‘Family’, State and Social Policy for Children in Greece[1]

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Introduction

This chapter examines certain aspects of welfare support for the family in Greece. The working definitions of the terms family and family policy are presented, followed by a description of the pattern of family arrangements and the attitudes towards families in Greece. The level of family benefits and tax allowances for a number of ‘model’ families is examined. An evaluation of the overall support for the family provided by the Greek welfare state follows, as the Greek child benefit ‘package’ is compared with the ‘packages’ of fourteen countries inclusive of all the European Union countries, Australia, Norway and the USA. The comparison reveals that the Greek welfare state provides very limited support for families with children. These findings highlight the central role that the family plays in providing care for children in Greece. Furthermore, they raise questions about the intra-family relationships that are legitimised and reproduced as a result of Greek family policy, an issue that will be discussed in the second part of the chapter.

The ‘family’ and family policy: working definitions

The term family has been used in sociological, political and social policy contexts in various ways to include both a variety of social arrangements and ideological constructions (Williams, 1989: 117-46). In this study, the concept of family refers both to a social institution and a social process and includes material and ideological aspects. It is defined as a structure in Giddens’ terms within which the different types of social relationships between men, women and children refer not only to `the production and reproduction of [a] social system but also to resources - the means, material and symbolic, whereby actors make things happen’ (Giddens, 1994: 85). As a fundamental working assumption of this study it is accepted that a welfare state via its family policy has a direct effect in maintaining, legitimising and changing the relationships within different family types. Moreover, family policies affect the extent to which certain notions of ‘the family’ are re-enforced and reproduced as ideological constructs and, consequently, certain family types are encouraged or discouraged in a given society.

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For Wilensky et al (1987: 422) the term family policy refers to an `umbrella' of different policies and programmes aiming to provide for a variety of persons, i.e. `the young and old, transition singles (divorced, separated or widowed) and women temporarily separated from the labour market due to maternity'. Kamerman and Kahn (1978) applied a more critical approach to family policy by arguing that the term is a disguise for a series of programmes of population , labour-market and health policies. Other authors placed the term within a gender perspective giving emphasis to the special relationship that women have to the welfare state and its interaction with social class, 'race' and age. (Ginsburg, 1992; Langan and Ostner, 1991; Dominelli, 1991; Gordon, 1990) The very concept of 'the family' is so heavily ideologically laden that one could argue that the term *policy for families* is probably more adequate as it refers to different forms of the family. In this study, the term family policy in practice refers to welfare state policies which implicitly or explicitly support a particular ideological notion of 'the family' and, consequently, the particular role that certain family types, in agreement with this notion, play in a given society.

For Wennemo (1992) family policy consists of three components: family legislation, social services targeted to families and income transfers to families. This study will focus on the last two components, especially on the elements that constitute welfare support of families with children. Policies under investigation include: income transfers to families with children in the form of benefits, tax allowances, subsidies and services in kind related to health, education and housing policies. Their overall income value constitutes, what will hereafter be called, the Greek child benefit 'package'.

Families with children in Greece: a comparative view

It is often argued that Greeks, as well as other southern Europeans, are strongly attached to family. A good starting point to explore this claim is to examine comparatively the composition of families in Greece. The distribution of families with children by number of children in eleven European Union countries is presented in Table 1. It can be observed that, compared with the other countries, Greece has the lowest proportion (10.9 per cent) of lone parent families and the highest percentage of couples with children (89.1 per cent). The percentage of lone mothers with one child is the lowest amongst the rest of the European Union countries.

The first indication that attachment to the nuclear family is strong can be illustrated by the fact that Greece has the highest proportion of married couples with two children compared to the other European Union countries. However, when it comes to couples with three or more children, Greece occupies a position close to the average, as it has a similar percentage of couples with three or more children to Belgium, Italy, Portugal and the UK. When it comes to couples with four or more children, Greece is amongst the countries with the lowest percentages of these types of families. Thus, in Greece the predominant type of family is the typical nuclear family, a couple with two children.

Table 1: Families with children (%) by number of children in eleven* member states of the European Union

Types of Family	BE	DK	FR	DE	GR	IE	IT	LU	NL	PT	UK
ONE-PARENT FAMILIES	21.2	22.0	16.1	18.6	10.9	18.4	13.5	18.6	15.8	13.1	22.3
- Fathers with 1 child	3.1	2.9	1.6	2.2	1.4	1.6	1.4	2.9	2.8	1.1	2.1
with 2 children	1.1	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.6	1.4	0.8	0.4	0.7
with 3 children	0.3	0.1	0.15	0.1	0.1	0.5	0.1	-	-	0.2	0.2
with 4 children or more	0.1	-	0.06	-	0.05	0.3	0.05	-	-	0.1	0.05
- Mothers with 1 child	10.7	12.0	8.6	11.2	5.4	7.6	7.4	10.0	7.2	6.6	11.2
with 2 children	4.4	5.3	3.5	3.6	2.7	4.1	3.0	2.9	3.7	3.1	5.5
with 3 children	1.2	0.9	1.1	0.7	0.6	1.9	0.73	1.4	0.9	1.0	1.8
with 4 children or more	0.4	0.1	0.5	0.2	0.15	1.6	0.22	-	0.3	0.6	0.7
COUPLES with CHILDREN	78.8	78.0	83.8	81.4	89.1	81.6	86.5	81.4	84.2	86.9	77.7
- Couples with 1 child	33.8	32.3	33.3	38.1	33.6	19.3	35.7	35.7	29.0	38.1	30.2
with 2 children	30.2	35.2	32.0	32.7	42.3	24.8	37.4	32.8	38.5	33.8	32.9
with 3 children	10.6	8.7	13.1	8.2	10.7	19.0	10.9	10.0	12.7	9.6	10.9
with 4 children or more	4.2	1.8	5.4	2.4	2.7	18.5	2.5	2.9	4.0	5.4	3.8
TOTAL (in thousands)	1,812	768	9,898	13,635	1,766	613	12,095	70	2,450	1,936	9,709

(Columns: *Countries*)

Note: * Data according to the categories used in the 1990/1991 censuses. Data for Spain are not available.
Source: Calculated from Eurostat (1994a: 8)

The claim that in Greece attachment to the nuclear family is strong can be supported by the examination of selected demographic indicators (Table 2). Greece has the second lowest divorce rate in Europe, although the legal and religious regulations for getting a divorce are not as stringent as in countries with a Roman Catholic tradition.[3] In addition, the percentage of births outside marriage is the lowest in Europe (2.7 per cent). Attempts to explain the latter phenomenon often refer to the 'stigmatisation' of lone parenthood and the fact that access to abortion in Greece is relatively unrestricted. However, economic factors have also to be taken into account. It will become apparent from this analysis that welfare support for lone parents in Greece is very limited. This lack of support reflects and reproduces certain attitudes and social practices with regard to the institution of marriage and the nuclear family. An examination of the social values and attitudes held by Greek men and women sheds light on the issue.

[3] The vast majority of population in Greece follows the Orthodox Christian denomination. It is generally accepted that on issues such as divorce or abortion the Orthodox church has not exerted the same moral pressure as the Catholic church has done so. Therefore, to perceive Greece as a country where Catholicism is strong is incorrect (see for instance Leibfried, 1993:141).

Table 2. Selected Demographic Indicators (EUR12)

Countries	*Divorces per 1000 population*	*Out of wedlock births as a % of 1000 live births*	*Average number of children per woman*	
	1993	1993	1977	1993
Belgium	2.1	11.3	1.71	1.61
Denmark	2.4	46.4	1.66	1.75
France	1.9	33.2	1.86	1.65
Germany	1.7	14.6	1.40	1.30
Greece	0.7	2.7	2.27	1.38
Ireland	-	18.0	3.27	2.03
Italy	0.4	7.2	1.98	1.21
Luxembourg	1.8	12.9	1.45	1.70
Netherlands	2.0	13.1	1.58	1.57
Portugal	1.2	17.0	2.45	1.53
Spain	0.7	10.0	2.65	1.24
UK	3.0	30.8	1.69	1.82

Sources: Eurostat (1994b: 4; 1992: 23)

Family as a social value and attitudes towards family policies in Greece

In the Eurobarometer report on the Europeans and the family (CEC, 1993a), Greeks appear as the most strongly attached to and supportive of the institution of 'the family'. In response to questions concerning the order of values, an overwhelming 99.4 per cent of the Greek respondents placed the family as their top priority on the value scale, the highest figure in Europe (EU average: 95.7 per cent). Indeed, similar views have been observed in a recent public opinion survey[4] where 69.2 per cent of male and 75.5 per cent of female interviewees agreed respectively with the statement that 'the family is the basis for a healthy society'. In addition, 46.3 per cent of men and 55.8 per cent of women strongly agreed with the statement that 'life without family is meaningless'.

However, despite the strong ideological attachment to the institution of the family, a series of ideological changes have taken place in respect of social roles within families. They relate to a series of structural changes, often defined as 'modernisation', which has occurred in Greece since the early sixties. Modernisation refers to: the shift from an economy based on agriculture to an economy based on services and (to a lesser extent) industry; the expansion of Greek statism and the intensification of 'intra-middle-class conflicts for access to the state machinery' (Petmesidou, 1991: 40); the phenomena of rapid urbanisation and migration; the cultural and economic impact of tourism; the increase in accessibility to higher education; the increase in women's labour force participation (small though it was); and last, but by no means least, changes in family legislation which preceded entry into the European Community.

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[4] The survey was conducted by MRB HELLAS and reported in *Eleftherotypia* (Greek daily), 11 July 1994.

Directly or indirectly these changes have influenced the social structure of families in Greece, especially gender roles within the household. Lambiri-Dimaki (1983) observed that a shift from traditional to more egalitarian gender roles has taken place while Kouvertaris and Dobratz have noticed a gradual detachment from the traditional roles within families 'as a less permissive society [was giving] way to a more permissive one' (1987: 155). Similarly, in a study by Georgas on the change of family values in Greece it has been suggested that contemporary attitudes towards family are characterised by the gradual 'rejection of the collectivist values and the gradual adoption of individualist values' (1989: 90). This trend is accompanied by a transition from an extended family system to a nuclear family system, a transition which is currently more observable in the non-urban areas. In the urban areas, such transition has been, to a large extent, completed (Doumanis, 1983).

The change in attitudes reflects and, at the same time, reinforces the shift towards smaller families, as is shown by the data in Table 2. The total fertility rate has fallen, in a period of sixteen years from 2.27 to 1.38, one of the lowest in Europe, with further decreasing trends.[5] Attempting to explore the causes behind this spectacular falling, Dretakis (1994) investigated the changes in the levels of income of couples in the period between 1981-1991. He found that, during this period, when couples per capita income (without children) lost 16.4 per cent of its purchasing power, couples increasingly tended to delay having children. It was observed that during the same period when the average income of couples with one child lost 7 per cent of its purchasing power, couples stopped having children after the first child or postponed having further children . Dretakis concluded that there is an urgent need to take serious measures to alleviate economic inequalities amongst Greek families and most importantly to increase welfare support of children, for example the level of child allowance. Indeed there is increasing public dissatisfaction with the results of Greek family policy. In the Eurobarometer survey (CEC, 1993: 119), 36.9 per cent of Greek respondents mentioned the level of child allowance as one of the most important issues on which the government should act to make life easier for families. As an indicator of dissatisfaction with the welfare state support for children this is the highest in the European Union and far beyond the EU average level of dissatisfaction (22.5 per cent).

Simulation of the effects of policies for families with children in Greece: A comparative evaluation

In order to explore in more detail the level of welfare support for families with children in Greece it was considered appropriate to examine the Greek child benefit package in comparative perspective. Despite the fact that attempts to make comparisons between family policies have been made in the past (Hantrais, 1993, 1994; Wennemo, 1992; GEFAM, 1992; Dummon et al, 1991; Rainwater et al, 1986; Kamerman and Kahn, 1978, 1981, 1983; Bradshaw and Piachaud, 1980) this type of research is still relatively underdeveloped. To a large degree, this underdevelopment can be explained by the problems of 'methods and objectives' which any attempt to compare family

[5] Interestingly, a similar dramatic drop in fertility rates has occurred in all the 'peripheral' EU countries, that is Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Ireland.

policies inevitably encounters.[6] The method and data employed in this study, which derive from of a comparative research project by Bradshaw et al (1993)[7], aims to overcome these problems. The project is a comparative analysis of the simulated impact that the child benefit package has on the disposable income of ten model families (horizontally) and eight income categories (vertically) in fifteen countries, inclusive of all the European Union countries, Australia, Norway and the USA.[8] Income data used in this study refers to the situation in May 1992.

There are at least three advantages in adopting a simulation approach. Firstly, it is not that costly because it does not incur the expense of a survey. Secondly, problems related to the accuracy of statistical data on social expenditure are avoided because what is examined is the simulated effect of a policy on families' incomes and not the overall expenditure on family policy. Thirdly, the concept of the package overcomes the problems of explicit-implicit family policies because it includes different benefits, tax allowances and even some quantified benefits in kind. A disadvantage of the method is that what is represented is a simulation and not what happens in reality. As Bradshaw et al (1993: 23) have remarked 'it produces a description of the way the system should work, rather than how it necessarily does work'. In other words, problems related to the implementation of family policies are not addressed. However, this method proves to be very useful in exploring two of the most important questions in the sociology of welfare policy: namely the ideological assumptions behind a family policy and, consequently, the kinds of social relationships which are implicitly or explicitly reproduced by such a policy.

The level of family benefits

A good starting point in exploring the inherent characteristics of the Greek child benefit package is to focus on the level of family benefits and the types of families that are supported by the system.[9] When examining family benefits, a distinction has to be made between non-income related family benefits and income-related family benefits. Both systems of benefits operate in Greece although the non-income related family benefits are allocated to specific types of families. They are given to families with three or more children in an attempt to increase the (low) birth rate. In addition, other types of non-income related benefits provide some extra help to lone parent families and to families with children with learning disabilities. In terms of the real value of benefits Greece performs

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[6] For a detailed presentation of the methodological problems of comparative family policy see Barbier (1990) and Hantrais (1994). For a more general account of the research issues related to the comparison of family policies see Ginsburg (1992).

[7] Bradshaw J., Ditch J., Holmes H., Whiteford P. (1993), *Support for Children: a comparison of arrangements in fifteen countries*, London: HMSO. The research project was undertaken by the Department of Social Policy and Social Work and the Social Policy Research Unit (SPRU) of the University of York. It was funded by the Department of Social Security (UK). Countries studied include all the EU country-members plus Norway, Australia and the USA. The author was the national respondent for Greece.

[8] The ten model families of the study include single people and couples without children, lone parents with one, two, three and four children and couples with one, two, three, and four children. The eight income categories of the study include three categories for one earner families, three categories for two earner families, one category where one parent is on average male earnings and the other is unemployed and one category where both parents are unemployed. For a full account of the methodology and a detailed description of family types, earning categories and assumptions see Bradshaw et al (1993: 23-28).

[9] Readers who are interested in a recent description of the Greek child care policy system can refer to Papadopoulos (1993).

poorly compared to other European Union countries operating similar schemes (Bradshaw et al, 1993: 34-36). In the case of a couple with four children Greece provides the second lowest non-income related family benefit among the fifteen countries. With regard to lone parent families with one, two and three children Greece occupies the bottom position. In the case of a lone parent family with four children Greece performs slightly better, ranking higher than Ireland and Portugal.

When it comes to income-related family benefits the Greek system of family benefits works clearly in favour of two parent families. For instance, while the allowance for lone parent families is decreasing or remains low as earnings level increases, the opposite happens for couples with children. This is due to the fact that, although child allowances are fixed,[10] spouse allowances are proportional to salary. Hence, the system not only favours couples but favours the couples with earners on high salaries. This is in sharp contrast with arrangements in all the other countries, where, as the earnings level increases, the income-related family allowance for couples with children ceases, or decreases.[11] In Greece, in the case of two parent families, income-related family benefits rise steadily as earnings increase.

A snapshot of the overall level of family benefits for different types of families in one income category is presented in Figure 1. The figure shows a comparison of the level of both non-income and income-related benefits for lone parent and two parent families with one or two children, with one earner in the household on 0.5 average male earnings. It is adjusted by Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) to a common currency (pound sterling).[12] Focusing on the lower income category and on the most common types of families the figure illustrates how the family benefits system should perform in relation to families close to each country's relative poverty line. In Greece, similar to Germany, Italy and the USA, lone parent families receive lower amounts of benefits than two parent families. As far as the overall level of family benefits received is concerned, Greece ranks second lowest after Spain in the case of a lone parent family with one child, while for a couple with one child it ranks last. Greece's performance slightly improves in the case of a couple with two children, ranking above Portugal and Spain. However, in the case of a lone parent family with two children Greece occupies the bottom position.

[Figure 1 - not available in this online version]

[10] Fixed rates for child benefits apply in the wider private sector. In the public sector and in some parts of the private sector (e.g. banks), income-related child allowances are proportional to the salary and are not fixed, a system again favouring those with high salaries.

[11] In France, for instance, the income-related family allowance increases only for lone parent families.

[12] Purchasing power parities (PPPs) are used for expressing the actual value of a currency in terms of purchasing power. A PPP is an estimate of how much a basket of goods and services costs in a country. Normally, it is converted into a common monetary denominator which in this study is one pound sterling. As Bradshaw et al (1993, 25) point out 'purchasing power parities are more satisfactory than exchange rates in that they take account of differences in the price of a common basket of goods and services in each country'.

A comparison of the benefits system of Greece with those of other countries revealed that the system of family benefits works clearly in favour of two parent families, especially those with higher incomes. However, unless the tax and social security contributions are included the picture is not completely accurate. For instance, it will be shown that although in the system of family benefits lone parent families are at a disadvantage compared to couples, when income tax and social security contributions are included this results in a slight improvement in the financial gains of lone parent families.

The effect of income tax and social security contributions

Comparisons of the systems of tax and social security contributions can be made in two ways, vertically and horizontally. Both ways examine the redistributive capacity of the systems. A comparative examination of how *vertically* progressive a system is reveals the extent to which redistribution from higher incomes to lower incomes occurs. A comparison of how *horizontally* progressive the system is reveals the extent to which a redistribution of income according to the number of children in the family is achieved.

Both vertically and horizontally, the Greek system of tax and social security has been found to be one of the least progressive (Bradshaw et al, 1993: 39-44). There is minimal vertical redistribution because of the way the tax system operates: as income increases, there is little variation in tax rates, while contributions remain the same. It has been found that, horizontally, the Greek system's redistributive efforts towards larger families are minimal.

In Table 3 estimates of the relative value of tax concessions *and* family allowances by family type, (with one earner in the household on average male earnings) are presented for selected countries. The estimates are expressed as a proportion of the average gross male earnings and represent the sum of the value of tax concessions and the value of family allowances. Tax concessions for lone parent families are calculated as follows: 'the difference between the income tax paid by lone parents with one or more children and the income tax paid by a single person in the same gross earnings'. For couples, tax concessions are calculated as 'the difference between the income tax liabilities of a couple without children and the corresponding liabilities of couples with children' (Bradshaw, 1993:43). The value of family allowances is calculated as a proportion of average male earnings.

Two observations can be made at this point. Firstly, it can be clearly observed that, in comparison to other systems, the Greek system of tax concessions and family allowances is horizontally one of the least progressive. Secondly, in Greece the overall value of tax concessions and family allowances is higher for lone parents rather than couples although comparatively it is still quite low. This is due to spouse allowance being considered as an integral part of income and, therefore taxable. Within the European Union, Greece and the Netherlands are the only countries in which the system results in lone parents being taxed less than couples who have the same number of children.

Table 3. Value of tax concessions and family allowances by family type as a % of average male earnings in selected countries

Tax concessions and Family allowances	*Lone parent with (number of children)*					*Couple with (number of children)*			
	1	2	3	4	Couple*	1	2	3	4
Denmark	5.7	10	14.3	18.6	8.0	2.5	5.0	7.5	10.0
France	10.2	23.8	45.3	58.6	5.4	2.5	9.2	26.3	35.1
Germany	7.2	11.2	18.5	27.0	7.3	3.4	6.8	14.8	21.6
Netherlands	6.5	11.0	15.5	21.1	2.7	3.2	7.7	12.2	17.8
UK	8.6	11.4	14.2	17.0	3.0	3.5	6.3	9.1	11.9
Greece	1.1	2.9	5.6	7.7	0.2	0.4	1.3	3.5	4.6

Note: * Signifies a couple with no children
Source: Bradshaw et al (1993, Tables 5.6). Data for Greece are author's calculations

An evaluation of the Greek child care package inclusive of all components

Next, the Greek child care package (inclusive of all its components) is placed in a comparative perspective, in order to assess its overall value. Firstly, the net disposable incomes of families with children is calculated by taking into account the following: earnings, family benefits (both non-income and income-related), tax allowances, social security contributions, housing, health and education costs and subsidies. However, comparing only the net disposable incomes of families with children has certain limitations. For example, it may be the case that income taxes in a particular country are low for all families, regardless of having children or not. The aim therefore is to calculate the difference in the net disposable incomes between childless families and families with children at the same earnings level. This additional income includes all the benefits, allowances and subsidies given to families with children which a childless couple will not receive. It provides a clear indication of the effort that a welfare state makes in order to support families to cover the costs of children.

The method used in this study is a comparison of the *horizontal redistributive effort* of the different countries. A country's horizontal redistributive effort is an estimate of the additional net disposable income which a family with children enjoys compared to a childless couple when both are at the same earnings level. It is calculated as a percentage of the net disposable income of a childless couple at the same earnings level.

Table 4 presents the efforts of fifteen countries for a couple with two children at three earnings levels. It has been found that housing costs and subsidies are important factors in determining the net disposable income of a family (Bradshaw et al, 1993: 45). Therefore two comparisons were applied for every earnings level: before and after housing costs.

It is notable that, in most cases, as earnings increase the horizontal redistributive effort decreases. The majority of countries make their greatest horizontal redistributive effort towards families with children at the lowest earnings level. However, when it comes to the Greek case, the opposite is true. Before housing costs are included, a couple with two children with one earner on half the average male earnings is expected to have 1 per cent additional disposable income over a childless couple at the same earnings level. The Greek system makes at this earnings level its least redistributive effort. This is contrary to all other systems which, as we can observe, make at this earnings level their greatest effort. If housing costs are included, the position of lower income families in Greece worsens dramatically. A couple with two children with one earner on half the average male earnings is expected to have 17 percent less net disposable income compared to a childless couple at the same earnings level.

Table 4. Additional net disposable income of a couple with two children measured as a % of the net disposable income of a childless couple before and after housing costs at various earnings levels, in fifteen countries

Countries	*One earner on half the average male earnings*		*One earner on average male earnings*		*Two earners, one in average male earnings and one on 0.66 average female earnings*	
	Before Housing Costs	*After Housing Costs*	*Before Housing Costs*	*After Housing Costs*	*Before Housing Costs*	*After Housing Costs*
Belgium	27	34	18	20	12	13
Denmark	14	35	8	11	6	-1
France	20	33	14	18	10	10
Germany	45	88	10	4	7	3
Greece	1	-17	2	-9	1	-6
Ireland	14	14	2	-2	1	-2
Italy	13	13	5	4	1	0
Luxembourg	17	17	14	13	11	11
Netherlands	14	17	9	8	5	5
Portugal	11	1	8	3	6	2
Spain	4	5	1	1	1	0
UK	34	58	8	8	6	6
Australia	31	40	5	7	2	3
Norway	29	74	16	10	11	6
USA	38	29	0	-25	0	-15

Source: Bradshaw et al (1993: Tables 9.2, 9.3). Data for Greece are author's calculations.

Furthermore, a couple with one earner on average male earnings is expected to have 2 per cent additional net disposable income over a couple without children at the same earnings level, while a couple of two earners will enjoy only 1 per cent additional income. If housing costs are included, the Greek system makes in both cases negative horizontal redistributive effort, second only to the USA.

To summarise the findings at this stage: compared to other European and Western countries Greece ranks very low in terms of its welfare state support for children. The Greek child care package is, comparatively, one of the least generous when it comes to making a redistributive effort in supporting families with children. It is also one of the least vertically progressive when it comes to tax arrangements. Given that the inequality in income distribution in Greece was found to be the highest in Europe,[13] it is understandable why several Greek authors talk about the non-existence of a Greek Welfare State. Petmesidou (1991:39), for instance, maintained that 'it is questionable whether any consistent redistributive social policies have ever existed at all', arguing that 'a welfare state has scarcely been formed in Greece' (p.36), while Fotopoulos (1994:9) referred to the 'non existent Greek welfare state'.

State, 'family' and policies for children in Greece: a discussion of social effects

From the analysis undertaken it became apparent that despite the strong attachment of Greeks to 'the family', the welfare state support for children in Greece is almost non-existent. This inconsistency is illustrative of the socio-economic role that the family performs in Greece in providing welfare for its members. This role is based upon a web of relationships, a special mix of solidarity and dependency, which the family policy of the Greek welfare state - via its *inaction* - implicitly nurtures and, thus, reproduces. Commenting on family policy as inaction Barbier argued that

> the absence of a generalised system of family benefits may have a completely different significance in a modern welfare state such as the United States, or in a state in which private solidarity and informal networks are important [...] All national contexts do not call for the same public intervention. A truly complete comparison of policies cannot afford to overlook this primary consideration as regards scope: the role of exchanges and informal networks in traditional family functions (child-rearing, bringing up children, taking care of elderly persons in particular, informal transfers of many types, inheritance and property practices and so on) [...] An international comparison of family policies must take into account the social and cultural situations which themselves are at the origin of these policies but which are also a product of them.
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> (Barbier, 1990: 331-334)

[13] The Gini coefficient is used as a measurement of the distribution of household and individual income in a society. Lane and Ersson (1987:83) calculated the Gini coefficients of fourteen European countries. Greece was found to have the highest coefficient among the fourteen countries (0.460).

In Greece, the absence of welfare state support for the family results in 'the family' itself undertaking a very important role in ideological, material and even political terms. According to a study of contemporary Greek society by Tsoukalas (1987: 268), the Greek family as a social institution is almost 'possessed' by the idea of social mobility. As an ideological driving force, the belief that the family is the main vehicle for social mobility is embodied in the social practices of almost all social classes through a system of attitudes, visions and expectations.

An expression of this belief can be observed in the attitudes and practices related to the education of children. Greek society is characterised by a 'generalised practice of familial educational investment' (Tsoukalas, 1987: 270). According to the same author 'Greek families do not only 'hope' for the upward mobility of their children but believe in it and, thus, are doing everything possible in order to 'program' it' (p.268). According to a recent study (Katsikas et al, 1995) the total amount that Greek families spent on their children's education is almost 1 billion Drachmae (2.5 million pounds) per day. This is a massive expenditure given the number of Greek children in education and in numerous cases implies the sacrifice of a better standard of living.[14] As an intergenerational family investment, it has both symbolic and material aspects. At the symbolic level there is the expectation of an enhancement of family image and status, as children 'continue forward' and become 'better' than their parents. At the material level, higher levels of education result in well paid employment (although this pattern has changed in recent years) which accordingly is translated into additional family income and property. The latter advancements do not necessarily benefit a paterfamilias, but all the members of a family and especially children since in the future they will inherit family property.

Expectations of mobility crystallise in social practices which produce a special kind of solidarity within the family collective. One could argue that the Greek family functions internally as a co-operative while competing with other families in a society dominated by the idea of social mobility. 'Familial solidarity' remains primarily in the private sphere of the nuclear family, as a kind of intergenerational responsibility towards the family. Although several Greek scholars point to this type of family ideology as one of the main reasons why the Greek welfare state is so underdeveloped (Maloutas, 1988), it seems unclear whether family ideology is the cause or the effect of this underdevelopment. What is clear, however, is that since solidarity rarely expresses itself in the public sphere, the development of notions of social responsibility or social solidarity encounter enormous obstacles. Thus, the creation of a sustainable ideological base for expanding the residual welfare state in Greece is weak. In this context, it can be argued that the ideological assumption which characterises welfare arrangements in Greece is that 'the family' operates as the primary provider of welfare support. I define these arrangements as 'Greek familism'.

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[14] In the Eurobarometer survey (CEC, 1993: Table 6.5) the cost of educating children was placed at the top three major issues of concern by Greek respondents (39.2 per cent against an EU average of 33.6 per cent).

The characteristics of Greek familism in terms of gender and youth

Familial solidarity is an integral part of the Greek familism. However, it is by no means the only type of relationship that is reproduced by the *inaction* of Greek family policy. If Greek familism is analysed in terms of gender and youth a pattern of dependency and power relationships among the members of Greek families emerges.

Attempting a 'gendered typology' of welfare regimes, Lewis (1992) categorised western European countries into strong male-breadwinner countries, modified male-breadwinner countries and weak male-breadwinner countries. Greece fits all the criteria for the first type. Thus, according to Lewis "strong male-breadwinner states have tended to draw a firm dividing line between public and private responsibility. If women enter the public sphere as workers, they may do so on terms very similar to men. It is assumed that the family (that is women) will provide child care and minimal provision is made for maternity leaves, pay and the right to reinstatement" (1992: 164).

This view can be supported by examining the Greek female activity rate.[15] Greece still has one of the lowest female activity rates in Europe, 34 per cent compared with 40.6 per cent which is the average for the European Union (Eurostat, 1992: 78). In addition, Greece pays the lowest maternity benefits compared with the other EU countries (Eurostat, 1993:6). Social spending on maternity benefits in Greece consists of only 0.05 per cent of Gross Domestic Product, which is again the lowest in the EU, a figure far behind that of Denmark (0.52 per cent), the highest spender on maternity benefits in the EU. Indeed, the Greek family is still patriarchal in its structure and despite any legislative rhetoric the dependency of women upon men continues. The inaction of Greek family policy results in reinforcing the role of women as the sole carers of children by nurturing, reproducing and legitimising their dependency on men, a reality observed by several Greek researchers (Stassinopoulou, 1993; Labropoulou, 1990; Maloutas, 1988). Thus, a shift from private to public patriarchy (Walby, 1990: Ch.8) has not yet occurred in Greece. Similar to Ireland (Mahon, 1994), the residual family policy of the Greek welfare state reproduces the structure of private patriarchy.

However, this is not the only type of dependency that is reproduced. Another type, that Greek social scientists have only recently begun to research (Makrinioti, 1993), concerns the dependency of children on families and especially young people upon parents. Children and young people are still conceptualised within the legislative and policy context as totally dependent on family and a notion of 'child as a partner' or participants in decisions (Qvortrup, 1990: 35) is totally absent. Since welfare support is left to families the dependency of young people on parents is reinforced and thus reproduced and legitimised. In a comparative study of the difficulties that young Europeans encounter during their transition to adulthood it was found that in Greece, 'leaving home and living independently of one's parents is almost always associated with marriage [...], or with becoming a full time-student' (Burton et al, 1989: 63). Since it is almost impossible for a young person to

[15] Female activity rate is calculated as the proportion of women aged 20-59 employed and registered unemployed to the total number of women of this age .

survive independently outside the family context, due to high housing costs, high youth unemployment, lack of income support and with no access to the limited welfare state services, a large number of young people, especially women,[16] often choose to marry in order to 'escape' from the family environment, not least because creating a new family is in most cases 'rewarded' with gifts of very significant value, such as houses,[17] cars or cash. And, thus, a new circle starts again.

Conclusion

To summarise, as the system of family policy operates in Greece, family is compelled to play an important socio-economic role in providing welfare for its members and, in particular, supporting children. This in turn results in the reproduction of a web of social relationships within families, characterised by a special mix of solidarity, dependency and power. If independence and equality are selected as the criteria to evaluate family arrangements it can be argued that in Greece women and children are particularly badly off. In this context, given the way in which the Greek system of welfare support to families operates, there is a need to explore new modes of structuring family policy in which issues of interdependence, equality and solidarity will be central.

[16] In Greece, the average age of women at time of first marriage is the lowest in the EU, 23.8 compared to an EU average of 25.1 years (Eurostat, 1993:4).

[17] According to Katrivessis (1993: 613), 41.7 per cent of houses transferred from parents to children consists of houses bought/built for children when they get married.

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