



**European project:
“The Role of Men in the Family”**

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*‘Ways that Men Conceptualize the Everyday Care of the Elderly
in Greek Families’*

Greek National Report

**Family & Childcare Centre (FCC)
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Introduction

The Family & Childcare Centre (FCC) as an international partner of the project “The Role of Men in the Family” conducted a survey about how do men conceptualize the everyday care of the elderly in the family. The need for this aspect of research has become by the realization of the fact that a lot has been said and researched about the role of men as fathers or as husbands but we tend to forget that apart from these they continue to be sons. So in this project FCC has chosen to focus on the role of men as sons and how do they consider the everyday care of their parents and their parents in law and what they do about it especially when the elderly members of their families depend on them.

Ageing of the European population has become increasingly important on the European agenda. In the 50 years between 1960 and 2010 the population aged 65 years old and over in the 15 EU countries will become more than double. In the increasing number of old people propels the need for action in long term care.

In the Mediterranean countries the care for elder people continues to be a “family affair”. Care is still often provided by the family and there is no direct support from the state. Despite the latest changes in the modern family, such as decreased family size, increased geographical depression and massive entrance of the women into the labor market, family remains the most important source of help to the elderly. However, the care-giving tasks provided by the family members vary enormously from country to country and also within countries. While some families, mostly in rural areas, provide nearly all kinds of support and help, which are necessary for an elder person, other families in the cities focus only on specific tasks, which have to do mainly with the emotional support.

The care for the elderly was influenced by strong moral and ethical views around the perceived roles and responsibilities of the family towards care-giving. However, whatever was the role that family adopted it was always evident that caring meant a heavy burden for the whole family who needs support and time for respite. If specific expectations towards integrated care exist, they do not seem to be very high. Many care-giver families see themselves as the main persons responsible for the elderly care. Further more most of the times care givers do not want to give up their ‘duties’ completely and there is relatively little

empirical support to the notion that professional services have as result less support to the relatives by the members of their family.

In societies like the Greek one, where historically the welfare state was not enough developed until recently, when big steps have taken place, compared to other European countries, there is great necessity to develop services, which support the informal care. In Greece, the long standing traditional and cultural beliefs prevail and the family usually takes care of the elderly, while the percentage of those who let their relatives living in clinics or residential care institutions is still small, but the last decade has started increasing gradually.

The concept of caring as a specific activity with the relevant support of the state is new in Greece. The sons mostly take care of their parents, especially in rural areas, as in many of them, still survives the tradition, according to which when a woman gets married she stays at her husband's house and they both take care of his parents. The last two decades certain positive steps have been taken by the local authorities through pilot programs like KAPI (ΚΑΠΗ) and 'Help at home'. KAPIs are open centres for the protection of the aged people, where the elderly can spent some of their time during the day talking to friends, drinking a coffee, watching a film, joining an excursion or participating in other entertainment events. The 'Help at home' program is more recent, of the last 5 – 10 years, and the local authorities hire unemployed people to offer help to elder civilians, who have asked for it, like taking them to the bank or the doctor, keeping them company, cooking their meals etc.

Despite the significant changes in family formation and family structure patterns, families are still the 'largest service' in Greece and predominantly responsible for meeting the needs of elder people. The importance of family ethics is crucial and it could be argued that this is an important factor of why informal family care remains the most expected way of elderly long-term care in some European countries like Greece.

In the chapter that follow whenever we refer to the elder dependant person, we mean the parents or the parents in law of the interviewee and when we say that this person depends on him, we mean either economically or physically and emotionally no matter if he/she stays at interviewee's house or another solution has been found.

Methodology

FCC conducted 200 *face to face* interviews by using the qualitative method of semi-structured interview. In semi-structured interview the researcher has a list of questions or a number of specific topics which have to be covered, but the interviewee is allowed to answer freely. Questions may not follow on exactly in the way they are outlined on interviewer's schedule. The interviewer is free to ask more questions, which are not included in his schedule as he/she picks up on things said by the interviewee. However, by and large, all of the questions will be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewee to interviewee.¹

We chose to use the semi-structured interview rather than the unstructured interview as we started the interview with a fairly clear focus, rather than a very general notion of wanting to do research on a topic. This way we were able to address more specific issues. Moreover, we chose semi-structured interview because the research was to be conducted to many interviewees nationwide and this means that more than one person was to carry out the fieldwork. So, semi-structured interview was preferred in order to ensure a modicum of comparability of interviewing style.

The kind of questions asked in such a qualitative semi-structured interview was variable. We started with introducing questions, which were to be answered with single words in order to get more general information on the interviewee (his profile) and we continued with direct specific questions, which were followed by follow-up, probing and specified questions, where needed in order to give the chance to interviewee to comment more on the answer he has given before.

FCC realised 200 interviews to men living in urban and rural areas nationwide. In urban areas we conducted 100 interviews specifically in Athens, Thessalonica, Patras and Iraklion. In rural areas we conducted 100 interviews in Naxos, Livadia, Ioannina, Halkidiki, Nafpaktos, Megalopoli and Pirgos. In the next chapter follow the interviewees' profile and the interviews' results.

¹ BRYMAN Alan (2001) *Social Research Methods*, Oxford University Press.

Main relevant results

From the 100 interviewees, who live in urban areas, 42 have an elderly dependant person and 58 do not have a dependant person, which means that their parents are either not alive or they do not rely on their sons, they are independent or someone else takes care of them. From the 100 interviewees, who live in rural areas, 55 have an elder relative depending on them and 45 do not have an elder dependant relative. Both groups were asked some general common questions and then the questions differentiated as they had to be on a hypothetical basis for those who do not have an elder dependant relative.

Urban Areas – Interviewees with an elderly dependant relative (42 interviews)

The massive majority of those who have an elder dependant person are between 36 and 65 years old, they are of a good or medium financial situation, they are married with children, they have either brothers or sisters and they own the house they live in. In most of the cases the dependant person lives in the house of the interviewee (47.6%) or in a house near interviewee's house (31%) or in a home for the aged (21.4%).

The most frequent reason for taking the dependant person to live in their own house is the provision of financial support by him or her (40%). Then comes the interviewee's wish (35%) and at last the elder person's wish (25%). Most of the interviewees (60%) are satisfied by taking the elder person (parent or parent in law) at their own house because:

- they get his/her financial support (42%)
- the elder person still helps with the children's upbringing and the household (23%)
- the elder is unable to live alone (16%), so they understand this and they cannot leave him/her helpless
- they can care for him/her better and in a more direct way (10%)
- it is a matter of consciousness (9%)

Less than half of the interviewed men (40%) were not satisfied by the above decision because:

- the elder person faces serious health problems and this affects the whole family (45%)
- all the family's habits and functions are affected by the presence of the dependant person in the same house (32%)
- the other members of the family cannot easily do whatever they want and whenever they want (23%)

In half of the cases the interviewed man takes care of the elder. However, he always has the help from another member of the family:

- his wife's help (78%)
- his children's help (17%)
- his brother's or his sister's help (5%)

He never offers his mere help to the dependant person without somebody else's help as well. In the rest half of the cases only the interviewee's wife takes care of the elder person without not even his help.

At the question about how much time they devote to the elder person the majority answered once a day (26.2%), many said many times a day (21.5%), the 19% said twice a week, 16.7% answered that they cannot really say as it depends on their spare time, a few said that they do not know how to answer this question (9.5%) and at last quite few said that they devote one time in a week (7.1%).

At the last question on whether they estimate they had the necessary information on how to take care the dependant person, the vast majority (78.6%) said no, while the other 21.4% said yes only because they simply knew that it was their duty to take care for an elder person of their own family or they had a little information by some homes for the aged, which advertised the services they offer if you get an elder person there.

Rural Areas – Interviewees with an elderly dependant relative (55 interviews)

The massive majority of those who have an elder dependant person are between 36 and 65 years old, they are of a good or medium financial situation, they are married with children, they have either brothers or sisters and they own the house they live in. In the vast majority of the cases the dependant person lives in the house of the interviewee (87.3%) or in a house near interviewee's house (9.1%) or in a home for the aged (3.6%).

The most frequent reason for taking the dependant person to live in their own house is the wish of the interviewed man (35.4%). The second most frequent answer is that this is a family tradition they are get used to follow (27.1%). After that ensues the wish of the rest of the family (18.8%) and then the elder person's wish (12.5%). The provision of financial

support by the dependant person comes low at preference (6.2%). The massive majority (85.4%) is satisfied by taking the elder person (parent or parent in law) at their own house because:

- this the family tradition(58.6%)
- they did their duty (21.6%)
- it is a matter of consciousness and self-satisfaction (19.8%)

A few of the interviewed men (14.6%) were not satisfied by the above decision because:

- the whole situation creates family problems (52.4%)
- the elder person faces serious health problems and this affects the whole family (47.6%)

In half of the cases the interviewed man takes care of the elder (52.8%). However, he always has the help from another member of the family:

- his wife's help (63.3%)
- his children's help (24.2%)
- his brother's or his sister's help (12.5%)

He never offers his mere help to the dependant person without somebody else's help as well. In the rest of the cases (47.2%) the interviewee does not deal with the care of the elder person, but other relatives of him have this responsibility:

- his wife (37.7%)
- his children (3.8%)
- the elder person's husband or wife (3.8%)
- a lady-help (1.9%)

At the question about how much time they devote to the elder person the majority answered many times a day (60%), some of them said once a day (18.2%), a few of them (10.9%) said twice a week, 9.1% answered that they cannot really say as it depends on their spare time and extremely few said that they devote one time in a week (1.8%).

At the last question on whether they estimate they had the necessary information on how to take care the dependant person, a bit more than the half (54.5%) said yes, meaning that they simply this was their duty and the rest (45.5%) answered 'no'.

Urban Areas – Interviewees with no elderly dependant relative (58 interviews)

The massive majority of those who live in urban areas and do not have an elder relative, who depends on them, are between 18 and 50 years old, they are of a good or medium financial situation, they are married with children, they have either brothers or sisters and they own the house they live in. Additionally, their parents or their parents in law live in a house at the same town but not close to their children or they live in another town or village.

Ensuant we asked a series of hypothetical questions on what they would do in some situations if they had an elder relative depending on them. The same questions were asked to those interviewed men who live in rural areas but still do not have an elder dependant person. The results to the above hypothetical questions are the following:

If they had a dependant person who could not go to the toilet:

- they would get him into an institute (41.4%)
- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (22.4%)
- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (20.7%)
- they would keep him/her at their house (8.6%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (6.9%)

If they had a dependant person who could not dress up by himself:

- they would get him into an institute (39.7%)
- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (24.1%)
- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (17.2%)
- they would keep him/her at their house (13.8%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (5.2%)

If they had a dependant person who could not move:

- they would get him into an institute (41.5%)
- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (25.8%)
- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (17.2%)

- they would keep him/her at their house (8.6%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (6.9%)

If they had a dependant person who could not eat by himself:

- they would get him into an institute (36.2%)
- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (24.1%)
- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (22.4%)
- they would keep him/her at their house (12.1%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (5.2%)

If they had a dependant person who could not use the phone to call for help:

- they would get him into an institute (36.2%)
- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (27.6%)
- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (19%)
- they would keep him/her at their house (12.1%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (5.1%)

If they had a dependant person who could not follow doctor's orders:

- they would get him into an institute (36.2%)
- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (20.7%)
- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (17.2%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (13.8%)
- they would keep him/her at their house (12.1%)

However, if they had to keep the elder person at their house, the services they would prefer to have are:

- visits of special professionals for help at home (43.1%)
- helping services for the elder's stay at home (36.2%)
- information services on technical and financial possibilities for his/her stay at home (8.6%)

- provision of temporarily help for a certain period of time (e.g. winter-time or summer-time etc) (5.2%)
- other support services to the dependant and the family as well (5.2%)
- preparation of the elder's meals and drinks (1.7%)

Rural Areas – Interviewees with no elderly dependant relative (45 interviews)

The massive majority of those who live in rural areas and do not have an elder dependant relative are between 36 and 78 years old, they are of a good or very good financial situation, they are married with children, they have either brothers or sisters and they own the house they live in. Their parents or their parents in law live in a house at the same town and close to their children or they live in another town or village.

The results to the hypothetical questions are the following:

If they had a dependant person who could not go to the toilet:

- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (26.7%)
- they would keep him/her at their house (24.5%)
- they would get him into an institute (22.2%)
- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (13.3%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (13.3%)

If they had a dependant person who could not dress up by himself:

- they would keep him/her at their house (35.6%)
- they would get him into an institute (24.5%)
- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (15.5%)
- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (15.5%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (8.9%)

If they had a dependant person who could not move:

- they would keep him/her at their house (28.9%)

- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (24.5%)
- they would get him into an institute (20%)
- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (17.7%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (8.9%)

If they had a dependant person who could not eat by himself:

- they would keep him/her at their house (33.3%)
- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (24.5%)
- they would get him into an institute (20%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (13.3%)
- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (8.9%)

If they had a dependant person who could not use the phone to call for help:

- they would keep him/her at their house (31.1%)
- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (24.5%)
- they would get him into an institute (20%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (15.5%)
- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (8.9%)

If they had a dependant person who could not follow doctor's orders:

- they would keep him/her at their house (31.2%)
- they would get him into an institute (26.7%)
- they would keep him/her at their house but they would hire someone to take care of him/her (17.7%)
- they would provide him/her professional help (15.5%)
- they would prepare a small apartment close to their house (8.9%)

However, if they had to keep the elder person at their house, the services they would prefer to have are:

- visits of special professionals for help at home (37.9%)

- helping services for the elder's stay at home (20%)
- information services on technical and financial possibilities for his/her stay at home (13.3%)
- other support services to the dependant and the family as well (8.9%)
- preparation of the elder's meals and drinks (8.9%)
- discounts on the buy of a means of transport (e.g. car) (4.4%)
- means of group transportation (4.4%)
- provision of temporarily help for a certain period of time (e.g. winter-time or summer-time etc) (2.2%)

At last we asked all the 200 interviewees to answer into 2 common questions we had incorporated all the partners of the project into our research. These two questions were more general as far as the participation of men into daily family responsibilities is concerned and the results follow:

1. In your opinion, what should be done, so that men can participate more in daily family responsibilities?

- | | |
|---|-------|
| • Fathers should change their mentality and become more active in the family. | 28,5% |
| • Mothers should hand over to fathers more responsibilities and insist on that. | 24,2% |
| • The school should take over initiatives and implement activities and sessions, which promote gender equality. | 19,8% |
| • The couple should find ways to run the family responsibilities through dialogue and understanding. | 16,7% |
| • There are no easy solutions for matters like this, long term changes to men's and women's mentalities should occur. | 10,8% |

2. In your opinion, what are the legal provisions necessary to improve the participation of men in daily family responsibilities?

- | | |
|---|-------|
| • There should be paid paternal leave for a significant period of time (either for taking care of their children or dependant members of their family). | 44,3% |
| • Provision for counseling to parents and especially to fathers from the local authorities. | 21,6% |
| • Child-minder programs or nursing programs for the elderly (at neighborhood level) run and financed by the local authority. | 16,2% |
| • Reduction of working hours. | 9,4% |

- Nurseries at fathers' jobs, so that they will be responsible for taking their children to the nursery school. 5,6%
- Benefits to companies, which adopt good practices for the reconciliation of professional with family life and they encourage their employees to make use of them. 2,9%

Conclusions and Recommendations

From the above results we notice that in urban areas men are more willing to overcome the tradition, which says that the family itself should look after the elder members. However, though these who do not have a dependant person would consider to get him into a home for the aged, if they had, those who do have a dependant person still keep him at their house or an apartment close to their house with or without someone else's help.

In rural areas the family tradition is stronger but we noticed that this notion have started changing as those who do not have an elder dependant person believe that if they had, they would try to find another solution than keeping him in their own house. However, the percentage of those, who insist keeping an elder relative at their own house if the need appears, is higher than that of the people who live in urban areas. The idea of getting your parents or parents in law into a home for the aged used to be a kind of 'disgrace' for many many years but people nowadays seem to overcoming this stereotype step by step.

It is obvious that men are not aware of the programs about the care of the elderly that are run by the local authority, as most of them stated that they didn't receive any information by any entity, the state or the local authority, when they had to decide how they would look after the elder. In rural areas most of the people just followed the family tradition and they kept the elder at their home, as they are still strongly influenced by moral values. Something else that became obvious by the interviews is that people who live in urban areas and have an elder depending on them admitted that the provision of financial help by the elder was a motive for them in order to keep him/her at their house. This is something that was rarely stated by those who live in rural areas. This could mean either that it is not a motive for them or that they are not willing to admit it because they think it is shame for them if they do so.

Concluding, as far as the participation of men in daily family responsibilities is concerned we focus on the need for paid paternity leave for a significant period of time. Men stated that it is difficult for them to devote more time to their family because of the time they spend at work and they remarked that it is necessary for them to get full paid paternity leave, as this would allow them to get to know better their children and their needs and it would also be a significant help for their wives.

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