility levels as women are forced to make a choice between family and work. Furthermore, in recent times the debt crisis in Greece has magnified the existing challenges that Greek women face as well as creating a number of new ones.

1.1.2 Historical perspectives

Women first gained the vote in Greece in 1952, but traditional ideas about the family were not overtly challenged until the 1980s.² This was ensured by the rule of the conservative military junta from 1967-1974 whose nationalist slogan was “Fatherland, Family, Religion”. Women were thought of as mothers and wives, and their duties were contained within the home. Indeed, female participation in the work force dropped dramatically between 1961 and 1981.³ The Greek family has undergone substantial change over the latter half of the twentieth century. Shifts in the ways people lived as well as legislative reforms in the early 1980s saw the emergence of new ideas about what it meant to be a mother.

It was also not until the late 1970s that the practice of arranged marriages largely ceased.⁴ Until relatively recently becoming husband and wife was not a decision made by two people but a formal agreement between two families. This had implications for the nature of Greek motherhood, residual traces of which can still be seen today. The Greek word for spouse, ‘sízigos’, literally translates as ‘under the same yolk’, suggesting that marriage was based primarily on the functional notion of husband and wife being economic partners (and that marriage was hard work).⁵ Brides-to-be were conceived of

as assets to whom fathers would award ‘ownership’ of to a chosen suitor. Family Law was reformed in 1983 so that marriages ceased to be the transferral of the woman as ‘possession’ from father to husband. Nevertheless, in modern day Greece marriage is still conceptualised of as a union between two families, not just two individuals, and family members still play a significant role in influencing their children’s choice of partner.⁶

Another change which altered the makeup of Greek families was the industrialisation and urbanisation of the country. Prior to the 1970s most Greeks lived agrarian lifestyles. This meant that large families were desirable, as more children meant more people to work the land and look after livestock.⁷ As employment opportunities in urban centres grew, families migrated to the towns and cities in search of work. In this environment the costs of raising multiple children were prohibitive and it became no longer advantageous to have large families. A preference for smaller family groups began to emerge as a result of new economic pressures. Indeed, economic considerations continue to exert an influence on the choice of family size and the low birth rate in Greece remains a national concern.

The early 1980s saw substantial changes in Greek social, economic and foreign policy. In 1981 Greece became a full member of the European Economic Community (EEC). This was in part a reward for the careful efforts of the conservative New Democracy Party which had been in government in the late 1970s. By the early 1980s though, PASOK, a populist socialist party had come to power, and used the momentum of joining the EEC to make liberal legislative changes.⁸ Contraception was legalized in 1980 and divorce in 1981. In 1983 the Family Law was revised to establish equality between the sexes. The husband was removed from being the legal head of the household and women were no longer the legal property of men.

Cultural attitudes have not, in many respects, kept pace with the legislative changes and the clear demonstrations of political will; issues of gender inequality are still present in contemporary Greece. The view that women’s primary role is as a mother and a homemaker is still widely held. Public debates concerning the rights of women have shifted though, and are no longer centred on equality in the home, but equality in the workplace.⁹ Heightened by the global recession and Greek debt crisis, women, and especially mothers, are frustrated by the obstacles that still stand between them and the world of work.

¹ Save the Children (2011) *State of the World’s Mothers 2011*, Save the Children.

² O’Reilly, Andrea (ed) (2010) *Encyclopedia of Motherhood, Volume 2*, USA, SAGE.

³ Paxson, Heather (2004) *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and family planning in urban Greece*, University of California Press, p.62.

⁴ O’Reilly, Andrea (ed) (2010) *Encyclopedia of Motherhood, Volume 2*, USA, SAGE.

⁵ Paxson, Heather (2004) *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and family planning in urban Greece*, University of California Press, p.49

⁶ O’Reilly, Andrea (ed) (2010) *Encyclopedia of Motherhood, Volume 2*, USA, SAGE.

⁷ Paxson, Heather (2004), *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and family planning in urban Greece*, University of California Press, p.47

⁸ Paxson, Heather (2004), *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and family planning in urban Greece*, University of California Press, p.62.

⁹ O’Reilly, Andrea (ed) (2010), *Encyclopedia of Motherhood, Volume 2*, USA, SAGE.

1.1.3 Demographics of motherhood

In 2009 the Greek fertility rate was 1.5 while the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) average was 1.7.¹⁰ The average first time Greek mother is 28.8 years old, compared to an OECD average of 27.8. Traditional family values are much more widely adhered to than in other European countries. The divorce rate in 2008 was at 1.2 per 1,000 of the population; one of the lowest rates in Europe. In the same year only 6% of births were out of wedlock, again one of the lowest rates on the continent. Most children grow up with both of their parents, with 93.6% of 0-14 year-olds living in a household with both their mother and their father in 2007. The importance of the family in Greece is reflected in the fact that 18% of households are multi-generational.¹¹ This is the highest proportion in the EU15, and substantially different to situation in the Nordic countries where less than 1% of households are multi-generational. Multi-generational households are indicative of a culture which places the family at the centre of one's support network, and can also be seen as a response to living in a nation where state welfare support is limited.

1.1.4 Defining 'motherhood' in the Greek context

The Greek word, 'teknoipiá' literally translates as 'to have a child'. This term does not only refer to the specific physical act of childbirth but is also suggestive of the socially appropriate contexts within which a child should be born and raised, while also connoting the ways in which having children changes oneself.¹² Having children is therefore an idea imbued with significance and expectation. What then, does 'teknoipiá' mean for mothers in Greece today?

There is still an expectation in Greece that marriage is a necessary prerequisite to having children. In 2007, 92.3% of Greek children lived with their two married parents, the highest figure out of all the OECD27 countries.¹³ The proportion of births outside of marriage has increased slightly, but not strikingly, with 2% of children being born out of wedlock in 1980, and 6% in 2008. As will be explored in more detail later, rates of single motherhood in Greece are extremely low. Culturally, becoming a mother and raising children is inseparable from the institution of marriage. Marriage is in part still seen as important because of the observance of Greek orthodox traditions by much of the population, including in urban settings. Furthermore, it is mothers, not fathers, who are

often the ones to ensure that religious practises are passed on to their children.¹⁴

As stated above, 18% of families in Greece are multi-generational, and it seems that the traditional close knit, interdependent extended family group remains. In 2010 45.5% of Greeks aged 20-34 lived with their parents, 36.4% were married and living with their spouse, 3.1% were cohabiting, 6% were single and living alone, and 8.9% designated their living arrangements as 'other' (eg. living with a group of friends).¹⁵ It seems that the close knit, often multi-generational nature of Greek families is linked to the ongoing importance of the institution of marriage. It is not the norm for young people to cohabit in Greece, and it seems that the transition to independent adult life and living apart from one's parents is commonly marked by marriage. This means that children often live in the parental home until they are married. The stage of young adulthood where one lives either with friends, or with one's unmarried partner which is common in some other European countries, is unlikely to feature in the lives of many young Greeks. A consequence of this is that the active role of Greek mothers lasts for longer than most of their European counterparts.

A newly emerging meaning for 'teknoipiá' is the idea of having children being a conscious, very personal consideration. A recent work by Heather Paxson discussing Greek motherhood included interviews with Athenian women. Soula, a 39 year old mother of one explained that, "I believe that in the past they had children, they had a lot of children, and they just happened without planning it, without so much consideration. Today I believe young people are thinking hard about it, and they have children consciously - that is, they know why they are having children, what a child means for them."¹⁶ Childbirth is no longer seen as an inevitable feature of a young woman's life, and instead is something over which she can now exercise some choice; a choice which may in part be influenced by eternal factors such as personal financial stability. This new trend for family planning, in its literal sense, has been linked to Greece's low fertility rates, which at 1.5 is lower than the OECD average. From the 1990s onwards, however, the low fertility rate has increasingly been considered problematic. In 1991 the PASOK government convened a parliamentary commission to investigate the country's declining fertility rates and recommend relevant policy measures. The report, which was issued in 1993, described how the fertility 'problem' had reached, "terrific national proportions that can threaten our national independence and territorial

¹⁰ OECD Family Database www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

¹¹ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009), *Second European Quality of Life Survey*, Overview.

¹² Paxson, Heather (2004) *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and family planning in urban Greece*, University of California Press, p.38.

¹³ OECD (2011), Families are changing, Figure 1.3. [Can be found at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/34/47701118.pdf>]

¹⁴ In, Halkias, Alexandra (2004) *The Empty Cradle: sex, abortion and nationalism in modern Greece*, Duke UP, pp.47-48. Halkias describes how mothers take the lead in ensuring, for example, that fasting periods are observed by her family.

¹⁵ OECD Family Database www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

¹⁶ Paxson, Heather (2004), *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and family planning in urban Greece*, University of California Press, p.38.

integrity." The contraceptive choices and other lifestyle options available to women were blamed for the 'threat' posed to Greece's prosperity.

The decision delay childbirth or to remain childless is most evident today among well educated women. In 2008, 48% of women between the ages of 25 and 49 who had a tertiary level education lived in households without children, while 40% of women with a secondary level of education lived in childless homes.¹⁷ In countries such as Poland and Turkey, less than 30% of the same age group of women live in childless homes. The high proportion of childless households in Greece partly reflects the low reproductive rates. It is the case though that Greece has some of the highest proportions of well educated, childless women in Europe, suggesting that motherhood may be seen as an impediment to the career trajectories of better educated women.

Another factor contributing to the way in which modern Greek women think about having a family is the increasing financial cost associated with raising a child. Galena, another mother interviewed by Heather Paxson believed that, "before, the family had children to work with them, to help as hands. Now this has changed. The baby is a mouth to feed, a body to clothe.... We change as a society, we are not as we were before."¹⁸ Childbearing was previously thought of as something which would reap a return as children were a source of free additional labour. Now though the direction of obligation has been reversed, and instead of children providing help for their parents, parents are expected to make substantial economic provision for their offspring.

1.1.5 Motherhood and Employment

In Greek families it is most likely be the case that men assume the role of breadwinner.¹⁹ Research conducted by the Greek National Centre for Social Research (EKKE) in 2002 found that socio-economic relationships between men and women were largely traditional, with men being the main wage earner and women the homemaker.²⁰ Much of the work women performed was in the form of unpaid housework. Indeed, women were recorded spending on average almost four times as many hours on housework per week (34 hours) when compared with men. In 2009, 50% of couples with children both worked full-time, in part reflecting the high cost of running a family household. Forty-two percent of couples with children saw one partner working full-time and the other

not employed, while only six percent of couples comprised of one full-time and one part-time worker.²¹ The employment situation of Greek parents is radically different to some other countries in the EU. In the Netherlands, for example, 67% of couples with children have one partner in full-time, and the other in part-time employment. It is most often mothers who take part-time employment or stop work completely when they begin a family. Greece can therefore be seen as a country where motherhood marks either the complete cessation of one's career, or the continuation of full-time work.

Maternity leave in Greece operates through two parallel legal structures; one for the public sector and the other for the private sector.²² Private sector leave is of average length compared to other European countries with women receiving 17 weeks leave at 100% pay. For women in the public sector, however, the amount of leave rises to 5 months. Both public and private employees receive 3 days of paid paternity leave, which is low by European standards. The public sector offers 2 years of parental leave and the private sector 13 weeks, after which the parent is guaranteed to be able to return to the same or a similar job. Uptake and awareness of parental leave among men is low, however, and only 45% of Greek men when asked were aware of the possibility of parental leave compared with 97% of men in Sweden.²³

Despite half of Greek mothers being in full-time employment, flexible working hours to assist mothers with their time management is still a 'marginal phenomenon'.²⁴ Furthermore despite the provision of 'childcare leave', which is explained in further detail in the following section, uptake is limited and most mothers make a decision to either continue or stop work completely. As a percentage of total employment, only 4.5% of people work part-time.²⁵ Part-time work simply is not an integral part of Greek working culture, which in particular creates a dilemma for mothers. There is an ongoing public debate surrounding the fact that a lot of women in Greece are well educated and highly employable and yet gender disparities persist in the workplace, making it difficult for mothers to strike a balance between their private lives and their work lives.²⁶ Pressure is mounting for working Greek

¹⁷ OECD (2011) Families are changing, Figure 1.3. [Can be found at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/34/47701118.pdf>]

¹⁸ Paxson, Heather (2004), *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and family planning in urban Greece*, University of California Press, p.65.

¹⁹ Dellios, Rosita (2008), "Institutions and gender empowerment in Greece", *Humanities & Social Sciences papers*. Paper 279. [Can be found at: http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs/279]

²⁰ Dellios, Rosita (2008), "Institutions and gender empowerment in Greece", *Humanities & Social Sciences papers*. Paper 279. [Can be found at: http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs/279]

²¹ Eurostat (2009), *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*.

²² Ray, Rebecca (2008), *A detailed look at the parental leave policies in the 21 OECD countries*, Centre for Economic and Policy Research. [Can be found at <http://www.lisproject.org/publications/parentwork/parent-leave-details.pdf>]

²³ Eurostat (2009), *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*.

²⁴ Eurostat (2009), *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*.

²⁵ <http://www.emplaw.co.uk/lawguide?startpage=data/20033221.htm>

²⁶ See for example, an article published on 07.03.03 in *Athens News*, 'Equality Still Failing Females', which states that despite "Greece's legislative framework [being] one of the best in Europe", cultural norms and lack of awareness mean women are not achieving equality in the

mothers to be more adequately provided for. Young women in Greece, and especially those with a high level of education, can often be seen to be leading more individualised lifestyles than in previous generations. As they move away from their family of origin to begin work, there is no longer the option to rely on family networks for daily support and provision of childcare. The pressure is mounting for wider availability of flexible working hours and childcare provision so that women can make the choice to look after their family and pursue a career.²⁷

1.1.6 Childcare

On the whole traditional gender roles prevail when it comes to childcare in Greece. The Secretary for Equality, E. Bekou, remarked in 2001 that Greek society is characterized by a fundamental injustice in the family, with the woman continuing to be exclusively responsible for running the home and raising the children.²⁸ Women spend three-times the amount of time that men do caring for their children. In an average week Greek mothers looked after their children for a total of 12 hours, while Greek fathers spent 4 hours on childcare.²⁹ The extended family also continues to serve its traditional role, and mothers rely extensively on informal help when it comes to childcare. In 2009, 29% of 0-2 year olds were looked after via means of informal care (e.g. by the child's grandparents, or an unpaid babysitter) for more than 30 hours a week. Childcare for the most part in Greece is viewed as a feminine, familial responsibility. Men and government authorities do not become overly involved.

Indeed, on a week-to-week basis, Greek fathers take little responsibility in the provision of care for their children. There is evidence of significant variation in the childcare tasks that Greek fathers do take part in. A study in 2000 compared the involvement rural and urban fathers had during the first year of their child's life.³⁰ Urban fathers reported much higher levels of participation in childcare, with 60% saying they had put their children to bed during the first year of its life. Only 6.2% of rural fathers said they had done the same. Furthermore 43.7% of urban Greek fathers said they had bathed their child, compared to 2.5% of rural respondents, and 28.7% of urbanites had changed their baby's nappy while just 2.5% of the rural cohort had done so. It appears that the strict divide between gender

roles is becoming more blurred for urban populations, although even so it is still mothers who take most of the responsibility for routine childcare. Rural locations on the other hand still witness a polarization of male and female parental roles.

Formalised childcare provision that is supplied or supported by the state is limited, and employer provision of childcare is virtually non-existent.³¹ In 2006, state childcare coverage for infants in Greece was 3% (3 slots available in childcare facilities per 100 children).³² In a country like Denmark provision is at 55% for the same age group. This low level of provision in Greece is in part a reflection of the centrality of the family in providing childcare, but then also in turn further contributes to it remaining the norm for mothers and family members to personally take responsibility for the care of their very young children. Furthermore, between the age of 3 years and mandatory school age, Greece sits alongside Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia in having the lowest level of childcare provision in Europe.³³ Only fifteen percent of children under 3 were enrolled in some form of formal childcare in 2008, while just over one-half of Greek 4 year olds were being looked after via formal means.³⁴ These figures represent some of the lowest in Europe. In the UK, for example, 97.3% of 4 year olds are enrolled in formal care.

The Greek state has introduced measures in an attempt to help working parents to take care of their children; one such measure being the 'childcare leave' initiative. The initiative offers parents of very young children a choice between a reduced working schedule, with no pay penalty, or a period of paid leave. Under the scheme parents employment rights are protected; both options offer assurances that employee/employer relations, seniority and pay will not be affected.³⁵ Again a distinction exists between the public and private sector, with 'childcare leave' in the public sector being exclusively for mothers, while women in the private sector may transfer unused time to the child's father. Mothers employed in the public sector are entitled to either reduce their schedule by two hours per day for the first year of their

workforce. [Can be found at:

http://www.athensnews.gr/old_issue/13004/9479]

²⁷ Petrogiannis, Konstantinos (2006), 'Policy and research on early childcare and education in Greece', in, Melhuish and Petrogiannis (eds.), *Early Childhood Care and Education, International Perspectives*, Routledge.

²⁸ Halkias, Alexandra (2004), *The Empty Cradle: sex, abortion and nationalism in modern Greece*, Duke UP, p.35.

²⁹ Eurostat (2009) *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*.

³⁰ Maridaki-Kassotaki, Katerinam (2000), *Understanding Fatherhood in Greece: Father's Involvement in Childcare*, Harokopio University. [Can be found at: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/ptp/v16n3/4808.pdf>]

³¹ Eurofound (2007), *Quality in Work and Employment – Greece*. [Can be found at:

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/studies/tn0612036s/gr0612039g.htm>]

³² Del Boca, Pasqua and Pronzato (2006), *The impact of institutions on motherhood and work*, Institute for social and economic research. [Can be found at: http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/files/iser_working_papers/2006-55.pdf]

³³ Eurofound (2007) *Quality in Work and Employment – Greece*. [Can be found at:

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/studies/tn0612036s/gr0612039g.htm>]

³⁴ OECD Family Database www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

³⁵ Ray, Rebecca (2008), *A detailed look at the parental leave policies in the 21 OECD countries*, Centre for Economic and Policy Research. [Can be found at <http://www.lisproject.org/publications/parentwork/parent-leave-details.pdf>]

child's life, or by one hour for two years. Alternatively, they may take a block of nine months paid leave. Private-sector parents may work one less hour a day for 30 months or may reconfigure the same amount of total time off over a different time scale, including the possibility of taking continuous leave for approximately four months.³⁶ Despite these provisions, the ongoing limited availability of formal childcare, combined with the value placed on the family and the prevalence of traditional gender roles, mean mothers tend to personally provide care for their children. This is particularly the case when their children are infants.

1.1.7 Values and popular representations

Traditional cultural practices and values are still important for many Greeks. Strong, unconditional bonds can still be found within local communities and families. This focus on localism includes the way in which one should approach marriage, which is embodied in the Greek expression, "Papoutsi apo ton topo sou kai as einai balomeno" (Buy shoes from your local cobbler, even if they're patched)³⁷

The values of the Greek Orthodox Church are still important for many Greeks, and in particular, for Greek women. This can be seen in the high incidence of marriage, and the low numbers of children born out of wedlock. The Virgin Mary is believed by the Greek Orthodox Church to have supreme grace and is highly venerated. Every year in Greece on August 15th, there is a national holiday to celebrate the Virgin Mary. Media reports on the day often cover the story of how many people have visited the Church of the Virgin Mary on the island of Tinos and what miracles they asked for.³⁸ The image of the Virgin Mary emphasises the centrality of the role of the mother within Greek society. It is also women who make up the majority of Church congregations, while the Orthodox clergy is exclusively male, perhaps further highlighting the gender divisions that exist in Greek society.

Fatherhood is viewed for the most part as a positive experience, and can also be seen to comply with traditional gender roles. A study that was conducted with fathers who lived in urban and rural Greece in 2000 found that 95% of urban respondents and 85% of rural respondents found fatherhood to be a 'pleasant' experience.³⁹ In addition 42.5% of urban fathers surveyed, and 81.2% of the rural cohort, agreed that becoming a

father 'makes me feel a "real man"'. It appears that fatherhood, especially in rural settings, acts to validate men's sense of masculinity and virility and affirms gender roles.

Public discourse in Greece today is dominated by the state of the national economy. There is also a concern that the current economic climate will have a particularly negative impact on Greek mothers. A recent news story quoted Stratigaki, the General Secretary for Gender Equality, saying that, "This [the prioritisation of the husband's employment] means women take a step back. Many take time off to raise their children. Re-entering the job market is not always easy, *especially now*."⁴⁰ In order to try and cope with the country's debt, the Greek government has made cuts to its already limited childcare services, thus making it more difficult for Greek mothers to work, or perhaps providing further disincentives for working women considering motherhood. It is also being reported that the current economic situation is creating anxiety among women who fear that, should they decide to start a family, they will be unable to provide sufficiently for their children in these austere times.⁴¹ The financial pressures which affect choices concerning motherhood are further revealed by the fact that 37% of Greek households reported that they had difficulties 'making ends meet', the highest proportion reported in a study of the EU15 countries.⁴²

There is also speculation that Greece's financial crisis has led some people to reconnect further with family and traditional values. Rising unemployment levels have seen young couples and their children moving back in with parents to ease the financial strain. A grandmother whose son, daughter-in-law and grandchild had moved back in with her was quoted in an Athens News article, explaining that "I can help out with the little one and at weekends we can have lunch or dinner together and discuss what to do next."⁴³ At times of crisis when other forms of security are falling away, it is the extended family that Greeks know they can rely on for support.

1.1.8 Single motherhood

Greece has the lowest number of single parent households in the EU27, with just 1% of households being headed by a lone parent.⁴⁴ In addition, with 40% of young adults living at home, it is often the case that single parents will not be

³⁶ Ray, Rebecca (2008) *A detailed look at the parental leave policies in the 21 OECD countries*, Centre for Economic and Policy Research. Can be found at <http://www.lisproject.org/publications/parentwork/parent-leave-details.pdf>

³⁷ From an *Athens News* article published on the 28.08.11, can be found at <http://www.athensnews.gr/issue/13458/46589>

³⁸ In, Halkias, A. (2004) *The Empty Cradle: sex, abortion and nationalism in modern Greece*, Duke UP, 48-49.

³⁹ <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/ptp/v16n3/4808.pdf> Maridaki-Kassotaki, Katerinam (2000) *Understanding Fatherhood in Greece: Father's Involvement in Childcare*, Harokopio University

⁴⁰ From an article published on the 06.03.11, can found at <http://www.athensnews.gr/issue/13433/38678> (emphasis added)

⁴¹ An example from the 04.08.11 can be found at <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2011/08/04/spiegel-online-fear-of-crisis-affects-family-planning-among-greeks/>

⁴² European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009) *Second European Quality of Life Survey*, Overview.

⁴³ From an *Athens News* article, published on the 01.05.11, can be found at <http://www.athensnews.gr/issue/13441/40953>

⁴⁴ Eurostat (2009), *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*.

the only adults living in the house.⁴⁵ Greece is similar to the other Mediterranean countries of Spain, Portugal and Italy with regards to the low prevalence of single mothers. Low levels of non-marital fertility and very low divorce rates can be seen as the main causes for this. Just 0.5% of women who had never been married had children in 2001, and almost all of them were in co-residence (e.g. Living with their parents). In addition over one-half of all divorced mothers were in co-residence.⁴⁶ Traditional attitudes when it comes to marriage and the context within which one should start a family mean that single motherhood is uncommon in Greece. Furthermore the importance of the extended family often means that a support network is available for mothers who do find themselves separated from the fathers of their children.

1.1.9 Motherhood and sports

Like many European countries Greece is experiencing rising levels of childhood obesity and an increase in sedentary lifestyles. Greece has the highest proportion of overweight adolescents in Europe; 23% of 14-17 year olds are overweight.⁴⁷ This phenomenon does concern Greeks; in a study conducted in 2004, 93% of Greeks thought that more time should be devoted to sport in the school curriculum.⁴⁸ The EU25 average stood at 77%, in part revealing that Greeks value the importance of being active during childhood, while at the same time signalling that there is a need to change current trends in sports participation among Greek children. Greeks on the whole have a positive attitude towards sport. A study in 2004 found that 97% of Greek respondents agreed that sports represented a sufficiently attractive alternative to indoor activities such as watching TV or playing video games compared with an EU25 average of 86%.⁴⁹ Participation in sport differs between the sexes. Forty-nine percent of 10-12 year old boys participate in more than 3 hours of sport a week, whereas only thirty-two percent of girls in the same age group do so.⁵⁰ Current literature on parental involvement in their children's sporting endeavours is

⁴⁵ OECD Family Database www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

⁴⁶ González, L (2008), 'A Decomposition of the Incidence of Single Mothers in Europe', *Universitat Pompeu Fabra*. [Can be found at: http://www.econ.upf.edu/~gonzalez/Research_archivos/November_2008.pdf]

⁴⁷ Malkogeorgos, A. (2010) Association between overweight, physical inactivity and school obligations in Greek high school students, *Serbian Journal of Sports Sciences*, 4.

⁴⁸ Eurobarometer (2004) *The Citizens of the European Union and Sport*. [Can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/sport/documents/publications/ebs_213_report_en.pdf]

⁴⁹ Eurobarometer (2004) *The Citizens of the European Union and Sport*. [Can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/sport/documents/publications/ebs_213_report_en.pdf]

⁵⁰ Antonogeorgos G, Papadimitriou, A., Panagiotakos DB, Priftis KN. & Nicolaidou P. (2011) Association of extracurricular sports participation with obesity in Greek children, *Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness*. Mar; 51(1):121-7.

limited. A study of female athletes conducted in 2010, however, found that the level of involvement parents had in their child's participation in sport depended on the age of the child. The younger the child was, the more overtly involved the parents were.⁵¹ The study also found that all of the sportswomen questioned wished they had been pushed more by their parents. The group involved in this study were all women who had taken part in competitive sport, and so it cannot be assumed that the desire for demanding parents exists among all Greek children. It is nonetheless revealing that talented Greek athletes feel they need 'pushy parents' whereas in other parts of Europe there is a concern that overzealous parents may actually be spoiling the experience of sport for their children.⁵²

1.2 Greek national survey

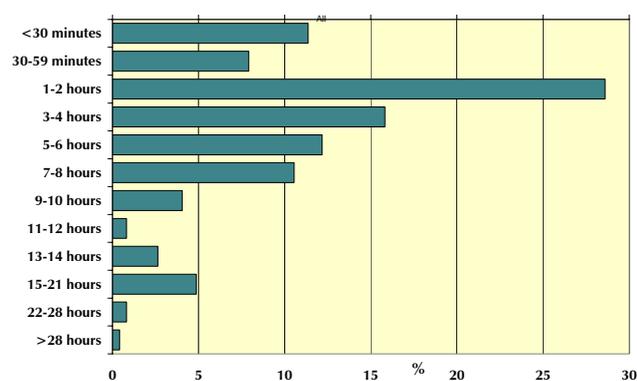
1.2.1 Introduction

SIRC surveyed over 500 Greek mothers, mainly in the Athens and Salonika areas. The majority of mothers in the sample had either one or two dependent children under the age of 16. Of these, 36% were in full-time employment, 19% in part-time employment and 43% undertook no paid work outside of the home.

1.2.2 Free time

Participants were asked how much time they had in a week to themselves without obligations to other people – children, family members, etc. The results are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Free time in an average week.



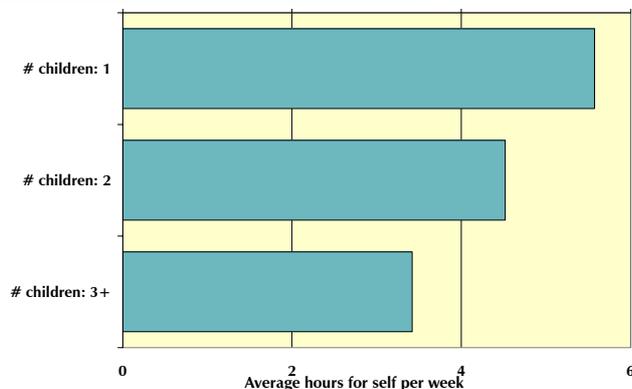
From Figure 1 we can see that the largest group (29%) of Greek mothers had between 1 and 2 hours of free time per week – an average of between 8.5 and 17 minutes per day. The average amount of free time across the sample was 4.6 hours per week, or 39 minutes per day.

⁵¹ Evgenia Giannitsopoulou, Evdokia Kosmidou, Vasiliki Zisi (2010), 'Examination of Parental Involvement in Greek Female Athletes', *Journal of Human Sport and Exercise*, Vol 5, No 2, pp.176-187.

⁵² See for example an article published in The Independent 29.09.2010, 'Pushy parents 'can turn their children off sport for life.': <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/pushy-parents-can-turn-their-children-off-sport-for-life-2092533.html>

As we might expect, the amount of free time decreased with the number of children, as shown in Figure 2. Mothers with only one child had, on average, 5.6 hours of free time per week, falling to 4.5 hours for those with two children and 3.4 hours for those with three or more children.

Figure 2. Free time by number of children.



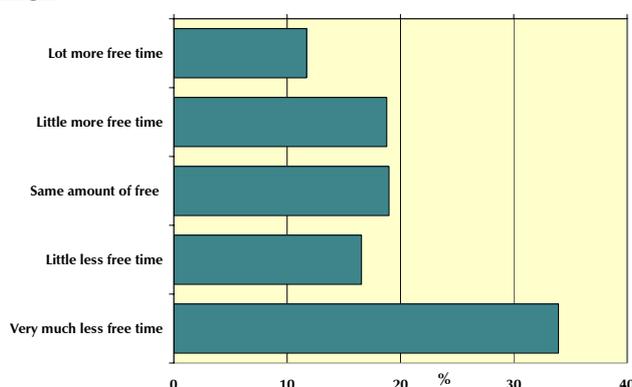
Greek mothers, on average, have less than 40 minutes per day of 'free time'.

There were only small, but unexpected, differences according to the employment status of the mother. Those without employment outside of the home had, on average, the least free time (4.3 hour per week) while those in part-time employment had the most – 4.8 hours per week. This pattern is quite different from that in most other Western European countries where non-working mothers tend to have the greatest amount of free time.

1.2.3 Generational comparisons.

Comparing themselves to their own mothers at the same life-stage as themselves, there was a tendency for respondents to report that they now had less free time, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Free time compared with own mother at same life-stage.

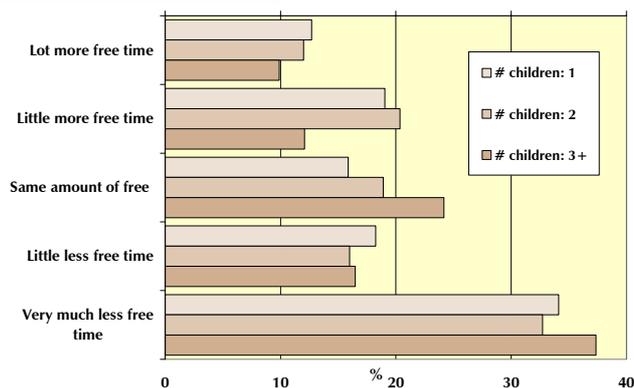


We can see from Figure 3 that the largest group of mothers in Greece (34%) felt that they had very much less time than their own mothers while only 12% felt that they had very much more.

Greek mothers feel that they now have less time to themselves than did their own mothers.

The responses varied to a small extent according to the number of dependent children. Those mothers with three or more children were the most likely to say that they had a lot less free time than their own mothers and the least likely to say that they had a lot more free time, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Free time compared with own mother at same life-stage by number of children

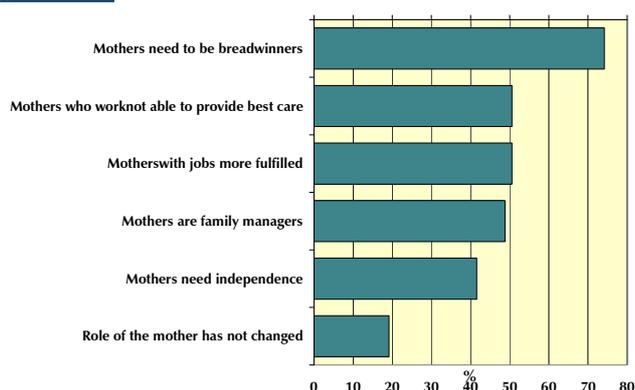


The responses also varied with the employment status of the mothers: 44% of those in full-time employment felt that they had very much less free time than their own mothers. Among mothers in part-time employment, 34% felt this way while less than a quarter (24%) of mothers not in employment felt that they had less free time than their own mothers. It is likely, therefore, that increased employment rates among women in Greece, and among mothers in particular, is responsible for this generational difference.

1.2.4 Perceptions of change

The last finding in section 1.2.3 is reinforced by responses to a further question regarding mothers' perceptions of what has changed since the previous generation of mothers. We can see from Figure 5 that the most significant change was seen as being the need for mothers today to be 'breadwinners' – a view shared by 74% of Greek mothers..

Figure 5. Mothers' perceptions of changes since the previous generation.



At the same time, however, 51% also felt that mothers who go out to work are not able to provide the best care for their children. On the other hand, an equal proportion felt that mothers today who have jobs and careers have more fulfilled lives than those who simply stay at home to look after the children. The fact that these three views dominate mothers' thinking in Greece suggests that some distinct tensions exist between the need to provide additional family income, the sense of fulfilment experienced by mothers and what is felt to be best for the children.

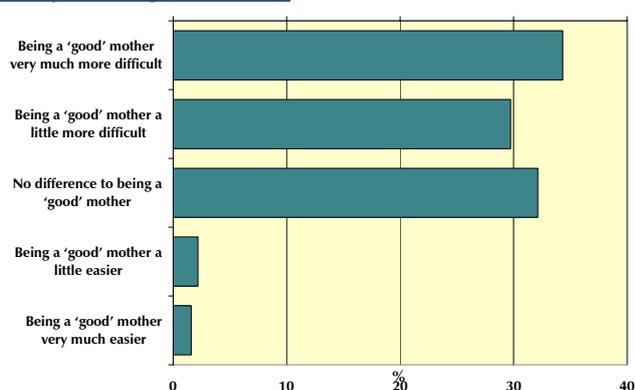
Today's Greek mothers need to be family managers and breadwinners.

Other perceived changes since the previous generation include the notion that mothers today are more like family managers than 'housewives' a view held by 49% of the sample. The modern Greek mother's greater need for a sense of independence was also recognised by 41% of the sample. Only 19% felt that the mother's role had not changed significantly from that in their own mother's day.

1.2.5 Impact of the economic downturn

A majority of mothers in the Greek survey felt that the recent economic problems had made being a 'good' mother more difficult, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Perceptions of the impact of economic conditions on ability to be a 'good' mother.



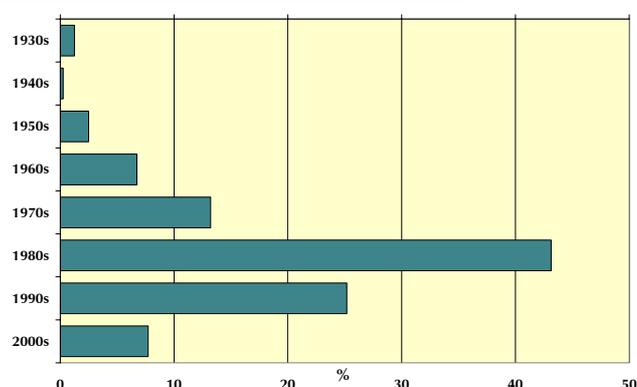
Here we can see that 34% of mothers felt that it was now very much more difficult to be a good mother, 30% felt it was more difficult and 32% felt that the economic conditions had made no difference in this respect. Only 4% of mothers felt that it was easier or very much easier to be a good mother in today's Greece. This, of course, reflects the very serious impacts that the economic 'crisis' has had on many aspects of life in Greece.

Over two thirds of Greek mothers feel that the economic recession has made it more difficult to be a 'good' mother.

1.2.6 The ideal decade

Figure 7 shows responses to the question 'If you had a time machine and could go back to be a mother in one particular period in the past 80 years, when would it be - which decade was the best for mothers, do you think?' As we can see, the largest group of mothers (43%) selected the 1980s. This, of course, was the decade in which Greece joined the European Union and a period of relative political stability began following the ending of the military dictatorship in the mid 1970s. It was also, however, a decade of quite substantial economic decline while prior to the 1980s Greece had one of the fastest growing economies in the world. It is difficult, therefore, to see what the attraction of this particular decade is for mothers.

Figure 7. Ideal decade in which to be a mother



The ideal decade in which to be a mother would be, for 43% of Greek mothers, the 1980s, followed by a quarter who would choose the 1990s.

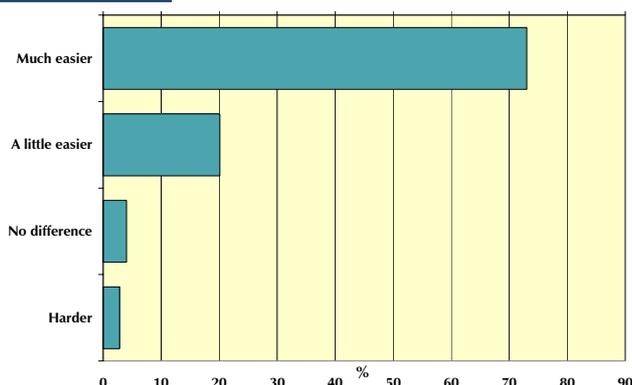
One explanation maybe the fact that many of the mothers in the sample would have been growing up as children themselves in the 1980s – the average age of mothers in the sample was 39. Perhaps a degree of nostalgia, harking back to their own happy childhood days, is evident here.

The other interesting aspect of Figure 7 is the apparent reluctance of Greek mothers to return to the earlier decades prior to the 1980s. This may well be because they recognise the positive contributions that labour-saving

appliances and products have made to their lives in more modern times. We can see from Figure 8 that the largest group of Greek mothers (73%) felt that such appliances and products had made their lives very much easier while 20% felt that life was now a little easier as a result. Only 3% thought that their lives were now harder as a result.

An overwhelming 93% of Greek mothers agree that labour-saving appliances and products have made their lives much easier or a little easier and richer.

Figure 8. Extent to which labour-saving devices have made life easier and richer.

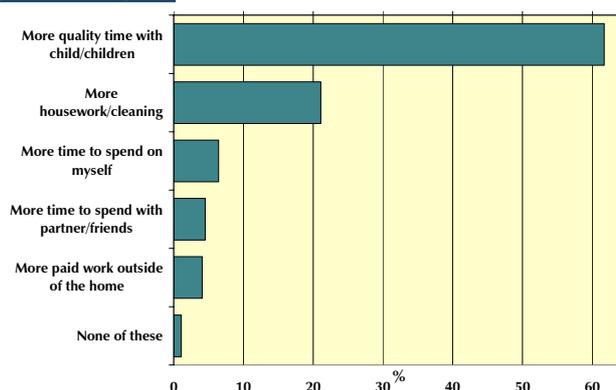


We would expect labour-saving devices, of course, to provide mothers with a little extra free time. It is the case in Greece, however, as in many other Western European countries, that the time saved in this way is used up on other activities – particularly spending more time with children, as we can see from Figure 9.

While labour-saving devices make life easier for nearly all Greek mothers, the time saved is quickly used up on extra time with the children and more housework.

Sixty-two percent of mothers said that they used the time freed up in this way to spend more quality time with their children while only 6% said that they spent such time on themselves. The other most popular choice was doing extra housework and cleaning.

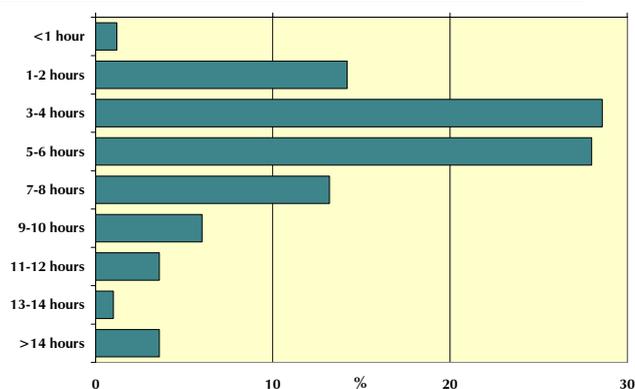
Figure 9. How time saved using modern appliances and products is spent.



1.2.7 Active time with children

The actual amounts of time that Greek mothers actively spend with their children are summarised in Figure 10.

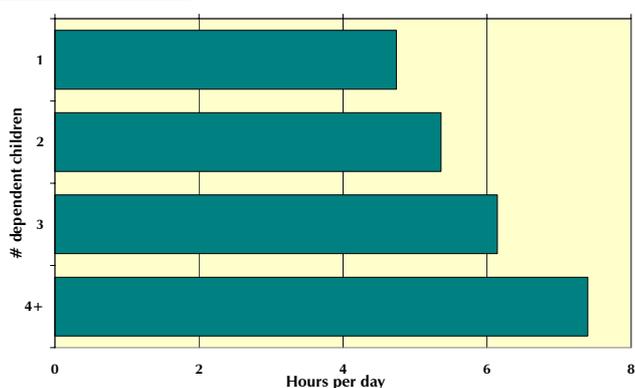
Figure 10. Hours per day of active time spent with children



Here we can see that a majority of Greek mothers (57%) spend between 3 and 6 hours engaged with their children in activities such as reading, writing, playing, washing, dressing, etc. The average amount of time across the whole sample is 5.4 hours per day – the highest in Western Europe.

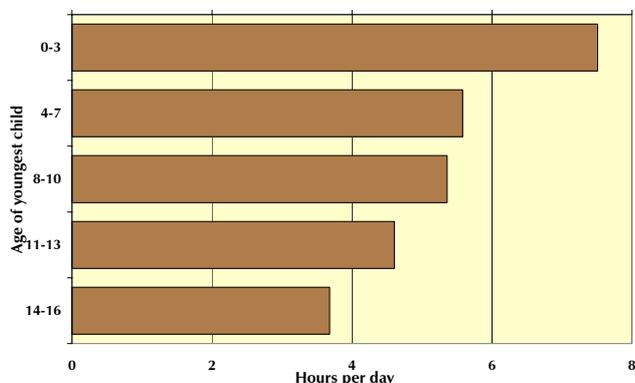
As we might expect, the greater the number of children in the family, the more active time that is required, as shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Hours per day of active time spent with children by number of children



The average number of hours spent per day by mothers of just one child is 4.7 while those with four children or more spend 7.4 hours per day. Similarly, young children require more active time than older children, as illustrated in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Hours per day of active time spent with children by age of youngest child.



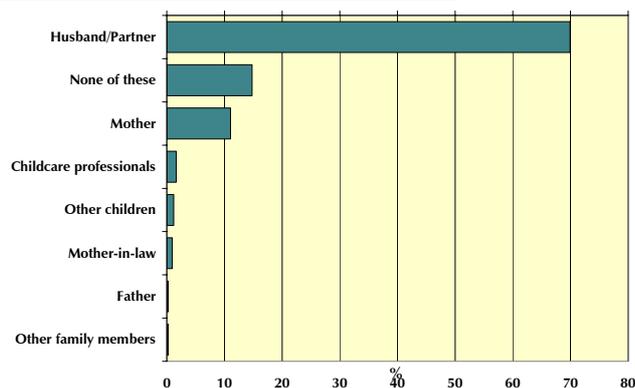
Mothers whose youngest child is under the age of 3 years spend 7.5 hours per day actively engaged with their children, while those whose youngest child is aged between 14 and 16 spend less than half of this time – 3.7 hours per day.

The average Greek mother spends 5.4 hours per day actively engaged with her children.

1.2.8 Help in the home

The main source of help with childcare for Greek mothers is the husband/partner, as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Main source of help with childcare.

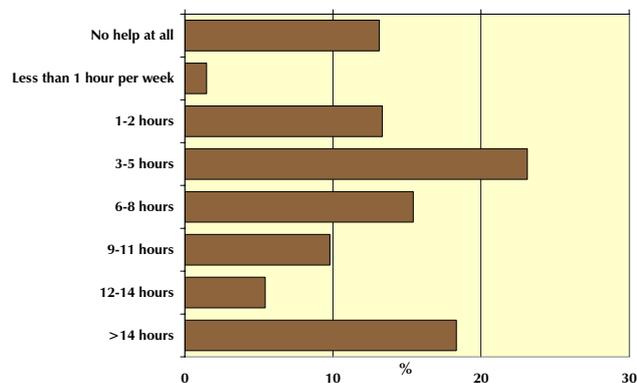


Here we can see that husbands or partners are the main source of help with childcare in 70% of cases. We can also conclude from Figure 13, however, that 15% of mothers receive no help of this kind at all. The child's maternal grandmother provides help for 11% of Greek mothers but other family members appear to contribute very little in this context.

Mother's main helper in Greece is, in nearly three quarters of cases, her husband or partner, but he contributes only an hour per day.

The number of hours of help with childcare and domestic chores provided by Greek husbands/partners is illustrated in Figure 14.

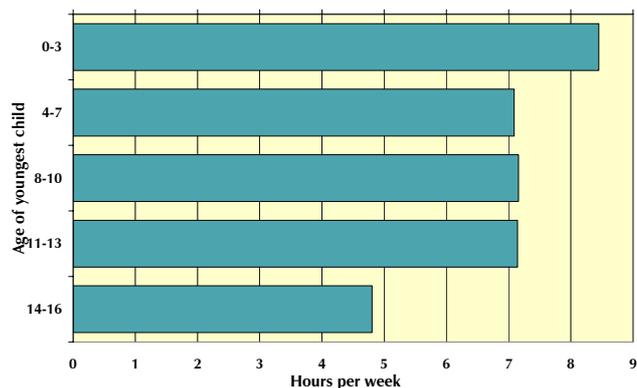
Figure 14. Hours of help per week from husbands/partners.



Here we can see that 13% of mothers receive no help at all from their partners and the largest group (23%) receive between 3 and 5 hours per week. The average is 7 hours per week, or just one hour per day.

The amount of time contributed by husbands or partners increases in families with very young children, as shown in Figure 15. Husbands contribute 8.5 hours of help per week in families where the youngest child is under the age of 3 years, but only 4.5 hours where the youngest child is over the age of 14.

Figure 15. Hours of help per week from husbands/partners by age of youngest child.

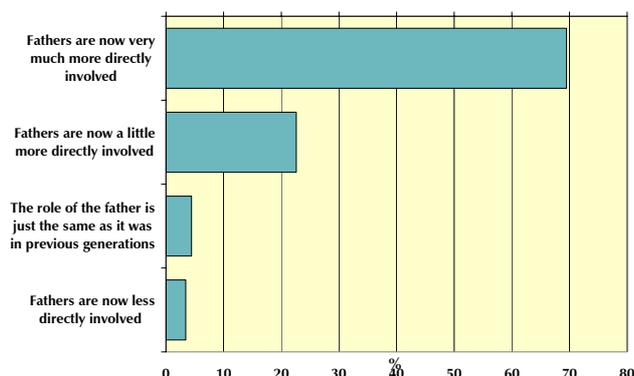


1.2.9 The role of the father

It is clear from the survey that although the contributions made by mothers' partners in terms of help with childcare and domestic tasks may be limited, their involvement is seen as being substantially greater than in previous generations. We can see from Figure 16 that over two thirds of Greek mothers (69%) feel that fathers are now much more involved in the day-to-day care of children

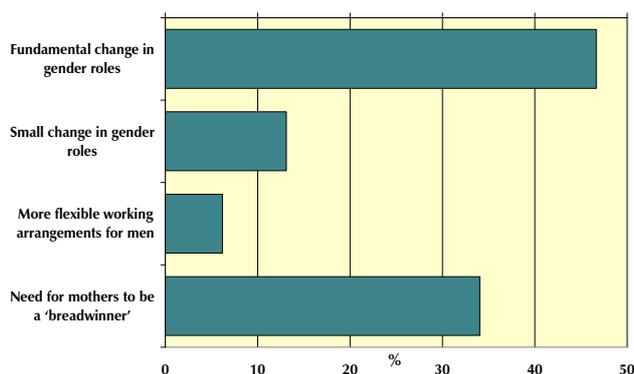
than in the past. Only 4% feel that the father’s role is unchanged and 3% say that they are less involved.

Figure 16. Involvement of fathers in childcare compared with previous generations.



The primary reason for this increased involvement of fathers in childcare and related activities is seen by the mothers as being a fundamental change in gender roles in Greek society – a sentiment expressed by 47% of respondents and illustrated in Figure 17.

Figure 17. Reasons for increase in fathers’ involvement in childcare.



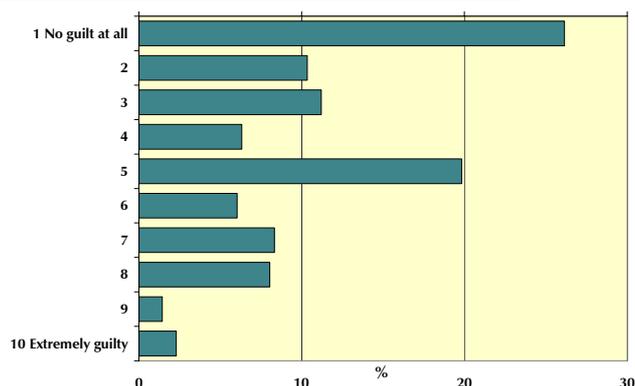
Greek mothers see a change in gender roles as being responsible for the greater involvement of fathers in childcare.

The second-most important factor in this context, however, is the increased need for mothers to contribute to the family income. Over one third (34%) of mothers feel that it is their need to be a 'breadwinner' that is responsible for fathers now being engaged in activities that were once the preserve of the 'housewife'.

1.2.10 Maternal guilt

The levels of guilt resulting from the work/home life balance that were reported by Greek mothers are illustrated in Figure 18. Here we can see that the largest group (26%) reported no guilt at all. The average level of guilt across the sample, however, was 4.0 on a ten-point scale ranging from '1 – no guilt at all' to '10 – extremely guilty'.

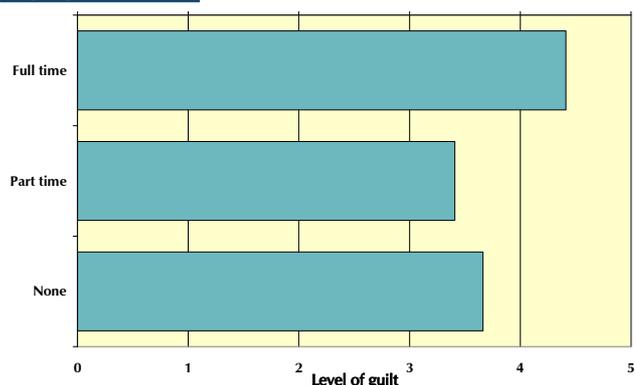
Figure 18. Levels of guilt reported by Greek mothers



Three quarters of Greek mothers experience a degree of guilt about their work/life balance.

The level of guilt was highest, as might expect, among Greek mothers with full-time jobs, average guilt score of 4.41, as shown in Figure 19. Those with no paid work outside of the home, however, had slightly higher guilt scores than those with no job – 3.66 and 3.41 respectively.

Figure 19. Levels of guilt reported by Greek mothers by employment status.

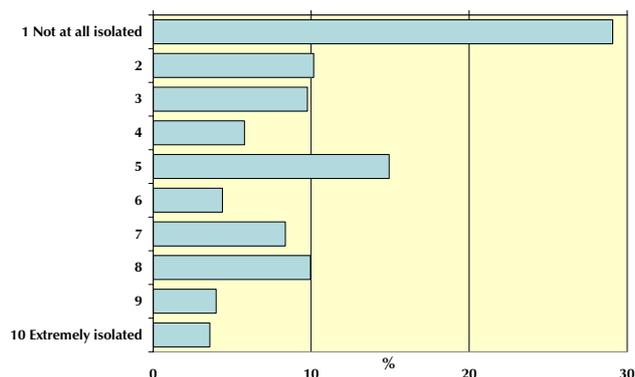


1.2.11 Maternal isolation

While most Greek mothers experience a moderate level of guilt, many also experience a sense of isolation. We can see from Figure 20 that the largest group (29%) reports no sense of isolation at all, a minority experiences isolation and lack of support quite acutely. The average isolation score across the sample was 4.21 on a ten-point scale ranging from '1 – Not at all isolated' to '10 – Extremely isolated'.

There were no significant differences between mothers in the sample according to their employment status – those with full-time jobs felt just as much isolated as those who did not go out to work at all. There were differences, however, depending on the age of the youngest child in the family, as shown in Figure 21.

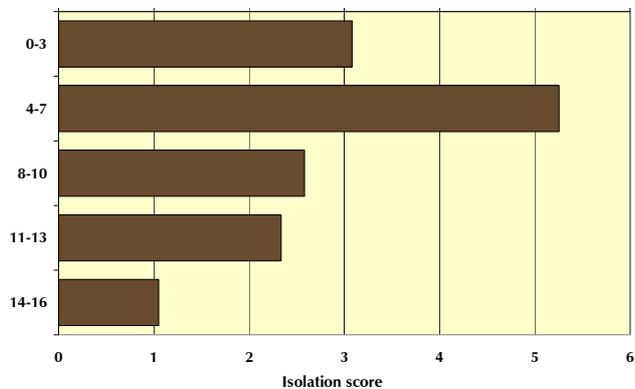
Figure 20. Greek mothers' sense of isolation.



Over 70% of mothers experience at least a degree of isolation.

From Figure 21 we can see that mothers with the oldest children tend to experience less isolation than those with the younger children. This, we might assume, is because they would mostly be more established in the community and have contact with other mothers through schools. It is mothers in families where the youngest child is aged between 4 and 7, however, that the experience of isolation is the greatest – average isolation score of 5.26. This may be due their child starting school and other changes that occur when children are of that age.

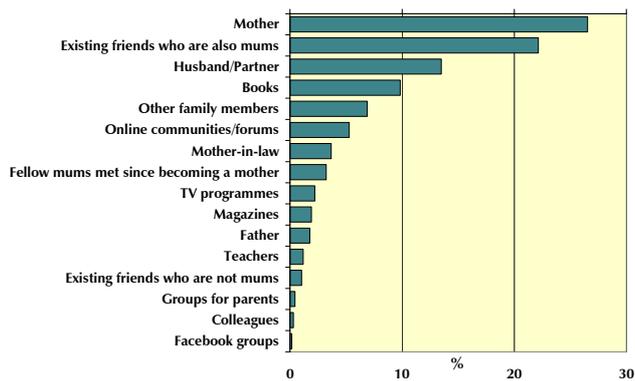
Figure 21 Greek mothers' sense of isolation by age of youngest child.



1.2.12 Support and advice

Given that there is a degree of isolation, coupled with feelings of guilt, evident among Greek mothers it is clear that many need to rely on others around them for support and advice at this stage of their life. The people to whom they turn the most for advice are summarised in Figure 22. Here we can see that the mothers' own mothers play the most significant role in this context – 27% make that selection. Other mothers, however, are ranked in second place as those providing the best advice on being a mother (22%). Husbands and partners are relegated to third place in this context – 13%.

Figure 22. Sources of advice for Greek mothers.

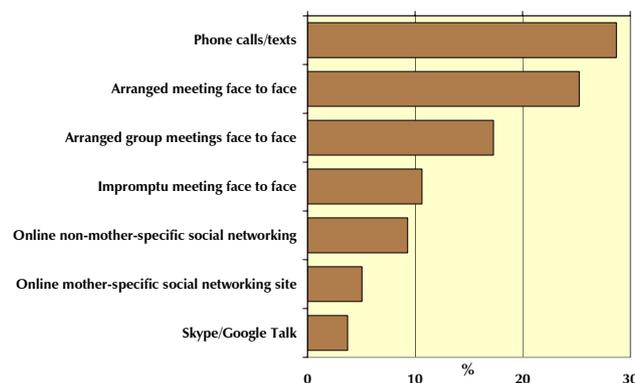


Greek mothers turn first to their own mothers for advice.

The use of books as sources of advice is higher in Greece than in some other Western European countries with 10% of mothers turning to such sources. Facebook and other online communities, however, are seen as being of little relevance here by most Greek mothers.

Using these individuals for advice and support requires, of course, that mothers communicate in some form with them. The channels used for this purpose are illustrated in Figure 23. Here we can see that phone calls and text messages are the primary source of communication (29%) followed by arranged face-to-face, one-to-one meetings (25%). The use of IT in this context is also evident with 18% of mothers using one or more of such technologies to stay in touch with others who can offer advice and support.

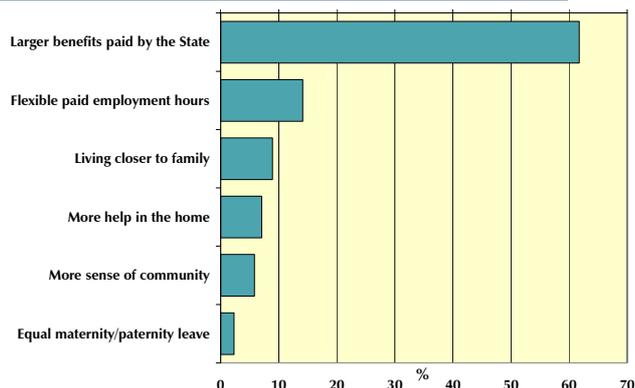
Figure 23. Channels used to communicate with sources of support.



1.2.13 Improving the quality of life

For Greek mothers the best way of improving their lives would be an increase in state benefits – a view held by 62% of the sample and illustrated in Figure 24.

Figure 24. Ways of improving the lives of Greek mothers.



Increased state benefits are seen by most mothers as the best way of improving their lives.

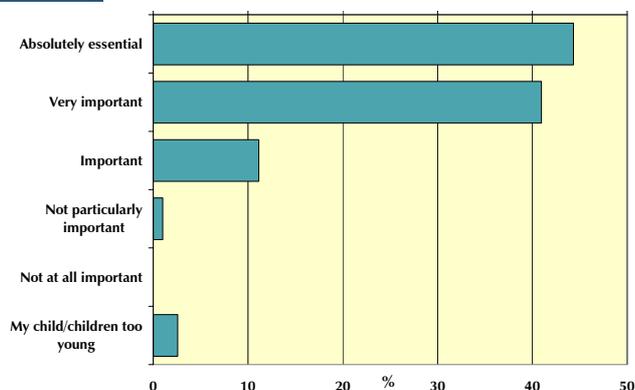
This, perhaps, reflects the response to the current economic crisis in Greece and the austerity measures that involve cuts to public spending. Other potential improvements such as more flexible working arrangements, being able to live closer to the mother’s family or more help in the home are seen as potentially much less significant.

There were few differences among mothers according to their employment status except regarding more help in the home. Ironically, perhaps, 14% of mothers without employment outside of the home felt that this would improve their lives, compared with 8% of those who worked part-time and only 3% of those who worked full-time.

1.2.14 Sport

Greek mothers overwhelmingly recognise the importance of participation in sport for their children’s development. We can see from Figure 25 that 85% of mothers rate such participation as being absolutely essential or very important. Only 1% rate participation as being not particularly important and none say that it is not at all important.

Figure 25. Importance of sport for child’s development and well-being

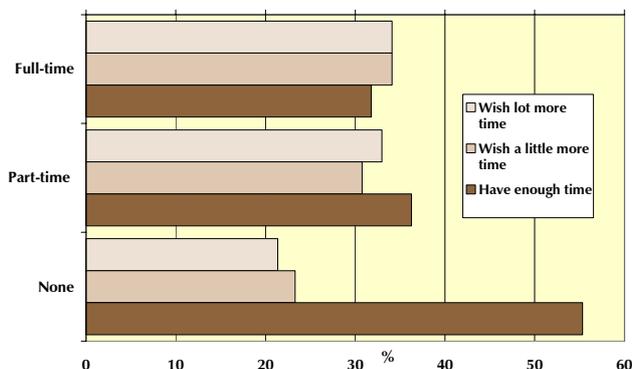


Almost all Greek mothers value highly their children’s participation in sport.

Because so few Greek mothers thought that encouraging their children to participate in sport was unimportant it was difficult to analyse responses to a question that asked why they thought it unimportant. Within this small minority, however, 40% said that they would rather encourage achievement in academic subjects, a similar proportion felt that they might give more encouragement if there were better sports facilities available to them and 20% said that it would take up too much of their children’s time.

Encouraging children’s participation in sport, of course, requires that mothers have the time to do so. We can see from Figure 26 that this depended on whether or not the mother was in paid employment.

Figure 26. Satisfaction with amount of time available to encourage sports participation by employment status.



Those Greek mothers who did not work generally felt that they had enough time to encourage their children’s participation in sport. Those with full- or part-time jobs, however, tended to wish that they had more time to do