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## Improved communication within the family as a result of parent participation in adult education programs conducted by parent education Groups

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### Abstract

During the last years, the programs for educating parents have become a subject for research, analysis, and review in relation to the outcome they produce. However, the literature review showed that the number of relevant studies in Greece is limited compared to the importance of this subject but also to the international standards. This study presents the results generated by the Parent Education Groups for improving communication within a family. 30 parents of the general population took part, and when the program was completed, they were asked to fill in a questionnaire. An anonymous improvised questionnaire which the parents filled in was the basic methodological tool for conducting this study. The questionnaire consisted of questions on improving communication within the family environment and the relationship of each family member with each other. The questions and answers have been encoded for analysis and statistical processing through the SPSS software program. We consulted the average rates, standard deviations, percentages and graphs to display the analysis of the obtained information. The findings coincide with the literature review, and at the same time presents unexpected answers in the final conclusion about the changes related to the males who were part of this study and how important the age is in the changes related to communications skills.

**Keywords:** Family, communication, Parent Education Groups, adult education

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. The study's purpose

This study contains detailed information about the Parent Education Groups' competence and their ability to improve communication within a family as a result of the parents taking part in their programs. This study's agenda and values rely upon the ambition to solve any problems that may occur in the field of Parent Education Groups in Greece. By reviewing previous studies, we have concluded that there are not enough studies to guarantee efficient results generated by the Parent Education Groups (Carlson & Christeson, 2005) [2]; this study has a double purpose and it should not be considered as a re-run (Robson, 2010) [7]. First, it aims to evaluate the progress within a family by the parents who were part of the different programs directed by Parent Education Groups. Secondly, it aims at evaluating how efficient they were in helping improving family relations of the parents who reside within district of Trikala, Greece. The goals are descriptive and fact-finding (Robson, 2010) [7] and can be divided into sub-objectives.

The goals are:

- Evaluation of the parents' communication skills progress since participating in the programs by the Parent Education Groups.
- To study the increase of knowledge regarding the theory of communication, proper family's functioning and the comprehension of the children's needs depending on which development stage they belong to.
- To study how Parent Education Groups can help improve communication and family relations regarding the parent's age, sex and educational level.
- Evaluation its impact on improving communication between the two parents, between the children, and also, the Parent Education Groups' contribution to improving family relations.

#### 1.2. Determining the investigative interview questions

This study is divided in five investigative interview questions which are part of a pilot survey and were based on the results we wanted to produce (Creswell, 2008) [3]. We will review foreign

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and Greek literature reviews regarding how effective Parent Education Groups are. The Investigative Interview Questions are as described below:

**1st Investigative Interview Question:** Does taking part in Parent Education Groups effect the development of the parents' communication skills?

Today most parents are not ready to become parents. The parent education programs through their preventing role aim at solving this serious matter (Konstantinidis, Goga, Simos and Maureas, 2012, p. 221) [5].

**2nd Investigative Interview Question:** Do the Parent Education Groups contribute to increasing knowledge about the theory of communication, of proper family functioning and also, in understanding the children's needs depending of which stage of development they belong to?

Many researchers agree that parents need to become stronger in order to gain the required knowledge and techniques which will help them meet the multiple demands of their parental role (Stogiannidou, 2011, p. 343) [9].

**3rd Investigative Interview Question:** Do the Parent Education Groups help parents understand their children's needs, including their own?

By analyzing their goals (Rogers, 1999) [8], we conclude one of the main goals are to improve communication in the family. In addition, another main goal is to help married couples establish better communication with each other at showing married partners how to improve communication between them and their offspring. (Rogers, 1999) [8].

**4th Investigative Interview Question:** Do these programs help the parents improve communication between them but also with their children?

This conclusion substantiates the goal we described above. The results produced by Orfanidoy's study (2012) [6] on evaluating the course of the Parent Education Groups for the Institute of Adult Continuing Education/Institute for Continuing Education for Adults in Greece, prove that this program reinforces the parental role, and recognizes its importance.

Do Parent Education Groups help improve family relations and establish communication, and in the end, is an improvement of communication and of family relations connected to the age, the sex and the educational background of the parent?

## 2. Methodological Framework

We conduct this study by using the sampling method of completing questionnaires because the methodology for collecting information is directly linked to its theoretical framework. What will take place will be a quantitative survey, that presents figures, and which in turn will lead to a statistical analysis.

It contains a series of structured questions presented in specific way and the questioner is required to answer the questions individually and in written form (Zafiriou, 2003) [10].

### 2.1. Research process

This questionnaire was designed in such a way so it could be directly (Bell, 1997) [1] linked to the general structure of this study. The main tools for collecting and measuring information were designed according to its purpose.

At the first stage we determine the population (Bell, 1997) [1]. The population consists of all potential questioners who are considered to be the appropriate candidates for taking part in this study. The population samples are the parents who participated in the Parent Education Groups' programs (Bell, 1997) [1].

The second stage consists of the sampling's framework which actually contains all the catalogues of all potential questioners from which the sample will be drawn (Bell, 1997) [1]. In this study the sample's framework were the parents' applications to the Institute of Youth and Lifelong Learning (INEDIVIM), where they took part in the program "Parent Education Groups".

The third stage presents how the sampling unit was determined (Bell, 1997) [1]. The sampling unit is the basic unit which contains the population information from which the sample will be drawn from. In this study the sampling unit is the parents who participated in the program "Parent Education Groups" by INEDIVIM during January 2014- April 2014 in the district area of Trikala, Greece.

The fourth and final stage presents how the sample's size was determined (Bell, 1997) [1]. The exact number of the sample's individuals which took part in this study are the 30 parents who completed the program. The number of parents provides security for conducting the study.

The process for collecting information was done as follows: We informed the parents about the study, its purpose and its goals, and then we asked them if they wanted to fill it in. After giving their consent and by cooperating with the Parent Education Groups' educators, they were given the questionnaire (see Appendix) which motivated the parents to fill it in and at the same time, it explained process's steps, it referred again to the study's purpose, as well as filling it in is optional and their personal data would be remain classified. This was all done so the parents would give honest answers.

### 2.2. Participants (sample)

30 random parents, mothers and fathers, comprised the sample of the main target group, who during the period January – April 2014 completed the program in the district of Trikala, Greece.

The information came from the questioners' answers. We then examine whether Parent Education Groups really do help improve communication in a family.

### 2.3. Tools for collecting information

The tools for collecting information are as we described above, and were arranged and compiled according to the Javeau's basic principles (2000) [4]. While drafting the questionnaire, we took into consideration these principles so the acquired information would be clear, and the results reliable, in order to conduct a proper scientific study.

The questionnaire contains twenty questions which were divided in five thematic issues. The first part contains five questions related to sample's demographic data. The second and largest part contains sixteen questions which study the communication progress within a family as a result of participating in Parent Education Groups, and also examines how effective these Groups are in improving family relations.

To be more precise, the part comprises of five questions about the parents' personal information (age, sex, educational background) – their specialty, the number and age of their children, and the time they spent in these programs.

The second part begins with four questions of a graduated scale – a scale between 1 (None at all), 2 (Little), 3 (Enough),

4 (A lot) 5 (Very much). These questions were chosen so we could examine the first investigative interview question which asked if Parent Education Groups do indeed help parents develop communication skills.

Then, there are four multiple answer questions where the questioners were required to answer either positively, or negatively. They must provide their own answers in the second investigative interview question which is whether Parent Education Groups contribute to increasing their knowledge about the theory of communication, of proper family functioning as well as understanding the children's need regarding their stage of development.

Afterwards, there are two questions about the third investigative interview question which is whether the Parent Education Groups help the parents understand not only their children's needs but also their own needs.

In the next four questions (related to the fourth investigative interview) the questioners are required once again to grade this precise graduate scale in this order since we can evaluate up to what degree this program contributes positively to helping parents communicate with each other but also with their children.

Finally, there are two questions that ask if Parent Education Groups help improve communication, family relations, and reduce conflicts.

The questionnaire also contains control questions for credibility (Creswell, 2011), which are 2.5a and 2.5 b because they measure how family relations have improved and how the attitudes and behaviours have changed since developing communication skills.

This questionnaire is approximately seven pages, and the process to complete it requires an average of ten minutes (see Appendix).

**2.4. Credibility and validity of the research process and measurements.**

According to Bell (1997, p. 107) [1], credibility is the degree to which a test or a process produces the same results under steady-state tests in any given circumstance. At the same time, retaking the same test after some time, the method of alternative formulas are recommended as a device to audit credibility where equivalent facts of the same subject matters are given and the results are correlated. In this study this did not occur.

However:

- ✓ The sample represents the population which this study aims at.
- ✓ The quantitative research approach supports the credibility of the information provided by using a structured questionnaire and with all types of questions (open questions & closed-ended questions).
- ✓ The research tool measures and evaluates all the parameters which correlate to the investigative interview questions and they reflect the goal of this study.
- ✓ The research tool ensures anonymity will be maintained, and they the reason why we conduct this study and they know its goal and the framework in which it is being done. This way the answers given are more honest.
- ✓ The questions are clear and straightforward which reduce the possibility of misinterpreting them and at the same time they provide a chance to give multiple answers which ensure the credibility of the information given.

The structural validity of a gathering information tool can be achieved only if the answers given are valid, meaning and have a purpose (Creswell, 2011). After the static analysis of

the participants' answers the questionnaire of this study was confirmed as structurally valid.

**2.5. Method followed to analyze the information**

The questionnaire was filled in between 23rd April and 2nd May 2014.

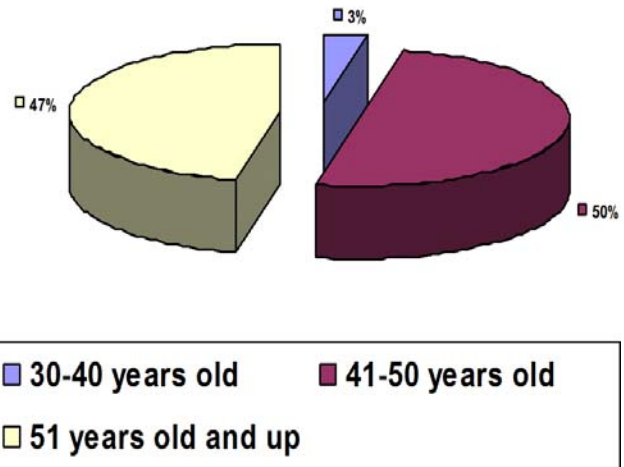
Once the questionnaires were filled in, 30 completed questionnaires were delivered and soon after the statistical processing began by using the SPSS Statistics, predictive analytics software for analyzing and conducting quantitative research, in order to verify all the information provided in this study. This way we are able to:

- Register and classify the answers into tables
- Bundle the questions in different categories of questions
- Develop the statistical processing of each answer, in order to investigate how effective Parent Education Groups are by using information provided the average and standard deviation in an attempt to draw valid conclusions related to the findings which resulted from the literature review of other related studies, including this study's objectives.

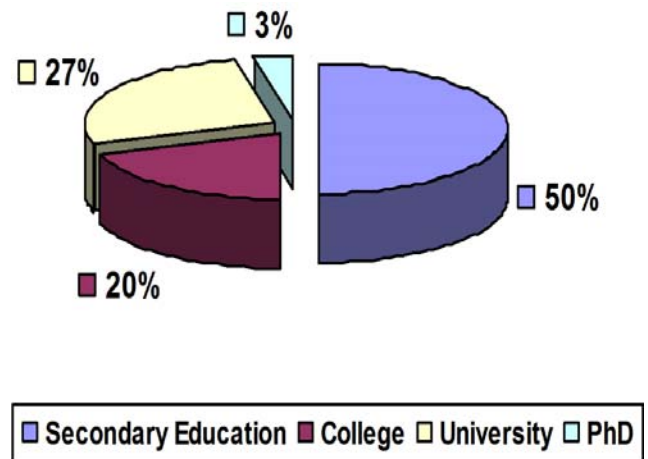
**3. Results of data analysis**

**Table 1:** shows the participants' sex (4 men and 26 women)

Sex	Number of participants	Percentage (%)
Males	4	13,3
Females	26	86,7
Total	30	100



**Fig 1:** Parents age distribution



**Fig 2:** Represents the participants' academic background

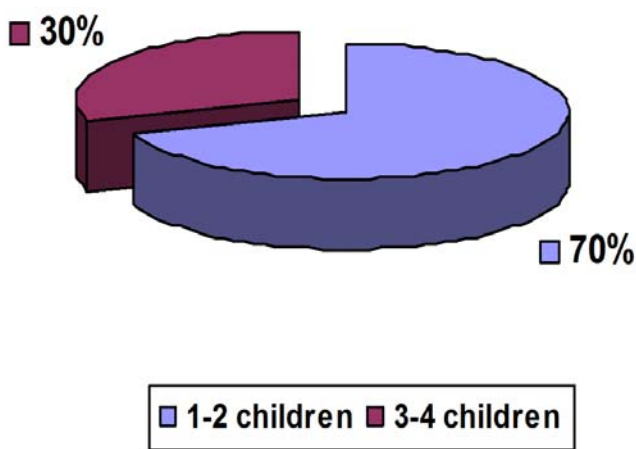


Fig 3: Represents the number of the participants' children

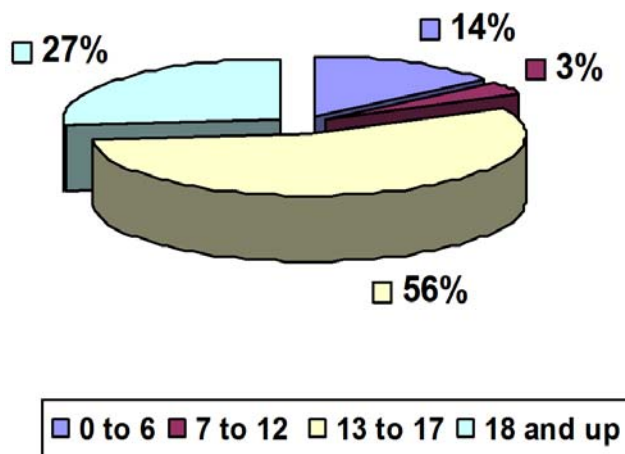


Fig 4: Represents the age of the participants' children

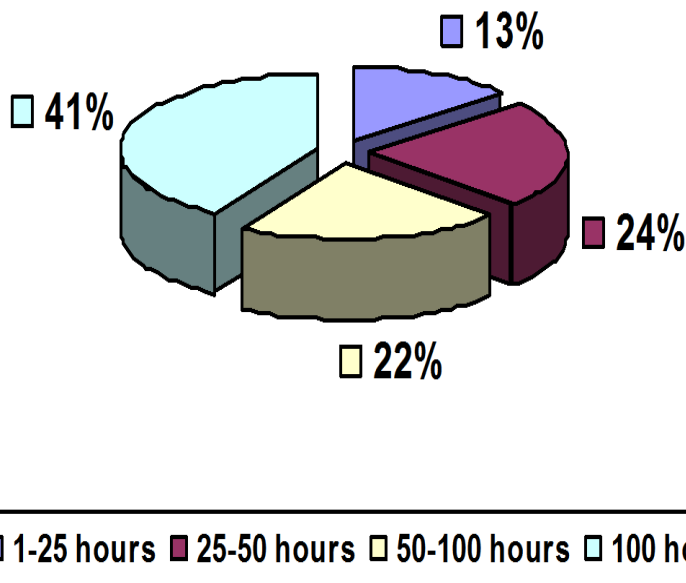


Fig 5: Represents the participants' hours of further education and training at Parent Education Groups

Table 2: Presents the percentage of each depended variable

Depended Variables	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	Percentage (%)
I. Taking part in Parent Education Groups helps...						
<i>In developing communication skills?</i>	0	0	6,7	16,7	76,7	23,3
<i>In creating a positive environment within the family?</i>	0	0	3,3	26,7	70	30,3
<i>In using active listening?</i>	0	3,3	3,3	33,3	60	40
<i>In reducing conflicts within the family?</i>	0	3,3	10	36,7	50	50
II. Up to what degree do you believe than Parent Education Groups contribute to ...						
<i>Improving communication between spouses?</i>	0	3,3	20	26,7	50	33,33
<i>Improving communication between parents and their children?</i>	0	3,3	3,3	26,7	66,7	33,33
<i>Promoting cooperation within the family?</i>	0	3,3	16,7	26,7	53,3	46,7
<i>To changing perspectives related to raising children?</i>	0	0	10	30	60	40
III. Do Parent Education Groups contribute ...						
<i>To improving communication and family relations?</i>	0	0	16,7	30	53,3	46,7
<i>To changing attitudes and behaviors?</i>	0	0	13,3	26,7	60	40

1=Not at all, 2= little, 3= Enough, 4= A lot, 5=Very much.

From the information given above we conclude that from the parents who participated in the program, 76,7% answered that they were greatly assisted in developing communication skills, 70% that they created a positive environment, and 60% in using active listening while 50% answered that the conflicts were reduced.

As a spouse, the parents realized that Parent Education Groups helped them to improve communication with their

spouse (50%), communication with their children (66.7%) and in general, promote collaboration within the family (53, 3%). Finally, changing perspectives about raising children, 60% answered that Parent Education Groups helped them change the self-beliefs and stereotypes while 53% said that their family relations improved, and generally, 60% changed their point behaviors and points of view.

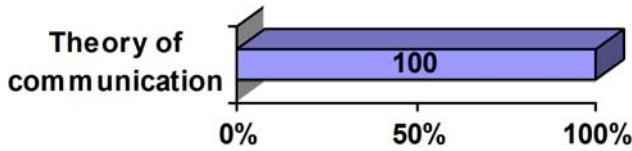


Fig 6: Represents an increase of knowledge as a result of taking part in Parent Education Groups' programs, which the parents understood, 100% the theory of communication.

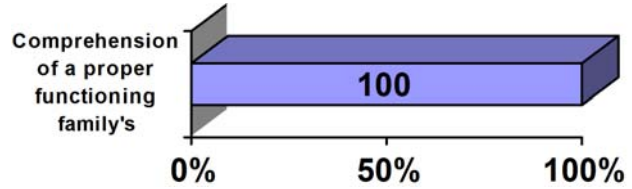


Fig 9: Represents the comprehension of a proper functioning family's characteristics – 100% comprehended by the participants.

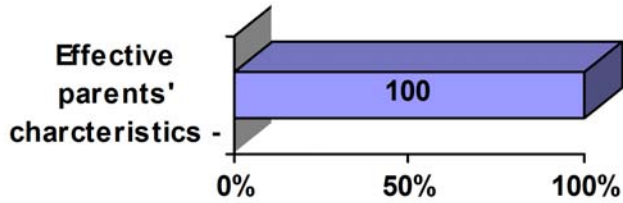


Fig 7: Represents the effective parent's characteristics – comprehended 100% by the participants.

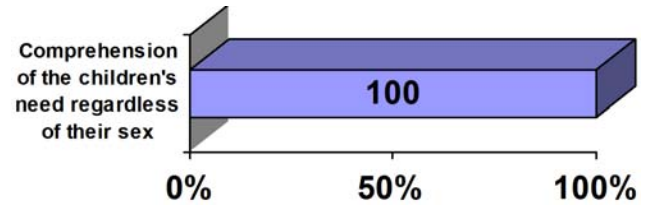


Fig 10: Represents the comprehension of the children's need regardless of their sex - comprehended 100%.

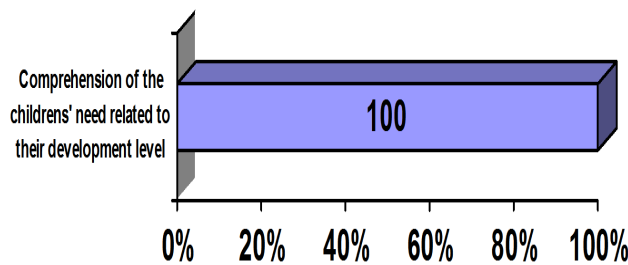


Fig 8: Represents comprehension of the children's need related to their development level which the participants comprehended 100%.

Table 3: Parent's age use of active listening

		Use of active listening				Total
		Little	Enough	A lot	Very Much	
Parent's age	Age 30-40	1	1	2	10	14
	age 41-50	0	0	7	8	15
	Over 51	0	0	1	0	1
		1	1	10	18	30

Cohesion Table of investigative interview questions – criteria – questions

Axis (research questions)	Criteria	Questions
Axis 1 Improving communication	Criteria 1 Communication Skills Criteria 2 Active listening Criteria 3 Cooperation	2.1.a, 2.1.c,2.1.d,2.4.1,2.4.a,2.4.b,2.5.a  2.1.a, 2.1.c,2.2 <sup>a</sup>  2.1.b,2.1.d,2.4.c,2.5.a
Axis 2 Knowledge	Criteria 1 Theory of Communication Criteria 2 Needs of parents and children Criteria 3 Characteristics of an effective parent	2.2.a  2.2.c,2.3.a,2.3.b 2.2.a,2.2.d
Axis 3 Attitude – Behavior change	Criteria 1 Change of perspective	2.4.c,2.4.d,2.5.b

**3.1. The study's limitations**

The basic limitation of this study was the small number of participants. This was a result of the limited time in which this study was conducted. In turn, this resulted in not having the required time to evaluate the validity of the questionnaire (pilot research).

One additional limitation was the methodology of research. The self-reference questionnaires were the only method for approaching the variables. Therefore, only the personal opinions given by the participants were taken into consideration while, at the same time, for a more specified research we could have combined the method of self-reference and more objective measuring method. However, the limited time for conducting this study demanded that we followed a specific method which enabled us to collect information as quickly as possible.

**4. Discussion – Conclusions**

The research design and the methodology followed helped us reach very useful conclusions about Parent Education Groups about improving communication within the family as a result of the parents taking part, and generally about improving family relations. Most of the information given responds to the research questions which were initially asked, therefore it also meets the goals of this study, as prove the finding in section3 – Table 2.

Furthermore, additional conclusions were drawn and they are worthwhile mentioning.

The first conclusion is that the majority of the participants were women, contrary to the small number of male participants (Table 1). This shows that mothers are more interested in taking part in a program that will help them improve communication, and therefore their relationship with

their children. However, nowadays, most mothers do not dedicate themselves completely to raising their children since they work, and therefore they share the family obligations with their spouse. One would indeed expect a greater percentage of fathers taking part in such programs. The Parent Education Groups could use this finding so they can invent ways that would stimulate the fathers' interest by designing programs in such a way that would produce exactly that.

Furthermore, this study presents a finding noteworthy in Table 3, where we see that learning, and then using active listening as a communication skill is more easily adopted by younger parents. This may occur because young parents are more open to making changes. We also verified that the time spent in training contributes positively to this change and the specialists must consider extending the programs' time limit and become more iterative.

The final conclusion is that the parents who took part in the programs conducted by Parent Education Groups, 53.3% of which claim that the relationships within their family were improved, similarly so did the communication among family members. 100% have gained knowledge about the theory of communication and their children's development level and needs. In general, 60% of the relationships within the family are changing towards the better, so, this present study confirms that the valid conclusions are in accord with its primal goals.

Finally, we propose that a future study be conducted which will investigate the reasons for motivating parents to take part in Parent Education Groups. Maybe such an approach could explain why women are keener in participating in such programs than men. In addition, another future study about the efficiency of Parent Education Groups throughout Greece could be conducted.

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