MARRIAGE OR COHABITATION? A SURVEY OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDES IN GREECE

Kostas Rontos – Myrsine Roumeliotou – Luca Salvati – Maria-Eleni Syrmali

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, family patterns have been (more or less rapidly) transformed in all Western societies. This is also the case for Greece, whose society was frequently considered one of the most traditional among European countries, since family stereotypes, secular social norms and – in some ways – religion occupied (and still do) a prominent position. Based on a survey of students' attitudes towards marriage (or cohabitation), an exploratory data analysis allows the identification of specific factors shaping beliefs and attitudes toward marriage in Greek society. In particular, it is demonstrated that female students are overcoming traditional boundaries and prefer more modern forms of companionship. The results indicate that female students tend to postpone their decision to marry, as traditional family stereotypes seem to have lost their influence on the life course decisions taken by young women. Additionally, a large proportion of female students use cohabitation as a precursor to marriage. Respondents are found to be more emancipated and independent than in years gone by, while social status and financial independence are sought through education rather than marriage. Another important factor is the lack of state policies supporting families and the lack of incentives to have children.

Keywords: marriage, cohabitation, attitudes, university students, Greece

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INTRODUCTION

Although among the most traditional cultures in Europe, Mediterranean societies have undergone important modifications in terms of their marriage patterns, including postponement of marriage and alternative (mainly informal) forms of companionship. The historical change in family forms has been less thoroughly explored in Southern Europe than in the rest of the continent. This study contributes to this worthwhile issue by investigating attitudes to marriage and cohabitation using a sample of female students in Greece, with the aim of revealing the motivations underlying a possible shift towards less traditional patterns of family formation – mainly outside marriage.

Young people especially – and particularly college and university students – explore new trends and alternative ways of companionship, such as cohabitation, in order to discover whether they can deal with conflict with, as well as commitment to, another person (Glick and Spanier, 1980). Nevertheless, cohabitation does not constitute a sufficient preparation for marriage (Olson, 1972; De Moor and Van Zanden, 2010; Beaujouan and Ni Bhrolchain, 2011; Carmichael et al., 2016). Rather, it is an alternative to marriage, as premarital sexual activity has led to an increase in the proportion of couples who live together and share a home out of wedlock. Only 5% of women in Great Britain cohabited in the mid-1960s, whereas the figure was 70% in the 1990s (Haskey, 1992). Between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, cohabitation rates increased even more, by 40% throughout the world (Fincham and Beach, 2010).

The benefits of cohabitation have to do with the fact that one can have the advantages of intimacy, without the drawbacks and constraints of commitment (Pagnini and Rindfuss, 1993). In research conducted by Scott et al. (1993) on attitudes to marriage or cohabitation, younger age groups were more likely to be in favor of cohabitation. More specifically, adolescents intended cohabitation as part of their future life trajectories (Martin et al., 2003); but they rarely envisaged cohabitation as a replacement for marriage – instead it was a step on the road towards marriage (Manning et al., 2007). Moreover, cohabitation is not an alternative to marriage, but merely a precursor to it, since most couples marry after cohabiting (Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel, 1990; Kiernan, 2001; Kalmijn, 2007). However, it has been demonstrated that cohabitees hold different values from those who marry directly, and have a different understanding of commitment and permanence (Reynolds and Mansfield, 1999). Perelli-Harris et al. (2014) argued that the increase in cohabitation has not devalued the concept of marriage, but has become a way to preserve marriage as an ideal for

long-term commitment. Furthermore, in some countries (especially advanced economies), partnership can be made official, without the need for marriage. This may take the form of a civil union or a registered partnership. Civil unions allow two people who live together as partners to register their relationship with the relevant public authority in their country of residence.

Theoretical background

Shifting trends in marriage and its intimate nature have stimulated an in-depth investigation of the changes over time in attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation. It is often perceived that marriage is not an outdated institution, and is still the norm. A survey carried out in European countries revealed that, for the majority of respondents, marriage indicated a commitment to be faithful to one's partner, as well as an intention to have children, to safeguard their legal rights, and to form a nuclear family (European Values Study, 2008). In the United States, Campbell and Wright (2010) stated that perceptions of marriage have remained rather stable over time, with people getting married because they believe in monogamy and fidelity; the main purpose of marriage is love and satisfaction.

Significant differences have been observed in the areas of permissiveness and family formation values between young people who have relatively short-term marital intentions (i.e., those who desire marriage in their early 20s) and those who have longer-term intentions (i.e., those who desire marriage in their mid-20s or later) (Carroll et al., 2007). Therefore, one of the aspects of marriage that have changed most in recent times has been the age at first marriage (Mencarini and Tanturri, 2004; Gjonca et al., 2008; Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008). Earlier studies revealed that people are tending to put off marriage to a later age, resulting in a systematically higher age at first marriage than among older cohorts. In 2010, the mean age at first marriage was over 27 and 29 years, respectively, in Asia and Africa. The mean age at first marriage among women increased by 1.0–4.5 years between 1990 and 2000 in European and North American countries (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2003). In advanced economies, mean age at first marriage was 25 years in 2005, while in some European countries – such as Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and Switzerland – it was over 30 years, according to Eurostat data.

Traditional attitudes to marriage are positively related to religiosity and negatively related to good practical skills in childhood and to smoking (or

drinking) in adulthood (Flouri and Buchanan, 2001). At the same time, attitudes towards marriage are greatly influenced by parental and family patterns, determining the success (or failure) of marriage (Trotter, 2010). Earlier research also explored the association between age at first marriage and socioeconomic status, gender, and place of residence (van Poppel and Nelissen, 1999). More recent studies have shown that financial security, which was one main reason for getting married in the past, no longer figures among the priorities of women (e.g., Gavalas et al., 2014).

Scholars have tried to explore gender differences in marital attitudes and the experience of marriage. Women's entry into the labor force and their tendency to go on to higher education have also influenced gender norms of marriage, and have changed attitudes towards marriage and the roles within it. Education is another factor associated with marriage trends. Studies carried out in European countries have shown that education results in higher age at first marriage and first child birth (Blossfeld, 1995; Liefbroer and Corijn, 1999). In this regard, it has been demonstrated that women find it more difficult to reconcile their roles as spouse, mother, and employee, which often leads to postponed childbearing, falling marriage rates, and a rise in divorce rates (Chafetz, 1992). Moreover, Abowitz et al. (2009) investigated differences between male and female students in the way they view relationships, and found that males are more likely to believe in the benefits of cohabitation for a better marriage than are females.

As a consequence of these dynamics, marriage – which has traditionally been regarded as an important pathway into adult life – has lost much of its centrality and essence in structuring the lives of young adults, and has gradually been replaced by cohabitation as the first stage in family formation (Bumpass and Lu, 2000; Smock and Manning, 2004). Whereas in most societies, marrying without prior cohabitation is not the norm (Kiernan, 2001), the notion of cohabitation has spread particularly slowly in the Mediterranean countries. Based on the Fertility and Family Surveys, only 7% of Italian females born in the years 1960–1964 chose cohabitation as a prelude to marriage. The figure for Spain was 11%. A steady trend towards marriage postponement has been in evidence since the early 1980s, and the current female age at first marriage is well above the EU-28 average in Italy (29.5%), Spain (29.4%), and Greece (29.9%). Nevertheless, the decline in marriage rates has not been counterbalanced by a concurrent rise in cohabitation rates (Díez Medrano et al., 2014). By contrast with Northern Europe, the percentage of women aged 25–29 who have not yet entered their first family union reaches 63% in Spain and 59% in Italy (Domínguez et al., 2007).

Relevance and goals of this study

Greece is considered one of the most traditional cultures in Europe as far as marriage and family formation are concerned. However, research into marriage patterns in Greece shows a distinct falling trend in marriage rates. More specifically, the average number of weddings during 1961–1970 was 73,500 per year, decreasing progressively to 70,540 in 1971–1980, 62,260 in 1981–1990, and 56,876 in 1991–2000. The number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants fell from 9.7 in the aftermath of World War II to about 5.5 in the most recent decades (National Statistical Service of Greece, 2005). The proportion of the population aged 20 and over who had ever been married in Greece was estimated at 62.4% in 2011. Mean age at first marriage for women increased by 1.9 years between 1990 and 2000, when it was nearly 27 (United Nations, 2000); the rate was over 30 in 2016 (National Statistical Service of Greece, 2005). For males, the figures were 29, 31, and 33 years in 1990, 2000, and 2016, respectively.

The marriage rate per 1,000 residents was 7% in 1960, declining slightly to 6.5% in 1980. By 2016, the figure had fallen to 4.6%. As for the distribution of people getting married by previous marital status, single persons who had never previously been married were estimated at 95.4% of the adult population in 1960, declining to 93.9% in 1980, and to 87.8% in 2016. The percentage of previously divorced people was 2.4% in 1960, 4.3% in 1980, and 11.5% in 2016. The respective statistics for those widowed were 2.2% in 1960, 1.8% in 1980, and 0.7% in 2016.

According to the OECD family database, in 2011 the proportion of the adult population (aged 20 and over) cohabiting was 1.7%, reaching 3.9% for young adults (20–34). Based on the level of educational attainment in Greece, cohabiting people with low education make up only 0.93% of the total population, while people with medium and high levels of education who were cohabiting were estimated at 2.12% and 2.63%, respectively. Cohabiting households without and with children were estimated at 2.42% and 0.41%, respectively.

However, the World Values Survey carried out in 1999 revealed a highly positive attitude towards marriage among respondents in Greece (Gavalas et al., 2014). In particular, 84.3% of respondents disagreed with the statement that marriage is an outdated institution. Age did not seem to affect attitudes towards marriage, with only slight differences observed for the age group 30–49, who were more likely than other age groups to agree with the statement (18.9% vs 15.7%). One factor that plays a role in attitudes towards marriage is level of education (Rontos, 2009). More specifically, 15% of respondents with higher education responded that marriage is an outdated institution; the corresponding percentage was 9% for

Greeks with the lowest educational level (European Values Study, 2008). A specific survey carried out in Greece (Rontos, 2007) also revealed a high proportion of young educated females in favor of marriage (81.8%).

Based on these premises, this study explores the attitudes of a sample of female students towards marriage and cohabitation in Greece. A specific investigation of attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation is particularly appropriate in order to reveal the possible shift towards less traditional attitudes and patterns of family formation (Abowitz et al., 2009). Selection of this particular student population with the aim of exploring changing trends towards marriage was a common practice in earlier studies addressing life course decisions (Johnson and Jaccard, 1981); expectations of future career, marital, and parental identity (Kerpelman and Schvaneveldt, 1999); and perceptions of future marital patterns of work-family integration (Forste, 2001). Men's attitudes were not included in this study, since it has been demonstrated that currently women's marital attitudes change with the evolution of the labor market and social conditions (Rontos, 2009). The analysis seeks to identify factors that shape attitudes towards marriage (or cohabitation), and to explore beliefs and values towards marriage, as well as feelings and dispositions that influence short-term and longer-term marital intentions.

METHODOLOGY

Definition of attitudes

The present article is an attempt to explore the attitudes of female students towards marriage and cohabitation. By attitudes, we use here the sociological definition: "a mental position with regard to a fact or state" or "a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). More specifically, in this study marital attitudes refer to the situation of being in favor of, or against marriage. The aim is to explore beliefs and values towards marriage, as well as feelings and dispositions (Rontos, 2009). For this reason, a primary survey was carried out and the related results were analyzed and discussed.

Target population and sampling design

This study investigates female students' attitudes towards marriage and family formation, considering a sample of women studying at various universities

across Greece. This particular section of the female population was selected as the most appropriate for the study: women in further education were given an opportunity to voice their aspirations for the future. Furthermore, as they were likely to have been aware of the current new labor market conditions, they were asked for their views about the role of the state and other institutions regarding family and employment. In seeking to infer more general demographic patterns from local ones, this study assesses the role of a number of socioeconomic factors underlying preferences for marriage or cohabitation.

The study was conducted in 2012, during the economic crisis in Greece, by interviewing university students attending various academic years. The sample consisted of 194 female students studying in various university departments. A stratified, random sampling was used, with department and year of study being the main stratification criteria. The Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) sampling technique was used to determine the number of respondents in the strata. The size of the sample means that the sampling error at a confidence level of 0.05 lies in the range 1.4–7.0 for percentage estimates derived from the survey's questions. Students were asked to complete an anonymized, self-administered questionnaire consisting of 43 closed-type questions concerning attitudes to marriage, divorce, fertility, and family formation. Attitudes towards marriage (or cohabitation) were measured by the following question and answer:

What is your attitude towards the institution of marriage?

1 – In favor of marriage

2 – Against marriage

Additionally, preference for cohabitation was measured by the question:

Would you choose cohabitation instead of marriage?

1 – Yes

2 – No

We also asked "What does cohabitation mean to you?" with values presented in *Table 2*.

This questionnaire was tested for reliability and validity (Rontos, 2007; 2009). Data were digitalized and analyzed in house, using a spreadsheet and the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) software. The total response rate was 67% – a percentage accepted by the sampling theory, provided non-respondents are not concentrated in a specific part of the population, but are spread across the population (which was the case in this survey) (Graves, 2006). Based on these premises, non-response bias has a negligible influence on data quality.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to provide information about the sample profile, as well as female students' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Moreover, chi-square tests were applied, in order to explore pair-wise associations between the "attitude towards marriage" dependent variable (see above for the exact wording) and other explanatory variables that expressed the sample's characteristics or views. Explanatory variables included age, family type, father's educational level, mother's educational level, type and size of income, a preference for cohabitation over marriage, readiness for marital commitment, living with parents, the student's opinion about the negative impact on her career, the influence of no permanent work on the marriage decision, and, finally, the student's opinion about measures taken by the Greek welfare state. These variables were selected according to earlier evidence from empirical research mentioned in the introduction.

In order to construct a more complete and more accurate model, a multivariate logistic regression model was run, adopting the Maximum Likelihood approach and the Conditional Forward Stepwise procedure (Bishop et al., 1975; Nerlove and Press, 1973; Cox and Snell, 1989). An additional attempt was made to explore factors affecting female students' attitudes towards marriage through the application of Classification and Regression Trees (CART). CART is a nonparametric statistical methodology introduced by Breiman et al. (1984). This type of classification method presents many advantages over other classification methods (Kitsantas et al., 2007). To define dendrograms, a Chi-squared Automatic Interaction Detector (CHAID) method, one of the oldest tree classification methods (Kass, 1980; Antipov and Pokryshevskaya, 2009), was preferred to other common procedures.

RESULTS

Students' characteristics

The female students participating in the study ranged in age from 18 to 37 years, with a mean age of 22.1 years. The majority of them were aged 22–25 years (50.2%) and studied at the University of the Aegean, the University of Crete and Panteion University of Athens; their main residences were spread all over Greece (*Table 1*). Most of them were studying Sociology (26.6%), Geography (18.8%), Psychology (12.5%),

and Cultural Technology and Communication (10.4%). The vast majority of them were undergraduates (92.1%) and were single (94.3%), so they had no personal experience of marriage. However, they came from a variety of parental family structures (single parent, extended, and nuclear), which means that they had varying indirect experience of marriage. As far as their family educational background is concerned, 52.6% of their fathers had attended university or a higher technical university, while 44.3% of their mothers had completed high school. The students' monthly income was rather low (301–600 euro for most of them), and 67% depended completely on their parents from the economic point of view.

Table 1: Variables describing students' personal characteristics and socioeconomic background

Variables and values	N	%
Age (years)		
18–21	83	42.8
22–25	97	50.0
26+	13	6.7
No answer	1	0.5
Total	194	100.0
University		
University of the Aegean	131	67.5
University of Crete	47	24.2
Panteion University of Athens	14	7.2
No answer	2	1.0
Total	194	100.0
Field of study		
Sociology	51	26.3
Social Anthropology and History	11	5.7
Psychology	24	12.4
Business Administration	6	3.1
Geography	36	18.6
Cultural Technology and Communication	20	10.3
Environmental Studies	14	7.2
Marine Sciences	16	8.2
Economic and Regional Development	14	7.2
No answer	2	1.0
Total	194	100.0
Level of study		
Undergraduate	176	90.7
Postgraduate	15	7.7
No answer	3	1.5
Total	194	100.0

Table 1: Variables describing students' personal characteristics and socioeconomic background (continued)

Variables and values	N	%
Marital status		
Married	6	3.1
Single	183	94.3
Cohabitation agreement	3	1.5
Divorced	1	0.5
Engaged	1	0.5
Total	194	100.0
Number of children		
None	190	98.0
1	3	1.5
2	1	0.5
Total	194	100.0
Parental family structure		
Single-parent type	13	6.7
Nuclear	169	87.1
Extended	12	6.2
Total	194	100.0
Father's educational level		
Did not finish elementary school	2	1.0
Elementary school	15	7.7
Junior high school	24	12.4
Senior high school	48	24.7
University or higher technical school	102	52.6
Postgraduate studies	3	1.5
Total	194	100.0
Mother's educational level		
Did not finish elementary school	1	0.5
Elementary school	15	7.7
Junior high school	42	21.6
Senior high school	86	44.3
University or higher technical school	47	24.2
Postgraduate studies	3	1.5
Total	194	100.0
Source of income		
Work	25	12.9
From parents	129	67.0
Both	39	20.1
Total	194	100.0

Table 1: Variables describing students' personal characteristics and socioeconomic background (continued)

Variables and values	N	%
Monthly income (euro)		
< 300	46	23.7
301–600	111	57.2
601–900	21	10.8
> 900	15	7.7
No answer	1	0.5
Total	194	100.0
Reading religious books		
Rarely	7	3.6
Quite often	27	13.9
A little	74	38.1
Not at all	72	37.1
No answer	14	7.2
Total	194	100.0
Frequency of going to church		
Never	11	5.7
2–3 times per year	68	35.1
1–2 times per week	78	40.2
Almost daily	23	11.9
No answer	14	7.2
Total	194	100.0
How religious life affects their decisions in daily life		
Very much	2	1.0
Fairly much	31	16.0
A little	77	39.7
Not at all	70	36.1
No answer	14	7.2
Total	194	100.0
Importance of ceremonies in their life		
Very important	12	6.2
Fairly important	61	31.4
A little	83	42.8
Not at all	24	12.4
No answer	14	7.2
Total	194	100.0

Source: Primary survey conducted by the Sociology Department of the University of the Aegean, Laboratory of Social Informatics, Statistics and Research Infrastructure, 2012, n = 194.

Religiosity among the sample is rather weak: in the main they did not read religious books or only a little (median value: 'a little'). Their daily life was not affected or was affected a little by their religious life (median value: 'a little'), and ceremonies were only fairly important in their life (median value: 'a little'). However, 56.1% of them went to church at least 1–2 times a week.

Students' attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation

As far as students' attitudes towards marriage are concerned, the majority of female students seemed to be in favor of the institution of marriage (71.1%), while 28.9% were against it. However, when asked if they would opt for cohabitation instead of marriage, most of them (73.7%) replied that they would choose cohabitation over marriage (the latter chosen by only 26.3%). In case of cohabitation, 64.4% would choose cohabitation without an official agreement, while 35.1% would choose to formalize their cohabitation with an official agreement. Regarding attitudes towards cohabitation (*Table 2*), 41.7% of students believed that cohabitation is a prelude to marriage, while 22.4% regarded it as an initial stage in the marriage process. Only 14.1% of respondents regarded cohabitation as an alternative to marriage, and another 14.1% found it indistinguishable from marriage. The cohabitation options were selected on the basis of respondents' answers to the associated questionnaire. Based on the categorization of Heuveline and Timberlake (2004), only 22.4% of female students regarded cohabitation as a stage of marriage, which is certainly going to happen.

Table 2: Female students' replies to the question "What does cohabitation mean to you?"

Type of cohabitation	%
Marginal and random fact	2.6
Alternative to marriage	14.1
Prelude to marriage	41.7
Stage in the marriage process	22.4
Alternative to single	5.2
Indistinguishable from marriage	14.1
Total	100.0

Source: Primary survey conducted by the Sociology Department of the University of the Aegean, Laboratory of Social Informatics, Statistics and Research Infrastructure, 2012, n = 194.

According to the female students' views, the most suitable age to get married is 25–29 years (54.1%), while for 41.8% of the students the most appropriate age was 30–34 years. Most of the students seemed to find the age groups 20–24 and 35–39 quite inappropriate for marriage (*Table 3*).

Table 3: Female students' opinion about the ideal age at marriage

Age class (years)	%
20–24	2.1
25–29	54.1
30–34	41.8
35–39	2.1
Total	100.0

Source: Primary survey conducted by the Sociology Department of the University of the Aegean, Laboratory of Social Informatics, Statistics and Research Infrastructure, 2012, n = 194.

As for the most important reasons leading to marriage, the students thought that women should get married mainly in order to protect their children legally (25.8%), while the second main reason for marriage had to do with sentiment (24.2%). A third motivation was a desire to cement a relationship (21.6%). Conversely, social recognition and financial security came low on the list of reasons mentioned by students (2.6% and 1%, respectively). Family pressure and religious reasons seemed to be of greater importance (*Table 4*).

Table 4: Most important reason for women getting married, according to female students' opinion

Reason	%
Protecting children legally	25.8
Sentimental reasons	24.2
Cementing a relationship	21.6
Religious reasons	11.9
Family pressures	8.2
Legal rights	4.6
Social recognition	2.6
Financial security	1.0
Total	100.0

Source: Primary survey conducted by the Sociology Department of the University of the Aegean, Laboratory of Social Informatics, Statistics and Research Infrastructure, 2012, n = 194.

Factors associated with attitudes towards marriage

The association between factors and the female students' attitudes towards marriage was investigated using chi-square tests (*Table 5*). The differentiation in the students' responses was found to be statistically significant in relation to their opinion about measures taken by the Greek welfare state (p = 0.010), source of income (p = 0.045) and living (or not) with parents (p = 0.05). Statistical significance was found in opinions about the negative impact of having a family on one's career (p = 0.002) and in students' opinions about measures taken by the Greek welfare state to promote marriage (p = 0.010). High statistical significance was observed for preferring cohabitation to marriage (p = 0.001) and for readiness to undertake marital commitments and obligations (p = 0.001). No statistical significance was found for the association between attitude towards marriage and all other factors, such as family type, father's educational level, mother's educational level, and the influence of no permanent work on the marriage decision.

Table 5: Chi-square tests between "attitudes towards marriage" (in favor of marriage/against marriage) and categorical explanatory variables

Variable	Chi-square value	Degrees of freedom	Significance
Family type	1.764	2	0.414
Father's educational level	0.912	3	0.823
Mother's educational level	2.860	3	0.414
Source of income	6.212	2	0.045
Cohabitation preference over marriage	14.892	1	0.000
Readiness for marital commitments and obligations	28.701	3	0.000
Living with parents[a]	3.759	1	0.050
Students' opinion about negative impact on career	15.122	3	0.002
Influence of no permanent work on marriage decision	4.630	3	0.201
Students' opinion about measures taken by the Greek welfare state to promote marriage	6.722	1	0.010

Source: Primary survey conducted by the Sociology Department of the University of the Aegean, Laboratory of Social Informatics, Statistics and Research Infrastructure, 2012, n = 194.
Notes: For variables' values/ranking, see *Table 6*.
[a] Or thinking of living with them when they return from their studies.

Students who were earning their money from work were more in favor of marriage than the other students, probably because of their financial

independence. Students living with their parents were more likely to be in favor of marriage. Conversely, a higher proportion of those who believed that their career would lead them to postpone starting a family were against marriage than among those who did not believe that.

Modelling attitude towards marriage and cohabitation

A logistic regression model was applied with the aim of exploring the factors affecting female students' attitude towards marriage. Logistic regression was used in addition to x^2 tests, as causal factors in x^2 tests work independently of those that offer univariate inference. The independent variable in the logistic regression model was the "attitude towards marriage" dichotomous response; those factors tested with the model are presented in *Table 6*.

Table 6: Variables of the logistic model, its values, and absolute frequency

Variables and values		Frequency
Will a flexible form of work influence your decision to get married?	Fully	39
	Partially	87
	A little	40
	Not at all	27
Father's education	Primary school or less	17
	Junior high school	24
	High school	48
	University/technological education	104
Might your career lead you to postpone a decision about starting a family?	Fully	18
	Partially	93
	A little	63
	Not at all	19
Mother's education	Primary school or less	16
	Junior high school	42
	High school	86
	University/technological education	49

Table 6: Variables of the logistic model, its values, and absolute frequency (continued)

Variables and values		Frequency
Readiness for marital commitments and obligations – Would you mind facing the obligations and commitments of marriage and family formation (resources for household, reduced time for fun, etc.)?	Fully	57
	Partially	72
	A little	53
	Not at all	11
Monthly income (euro)	1–300	46
	301–600	111
	601–900	21
	901 and more	15
Source of monthly income	Work	25
	Parents	127
	Work and parents	41
Family type	Single parent	13
	Nuclear	168
	Extended	12
Has the Greek welfare state taken active measures to promote marriage among young people?	A little	56
	Not at all	137
Do you live with your parents (or are you thinking of living with them when you return from your studies)?	Yes	120
	No	73
Cohabitation preference instead of marriage (Will you choose cohabitation rather than marriage?)	Yes	142
	No	51

Source: Primary survey conducted by the Sociology Department of the University of the Aegean, Laboratory of Social Informatics, Statistics and Research Infrastructure, 2012, n = 194.

A Conditional Forward Stepwise procedure was adopted, and the model was completed after three steps (*Table 7*). The model was statistically significant at all steps (for the last step: x^2 = 54.56, df = 5, p < 0.0001) and explained 35.3% of the variance in marital attitudes among the sample (Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.35). This value indicates a moderately strong relationship between the predictors and the dependent variable. Model goodness-of-fit was also reflected in the non-significance of the statistical test of Hosmer and Lemeshow (1989) at all

steps (for the last step: x^2 = 1.16, df = 6, p = 0.979); −2 log likelihood fell from 196.185 in step 1 to 176.111 in step 3, a value indicating that the last model's step 3 fits the data better than steps 1 and 2.

The model correctly classifies 71.5% of the cases. According to the model's step 0 (constant), the students as a whole were 2.5 times more likely to be in favor of marriage than to be against it. The variable "readiness to undertake marriage commitment and obligations" entered in step 1. During step 2, the same variable was kept and "cohabitation preference over marriage" was added. Step 3 kept the variables "readiness to undertake marriage commitment and obligations" (Wald = 16.15, df = 3, p = 0.001) and "cohabitation preference over marriage" (Wald = −2.0, df = 1, p = 0.001), and introduced a variable concerning the view of the state's policy to promote marriage (Wald = 3.81, df = 1, p = 0.05).

Those female students who said they were ready to undertake fully the commitment to (and obligations of) marriage appeared to have a higher positive b coefficient (b = 3.89), showing that students who were ready to undertake the obligations and commitments of marriage were also more likely to be in favor of marriage. Actually, the stronger the readiness to undertake the commitments and obligations of marriage, the higher the probability of a student revealing a positive attitude towards marriage, as indicated by the value of b coefficients for this variable in model 3. The odds ratio of a student – fully ready to undertake the commitments and obligations of marriage – being in favor of marriage is 49 times higher than the other items.

Those students who seemed to prefer cohabitation to marriage were less likely to be in favor of marriage (b = −1.998 and e^b = 0.136). The odds of being in favor of marriage were 7.36 times higher among those female students who did not prefer cohabitation to marriage than among those who did. Finally, those students who believed that the Greek welfare state had taken active measures to promote marriage were 2.6 times more likely to be in favor of marriage than those who believed that the state had undertaken no action at all (b = 0.964 and e^b = 2.622). It is worth mentioning that not a single respondent in the sample expressed the view that the state had taken comprehensive measures to promote marriage among young people.

The methodology also predicts the probability of an individual in the sample having specific characteristics (values taken from the variables in the model) and may define the profile of an individual who has a specific probability of being in favor of marriage. The highest score (99.6%) in favor of marriage was attributed to female students who (i) said they were ready to undertake the commitments and obligations of marriage, and (ii) expressed the feeling that

the Greek welfare state had taken some active measures to promote marriage among young people. Conversely, the lowest probability of having a positive attitude towards marriage (20.9%) was attributed to female students who said they (i) preferred cohabitation to marriage, (ii) were not ready to undertake the commitments and obligations of marriage, and (iii) felt that the Greek welfare state had taken no active measures to promote marriage among young people.

Table 7: Results of the logistic regression model

Step	Variables (values)	B	S.E.	p	Exp(B)
Step 1	A7			0.000	
	A7(1)	3.874	0.954	0.000	48.125
	A7(2)	1.130	0.673	0.093	3.096
	A7(3)	1.060	0.688	0.123	2.888
	A7(4)	(ref.)	–	–	–
	Constant	−0.560	0.627	0.372	0.571
Step 2	A2(1)	−1.932	0.570	0.001	0.145
	A2(2)	(ref.)	–	–	–
	A7			0.001	
	A7(1)	3.923	0.989	0.000	50.541
	A7(2)	1.126	0.721	0.118	3.082
	A7(3)	1.110	0.736	0.131	3.035
	A7(4)	(ref.)	–	–	–
	Constant	0.997	0.819	0.223	2.711
Step 3	A2(1)	−1.996	0.579	0.001	0.136
	A2(2)	(ref.)	–	–	–
	A7			0.001	
	A7(1)	3.891	0.991	0.000	48.984
	A7(2)	1.340	0.733	0.068	3.819
	A7(3)	1.359	0.750	0.070	3.893
	A7(4)	(ref.)	–	–	–
	A17(1)	0.964	0.494	0.051	2.622
	A17(2)	(ref.)	–	–	–
	Constant	0.664	0.830	0.424	1.942

Source: Primary survey conducted by the Sociology Department of the University of the Aegean, Laboratory of Social Informatics, Statistics and Research Infrastructure, 2012, n = 194.
Legend:
A7: Readiness for marital commitments and obligations [A7(1): fully, A7(2): partially, A7(3): a little, A7(4): not at all];
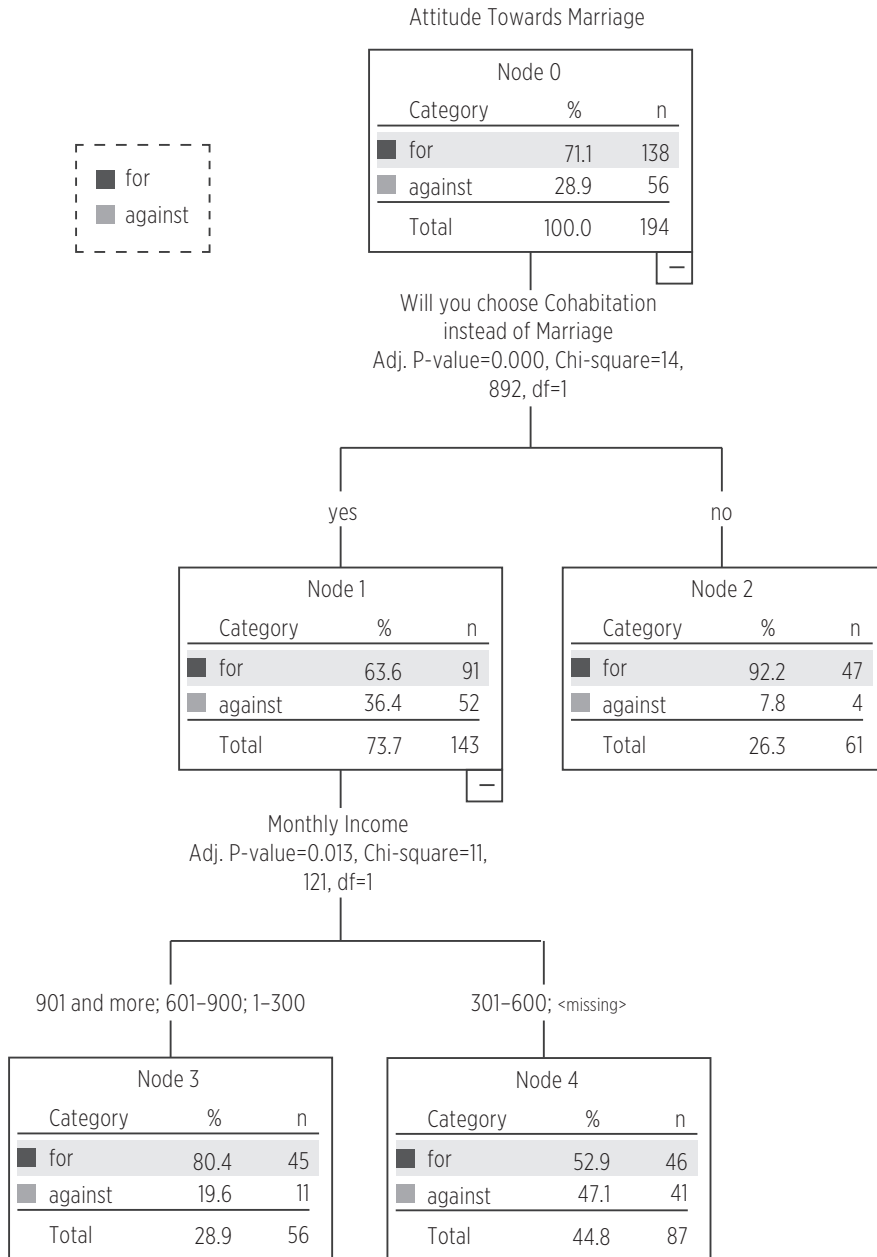A2: Cohabitation preference instead of marriage [A2(1): Yes, A2(2): No];
A17: Has the Greek welfare state taken active measures to promote marriage among young people? [A17(1): a little, A17(2): not at all].
Notes: Variables not in the model are age, family type, father's educational level, mother's educational level, type of income, size of income, living with parents, students' opinion about negative impact on career, and influence of no permanent work on marriage decision.

Classification tree analysis of factors affecting attitude towards marriage

The "attitude towards marriage" dependent variable was tested with the same independent variables analyzed with the logistic regression model (see above). Application of a CHAID on the dependent variable (*Figure 1*) revealed that the best predicting factor for female students' attitude towards marriage was their preference for cohabitation instead of getting married (x^2 = 14.892, df = 1, p = 0.001). For female students answering that they would not choose cohabitation instead of marriage, this seems to be the terminal node of the tree, representing the most predictive factor of their positive attitude towards marriage. More specifically, 92.2% of the students who responded in the negative to the question of whether they preferred cohabitation stated that they were for marriage, and only 7.8% were against it. Among those students who replied that they would choose cohabitation over marriage, 63.6% had a positive attitude towards marriage and 36.4% were against it. For those who said they preferred cohabitation, the second important predictive factor seems to be monthly income (x^2 = 11.121, df = 1, p = 0.013). Students with a monthly income of up to 300 euro and above 601 euro were mainly in favor of marriage (80%), while only 53% of those with a monthly income of between 301 and 600 euro were in favor of marriage. Overall, the predictive model performed relatively well, with low risk estimation (0.289, standard error = 0.033) and correct prediction and classification in 71.1% of cases.

Figure 1: Classification tree on attitude towards marriage

Attitude Towards Marriage

Node 0		
Category	%	n
■ for	71.1	138
■ against	28.9	56
Total	100.0	194

Legend:
■ for
■ against

Will you choose Cohabitation
instead of Marriage
Adj. P-value=0.000, Chi-square=14,
892, df=1

yes

Node 1		
Category	%	n
■ for	63.6	91
■ against	36.4	52
Total	73.7	143

no

Node 2		
Category	%	n
■ for	92.2	47
■ against	7.8	4
Total	26.3	61

Monthly Income
Adj. P-value=0.013, Chi-square=11,
121, df=1

901 and more; 601–900; 1–300

Node 3		
Category	%	n
■ for	80.4	45
■ against	19.6	11
Total	28.9	56

301–600; <missing>

Node 4		
Category	%	n
■ for	52.9	46
■ against	47.1	41
Total	44.8	87

Source: Primary survey conducted by the Sociology Department of the University of the Aegean, Laboratory of Social Informatics, Statistics and Research Infrastructure, 2012, n = 194.

DISCUSSION

Over the past three decades, family patterns have been transformed in all Western societies (Billari, 2005). In this study, the attitudes of female students are analyzed, with the aim of exploring the patterns of marriage and the decisions to form a family in the shorter and longer term in Greece. Sample characteristics cover a broad spectrum of socioeconomic conditions and a relatively large geographical area.

Most of the female students seemed to be in favor of marriage, in line with the traditional patterns of the society where they grew up. Nevertheless, when they had to choose between cohabitation and marriage, the majority of them would opt for cohabitation. New trends and changes in socioeconomic conditions have affected students' views, which show up as a preference for more practical and economic solutions to being with another person, rather than marriage (Bumpass and Lu, 2000; Abowitz et al., 2009; Fincham and Beach, 2010). This finding is extremely important, as Greece is generally considered to be a traditional society, where family patterns and religion play a dominant role (Gavalas et al., 2014). Despite this, the students appeared to go beyond the traditional boundaries and preferred "modern" types of partnership. Hence, the research findings revealed that marriage has not lost its essence and importance, but a great proportion of the female students regarded cohabitation as a precursor to marriage. In some cases, students actually prefer cohabitation and are indifferent to marriage (Campbell and Wright, 2010). Comparing the results of attitudes towards marriage in this survey with those collected in an earlier study (Rontos, 2007), we notice that the positive attitude of young educated Greek women towards marriage is still high, but declined between 2007 and 2012, from 81.8% to 71.1%. This variation may reveal a changing trend regarding attitudes towards marriage. However, it should be emphasized that the majority of young educated people are still in favor of marriage, despite the rapid socioeconomic changes observed in Greece.

As for the reasons for getting married, the young female students believed that the most important was to give their children legal protection, and a large and relatively stable proportion of the young people believed that marriage and family life are important for having and bringing up children. For some other respondents, marriage is still of symbolic value, as it cements their relationship with their partner (Carroll et al., 2007). Interestingly, the motivations stated nowadays by young women differ from those reported in the past. Therefore, the institution of marriage is no longer considered a means by which women enter

the adult world and attain a certain social status (Cherlin, 1992). On the contrary, the young female students in the sample seem to be more independent, as their responses indicated that religious reasons, social recognition, and financial security were all of low importance (Rontos, 2007). Apparently, social status and financial independence are sought through education, rather than marriage (Díez Medrano et al., 2014).

However, it should be noted that the sample considered in this study consisted of highly educated women (i.e., university students) who have recourse to education rather than marriage for their personal and professional development. A study applied to the total female population would be required in order to generalize the shift in attitudes towards marriage among Greek women as a whole. Nevertheless, the empirical findings of this study are indicative of the latest trends in marriage patterns in Greece, as shifts in attitudes and views are reflected in this particular portion of the Greek female population (Gavalas et al., 2014).

Moreover, within the sample there were certain socioeconomic factors that affected students' attitudes towards the decision to marry. Female students on a low monthly income seem to be more hesitant to marry, as revealed by the classification tree analysis. As a matter of fact, economic and professional instability seems to lead to a postponement of the marriage decision, as a great percentage of female students think that marriage may have a negative impact on their careers (Flouri and Buchanan, 2001). An important factor related to the positive attitude towards cohabitation, as opposed to marriage, is that young female students nowadays often have to move and live away from home when they pursue their studies in different cities. Thus, living independently encourages the idea of cohabitation with their partner, in a way that is at variance with the experiences of those who live with their parents while studying (Heuveline and Timberlake, 2004). Furthermore, the lack (or limited provision) of social protection measures by the Greek welfare state may constrain the preference for marriage.

Particularly important factors associated with attitudes towards marriage include the readiness of young women to undertake marital commitments and obligations, their predisposition towards cohabitation, and their opinion about the role of the state in promoting marriage among young people. In addition, family formation means that more time and money are spent on the household, childbearing, and child care, instead of one's personal life. Individualism and today's ego-centric and consumerist mentality of non-commitment deter young people in Greece from moving towards marriage and its commitments

and obligations, as earlier studies have shown (e.g. Kiernan, 2001). A change in attitudes can also be noticed regarding the preferred age of marriage, as stated by respondents. The most suitable age of marriage was reported to be 25–34 years. This period of life almost coincides with the completion of studies, as well as with professional and financial security. In this way, a delay in the decision to marry was noticed among Greek female students, as they probably prefer to complete their studies, find a job, and establish a career before forming their own family and household.

CONCLUSIONS

Religious and family stereotypes seem to have lost their topical influence on life decisions taken by young, educated women in Greece – more emancipated and independent than in the past – resulting in more heterogeneous attitudes towards marriage. For this reason, marriage is a decision they take for personal reasons, such as emotional bonding or the legitimization of their offspring. Nevertheless, the alternative to marriage (i.e., cohabitation) seems to be gaining ground over marriage, as it is less restrictive and does not seem to threaten independence. Therefore, the institution of marriage is jeopardized by the new social role of women, who aspire to higher and postgraduate studies, rather than to get married and start a family. In this way, marriage is delayed until later, when biological constraints mean that the chances of having a large family are restricted. In addition to negative attitudes to marriage, and amidst the difficult economic situation caused by the economic crisis, the incentives for childbearing and family formation offered by the Greek state are considered too limited. Taken together, these results make the case for a rethinking of family policies in Greece – something that is increasingly required to adapt to both rapidly changing local contexts and more general demographic trends on national level.

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