Families Across Cultures

A 30-Nation Psychological Study

Edited by

James Georgas, John W. Berry, Fons J. R. van de Vijver,
Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı and Ype H. Poortinga

CAMBRIDGE

Contents

21   Greece

Kostas Mylonas, Aikaterini Gari, Artemis Giotsa,
Vassilis Pavlopoulos, and Penny Panagiotopoulou

A HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF GREECE

Greece was established as an independent nation state in 1822, having
rebelled against the Ottoman Empire. Its present-day population is
approximately 10,500,000 inhabitants. Athens is the capital, with
4,500,000 inhabitants. Greece became a member of the European
Union in 1981.

ECOLOGICAL FEATURES

Greece is in southeastern Europe, situated at the base of the Balkan
peninsula, with mountains as its spine and hundreds of islands in the
Aegean, Ionian, and Cretan seas, few fertile plains, and, even today,
small isolated communities in the mountains and on the many islands,
and relatively large cities on the plains and by the sea. Its climate is
Mediterranean with hot and dry summers and mild winters.

ORGANIZATION AND INSTITUTIONS OF SOCIETY

Economic organization

The ecological features of Greece shaped specific types of subsistence
patterns which remained unchanged for hundreds of years. The plains,
essentially broad valleys between mountains, permitted some cultivation
of crops. Cities, often located near the sea on the serrated coastline,
became trading and mercantile centers. In the mountains, the herding of
goats and sheep, and vine and olive oil cultivation were widely found.
Fishing was the standard mode of subsistence in communities by the sea,
together with merchant shipping. During the past 20 years, the trad-
itional forms of subsistence patterns have given way to decreased agri-
culture (20 percent), increased industrialization (20 percent) and
services (60 percent) primarily related to tourism.

Political institutions and legal system

Historically, the many small communities throughout Greece were partly self-governed, most likely because the geographical conditions made effective political control of these isolated communities by a central government almost impossible, either by the Ottoman Empire or by the governments of Greece after its establishment in the early 1820s. This relative autonomy and self-government in the communities, in which essentially each set their own traditions, customs and right to judge their own members according to local customs and norms, was a critical factor that affected the Greeks' social perception of law, fairness, government, and suspicion of central government – attitudes that have been sustained until the present time (Friedl, 1962). However, in modern Greece, central government controls all aspects of life. Since the 1980s, institutional changes regarding women's rights have been codified by new laws.

The educational system

After the establishment of the Greek state and the formation of the first Greek constitution of 1823, education was limited to the very few. The University of Athens was established in 1837, with male students only until 1890, and one of the highest values of the traditional agricultural family was to send at least one of the sons to the university, even if this required selling of land to finance his education (Gari and Kalantzi-Azizi, 1998; Tsoukalas, 1982). At the present time, the Greek education is an integral part of the EU educational system. Approximately 90 percent of the population is considered literate and the percentage of males and females enrolled in tertiary education is 47.4 percent and 46.3 percent, respectively.

Religion

The population is 98 percent Christian Orthodox. Although the proportion of people attending church regularly in the urban areas is about 10 percent, recent polls indicate that the great majority of the population believe in the Orthodox religion.

BONDS WITH GROUPS IN THE IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY

The small isolated autonomous communities were characterized by suspicion of outsiders and tight social control of their families or clans.

Violations of local social standards or religious customs provoked the reaction and sanctions of the entire community. The members of the community judged and punished those who violated their customs, whatever the law of the central government, either Ottoman or Greek. The collective responsibility of the community members, the respect for life, the respect of family honor and property, and the institutions collectively supported by the community, were carefully protected. On the other hand, the inter-family relationships within the community were often characterized by hostility and contention.

THE FAMILY

Marriage

In regard to exogamy, in the traditional family of the past, marriage was restricted to potential spouses from the same village and of the same religion. In today's family, choice of a spouse has few restrictions. In regard to endogamy, the Orthodox religion prohibited marriage of the nuclear family and first cousins, but marriage of second cousins was permitted, although in isolated villages these restrictions on marriage between first cousins were sometimes overlooked.

Obtaining a spouse

Traditionally, decisions to marry were made by the two families, with the father – or the eldest brother in case of the father having passed away – making the decision. Today, the decision whom to marry is made by the individual with or without the consent of the parents. In the traditional family, marriage was usually arranged on the basis of contracts, in which the father's dowry of a house to the groom represented legal transfer of property (Cassia and Bada, 1992; Friedl, 1967; Psychogios, 1987). However, regional variations in property transmission were observed. Pastoralists with extended families and neolocal island farmers gave a trousseau to daughters at marriage; continental farmers presented land and trousseaux to daughters. Women from the islands had a comparatively freer status, e.g, on the island of Naxos daughters were endowed from the patrimony and sons from the matrimony. In the present day, there is no official dowry, but social norms are directed toward the father buying property ready for when the daughter marries, or buying a car for the married couple after marriage.

Social sanctions against divorce were strong in the traditional family, although the Orthodox Church permitted three divorces for both men

and women. The patriarchal rights of the head of the family were codified in terms of the father; in case of divorce the father retained the property, became custodian of the child, maintained control of family finances, etc. The Greek constitution of 1975 and later laws contained provisions regarding gender equality, including the married woman's right to maintain her family name and equal rights after divorce regarding control of property and child custody. According to Eurostat (1995) the lowest increase in divorce rates in the European Union are in Greece and Ireland. Greece had a rate of 0.4 in 1965 as compared to a 0.6 average of the 15 EU countries, and a 0.7 rate in 1993 as compared to a 1.7 average of the EU countries.

Family structure

The traditional Greek extended family structure could be described as patrilineal in terms of lineal descent, in which kin of both sexes were related. It can also be described as patriarchal in that the father or the grandfather had the legal power and the social norms which supported his authority.

The extended family included three generations: grandparents, sons/ fathers, daughters/mothers, and children, with the grandfather being the head of the family in terms of authority structure. The family was related to collateral kin (cousins, uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews), and maintained affinal relationships (parents-in-law, children-in-law, and siblings-in-law), as well as *koumbari* (bonds with a family through baptism of the children, or "best man/maid of honor" at the marriage of offspring), or bonds with others through mutual obligations.

Residence after marriage was patrilocal, in that the married sons resided in or near the father's residence or that of kinsmen. The married daughter resided with or in a separate home near the father-in-law. In Athens, residence was almost always in the home of the father-in-law and the mother-in-law had complete authority over the daughter-in-law.

Family roles and functions

The traditional roles of the family members have been described based on perceptions and attitudes towards Greek family values, roles, and duties (Vassiliou, 1966) and on traditional Greek family values (Georgas, 1991). Roles in the traditional Greek family can be described as follows: *father* takes the lead role in the family and handles all financial matters; *mother* accepts her husband's decisions, is always there – in the home – living for her children, as her first goal should be to be a good mother;

parents are protective and supportive; *children* are obedient, respectful, and caring for their parents when they become old; finally, *women* should not have children outside marriage and should return to their family homes if separated.

Triandis and Vassiliou (1972) described the Greek ingroup as composed of more than the extended family, including e.g., best man at the wedding, the godfather, in-laws, friends, with the criterion that they showed concern and support during times of need. The appropriate behaviors toward members of the ingroup were cooperation, protection, and help, while appropriate behaviors toward members of the outgroup were competition and hostility. Also, a key central value of the ingroup, which encompasses many other values, was *philotimo* (Vassiliou and Vassiliou, 1973). *Philotimo* can be loosely translated as "honor," but it has a special meaning for the Greek ingroup, i.e., "to give to others," "to be correct in fulfilling your obligations," "to sacrifice yourself for others," "to respect others."

CHANGES IN THE FAMILY

Demographics

The number of marriages per 1,000 persons in Greece has been declining in Greece from 9.4 in 1965 to 5.4 in 1994 (Eurostat, 1996). The same trend was found in the 15 EU nations, but the number of marriages in Greece was following a steeper declination than the average of the EU nations, i.e., 7.8 in 1965 to 5.2 in 1994.

Greece has the lowest rate of one-parent families in the EU. The number of births per 1,000 women of childbearing age in Greece has been declining from a rate of 2.39 in 1970 to 1.35 in 1994, but this still remains somewhat higher than the EU average. In general, in Greece there is a close association between marital status and fertility rates, with 98 percent of births within marriage, the highest percentage among the 15 state-members of the EU (Kotzamanis and Maratou-Alibrante, 1994).

Family values

The Greek constitution of 1975 preserved the traditional norms of family life (article 1388), until 1983, when the new Greek Family Law (23/2) introduced alterations in respect to the duties and rights of Greek family members. In studies of traditional family values, three factors emerged (Georgas, 1986, 1989, 1993; Papademou, 1999). The

strongest factor was *hierarchical roles of father and mother*, with values related to the traditional roles of the patriarchal extended family, in which father was the head of the family, who acted in an authoritarian manner (punishes children when disobedient), controlled the finances (handles the money in the house . . . is the breadwinner), while mother was submissive, conciliatory, a housewife, caring for the children (accepts the decisions of the father . . . yields and is compromising . . . is always there for everyday matters . . . her place is in the home). A second factor was *responsibilities of parents toward the children*, e.g., parents shouldn't argue in front of the children; should teach their children to behave properly; the problems of the family should be solved within the family. The third factor was *responsibilities of children toward the family and the relatives*: children should take care of their parents when they become old; obey their parents; help with the chores of the house; respect their grandparents; maintain good relationships with one's relatives. In contrast with the rejection of hierarchical roles of father and mother (Safilios-Rothschild, 1971), young people did not reject values associated with responsibilities of the parents toward the children and responsibilities of the children toward the family and the relatives. These latter values were not only related to responsibilities of children to the family but also to the importance of maintaining ties with members of the extended family, that is, traditional values of the Greek extended family system.

Thus, the findings indicated that children, adolescents, and young people in Greece do not reject all the values of the traditional extended family, but only those associated with the traditional hierarchical roles of father and mother, son and daughter. The results also suggested that father's power within the family has lessened and mother's has increased, although the two-spouse family roles seem to remain traditional (Lambiri-Dimaki, 1972; Maratou-Alibrante, 1995). On the other hand, young people in Greece agreed with values of the traditional extended family in regard to the importance of maintaining relations with relatives, of respect for grandparents, of offering help to parents, of obligations towards the family, etc.

The analysis of the transition of the Greek traditional extended family system to the nuclear family system was based on methods of social support theory (Bengtson and Schrader, 1982; Roberts, Richards, and Bengtson, 1991). The findings indicated that the types of residence patterns and interactions with kin in Athens are very similar to that of the traditional towns. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins reside very near the nuclear family, even in Athens, either in the same apartment building, in the neighborhood, or in the

community. They visit each other frequently and telephone each other frequently. In addition, it appeared that they also telephone each other frequently even when the kin live outside Athens (Georgas, 2000; Maratou-Alibrante, 1999).

CONCLUSIONS

Is today's Greek family extended or nuclear? Many family values of the extended family, as discussed above, particularly those related to relationships with kin, are still accepted, even by young people. Thus, one can conclude, at least on the basis of the evidence presented, that aspects of the extended family are still active in Greece and in Athens. It appears that the form of the rural extended family in Greece has been transplanted to Athens. Thus, one can characterize the Athenian family type as an urban extended family.

These conclusions also provide a partial answer to why the percentage of nuclear families in Greece was at the average of EU nations and slightly higher than Germany (Eurostat, 1995). We first have to add that the same panel also found that the number of three-generation households in Greece, over 20 percent, was the highest in the EU. However, just comparing demographic statistics is not enough. One has to look at the interactions between the members of the constellation of nuclear families which constitute the extended family, and not just at demographic statistics regarding the nuclear family itself, in order to understand the degree of maintenance of ties between the nuclear family and other kin.

In addition, historical and ethnographic information (Mousourou, 1985) is also vital in interpreting these results. Common residence of two or three generations is one way of differentiating between the nuclear and the extended family. Nuclear family households have been found (Georgas, Mylonas, Bafiti, et al., 2001) to be more prevalent in affluent countries. For example, an adult son or daughter can afford, because of the high level of GNP in Western Europe, to rent or buy an apartment and live separately from his/her parents. This is more difficult in a less affluent society such as Greece. However, as discussed above, one of the values in modern Greek society, stemming from older traditions of property transmission (Cassia and Bada, 1992), is that the father/potential-grandfather plans for a separate residence for the daughter, even before adolescence, for when she marries. Economics of Greece are an imperative at this point. A typical process of many fathers/potential-grandfathers with a piece of property or an old house in Athens or another city would be to make an arrangement with a building

contractor. The arrangement was that the father would provide the property and the contractor would finance the construction of the apartment building, with the provision that the father would retain two or three apartments, e.g., one for him and his wife, and two for the daughters, and the contractor would sell the other apartments. This explains why such a large proportion of Athenian families live in the same apartment building. Although some family values have changed, they are primarily those related to some traditional roles of father and mother. The father has lost some of the autocratic power over the mother and the children, and as "nature abhors a vacuum" this power has been absorbed by the mother, and to a large degree, by the children. However, this does not mean that the extended family system is decomposed into isolated nuclear units. In fact, family values associated with maintaining close contact with relatives, children respecting grandparents, children's obligations toward parents, are still accepted by young people in Athens and in Greece. Nuclear family members in Greece maintain close contacts with relatives; they visit them regularly, or if living at some distance, telephone them frequently (Georgas, Christakopoulou, Poortinga, Goodwin, Angleitner, and Charalambous, 1997). Indeed, in comparing the frequency of these contacts with other cultures, Greece has one of the highest rates of visits and telephone contacts with relatives. According to the definition of the nuclear family – two generations in a household – each of these families is structurally nuclear, but functionally, their ties are that of an extended family or joint family; that is, the Greek family appears to be phenomenologically nuclear but functionally extended.

When these changes in the Greek family were compared with other countries, demographic statistics indicated that rate of divorce, the number of one-parent families, the number of children born to unmarried women in Greece remain the lowest in the EU. The social support data described above were used (Georgas et al., 2001) in a cross-cultural study with 16 countries: Canada, USA, Mexico, UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Hong Kong, China, and India. In terms of means of geographic proximity, Greece was fourth after Cyprus, India, and China. Cyprus and Greece had the highest means of meetings with siblings, aunts/uncles, and cousins. Greece also had the second highest means, after Greek-speaking Cyprus, of telephone contacts with grandparents, aunts/uncles, and cousins. These are indications that residence patterns, interaction, and communication with kin are relatively close in comparison with other countries that also have an extended family system.

The conclusions about changes in the family in Greece appear to be that although affluence has been increasing in recent years, the traditional extended family has not decomposed into isolated nuclear families, but has changed its configuration. Its morphological equivalent is the extended family system in the urban setting with a continuation of contacts with its network of kin.