

Greek Preschool Children's Perceptions of Parental Warmth in Cases of Family Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present research is to study preschool children's perceptions of parental warmth, in cases of family crisis stress, in Greece. Specifically, it aims at investigating the connection between family crisis (parental unemployment, divorce/separation or migration) and perceived maternal or paternal acceptance and rejection. The sample consisted of 550 preschool children ($M=4.91$ years, $SD=.56$), almost half of them boys (48.9%) and half of them girls (51.1%). In addition, setting a criterion of specific family crisis cases (unemployment, divorce/separation, moving/immigration) for 24 months or less, during the sampling procedure, families without crisis reached 50.4% of the sample and families facing crisis reached the 49.6%. The respondents completed the Greek version of the Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (ECARQ), for mother and father. The main results of the research indicate that (a) mothers are perceived as warmer and more hostile at the same time in the total sample, (b) parents who are members of families with crisis are conceived as more indifferent and hostile, (c) fathers of families with crisis are conceived as less warm, (d) in families with divorce/separation fathers are conceived as more indifferent and more hostile than fathers in families with unemployment or immigration. Concluding, parental divorce/separation is the case of family crisis that correlates the most with the parental acceptance and rejection, as perceived by preschool children.

KEYWORDS

Greek family, early childhood, family crisis, Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory, perceived parental warmth

INTRODUCTION

Greek family in crisis

The global financial crisis of 2008 was considered as a shock for the society, which was not prepared for the changes that resulted from the new circumstances following the financial crisis. New policies were applied, so as to face the crisis, and the Greek citizens struggled with the abrupt decrease of their income and in parallel the increase of tax payments (Giotsa & Mitrogiorgou, 2014a; Papageorgiou & Tsironis, 2013). In fact, the financial crisis commenced from society and was quickly expanded to enterprises and households, forming a generalized financial recess (Katsikas et al., 2015). What is more, it seems that, in more recent years, the Greek financial crisis' social consequences have not only remained unresolved, but they are also compounded with other kinds of socioeconomic crises, such as the refugee crisis started in 2015-2016, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2019, as well as the emergence of the energy crisis (Giotsa, 2023; Halkos & Gkampoura, 2021; Hazakis, 2022; Maris et al., 2021). According to Makantasi and Valentis (2024) Greek economy shows weak growth rates even after 13 years, as some of the significant fundamental weaknesses of the Greek economy, which had accumulated over time and constituted the real origin of the Greek crisis, have not been properly addressed yet.

In Greece, a literature review regarding the financial crisis of 2008 (Giotsa & Mitrogiorgou, 2014a) reveals that unemployment was the most obvious consequence of the financial crisis. The rapid increase in unemployment rates between 2010 and 2015, as well as the changing working conditions until nowadays (e.g. lower income, flexible working hours, short contracts, constant changes in working environments, more dismissals) seemed to affect people (Giotsa & Mitrogiorgou, 2014a, 2014b; Mpouras & Lykouras, 2011; Ntolliopoulou, 2013, 2015). The changes and the destabilization in their lives though seem to have a psychological aspect for them, as well. The psychological consequences of financial crisis have been connected with higher depression rates (Anagnostopoulos & Soumaki, 2013; Brouzos et al., 2015; Economou et al., 2013; Karanikolos et al., 2013). What is more, people trying to overcome difficulties tend to seek for better working and living conditions, either moving to other regions of Greece or to other countries (Giotsa, 2019; Giotsa & Mitrogiorgou, 2014a, 2014b; Khaleeli et al., 2013). All this data confirms that the crisis does not affect only the persons themselves, but also their whole households.

The structure of the Greek family has changed a lot within the last 30 years and there is evidence to suggest the impact of the socio-economic situation created by the crisis (Akrivou et al., 2016; Arundel & Rohner, 2016; Dagkouli-Kyriakoglou, 2018; Giotsa, 2019). In particular, Greek families tend to be reformed from strictly nuclear to other extended types, including more members (e.g grandparents, siblings of the parents), who are able to financially and emotionally support the nuclear family. On the other hand, the financial support by relatives

seems to affect decision making within the family and leads to a feeling of lack of control of their lives for the parents themselves.

Except for the changes in family types, it is obvious that stress connected with the crisis deeply affected the ways that people face personal difficulties, as well as the quality of their relationships with others, including the way they think about their families' members (Conger et al., 2010; Helms et al., 2014; Kinnunen & Feldt, 2004). According to Cutrona and colleagues (2003), it is more likely for couples facing economic difficulties to have more conflicts, criticize each other, and get more distant. At the same time, the psychological situation of parents and the relationship between them, affect also their relationships with children, as well as the way their children look at them. Negative emotions, hostility, lack of clear answers and explanations, and stress tend to negatively affect the family dynamics (Fonseca et al., 2016), while children seem more likely to develop negative attitudes regarding their parents and family.

In contrast, some researchers tend to believe that economic difficulties and the tension within the family system, due to financial reasons, may empower the relationships among family members. This seems to happen, due to the support provided among the wider family members in times of crisis, so as to overcome the difficulties (Karademas & Roussi, 2016). The extended family types seem to remain traditional for the Greek people, who keep developing strong emotional connections with relatives beyond their nuclear family (Georgas, 2002; Giotsa, 2004, 2019). As a result, the protection factors, provided by the systems each person is a member of, are able to deteriorate the consequences of the financial crisis to the nuclear family's dynamics (Fonseca et al., 2016).

Beyond the family types and the support provided from the wider family in Greece, many researchers focused their interest on the roles of women and men within the family system. Even in times of crisis, the struggle of each gender seems to be connected to their traditional social roles (Fonseca et al., 2016). Precisely, although the women's role has changed a lot over the years, it seems that in most societies they tend to have the social role of the person who manages the emotional tense and provides emotional support to the family (Aytaç & Rankin, 2009; Forkel & Silbereisen, 2001; Kwon et al., 2003). On the other hand, men seem to experience higher levels of social pressure because of the financial difficulties, as they sense that they are expected to be the ones to provide economical support for their families and fulfill their material needs (Conger et al., 1993; Elder et al., 1985; Hraba et al., 2000; Ponnet et al., 2014).

Interpersonal acceptance and rejection in early childhood in Greece

The amount of research data, regarding IPARTTheory, tend to grow year-by-year, as it is an evidence-based theory. Since the 1960's, there is a really large amount of research data coming from all continents (except Antarctica), studying the relationships and interactions, through the experienced acceptance and rejection (Rohner, 2021). It is suggested that interpersonal acceptance and rejection consistently predict the psychological and behavioral adjustment of children and adults, across cultures and other sociodemographic groups (Ali et al., 2019; Khaleque & Rohner, 2011; Khaleque et al., 2019; Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner et al., 2005;

Rothenberg et al., 2022). What is more, IPARTtheory tools are not only useful for research purposes, but may also have clinical applications (Donoghue, 2010; Giotsa & Mitrogiorgou, 2025; Rigazio-DiGilio & Rohner, 2015).

As the relationships between children of preschool age and their parents are very important for their development, this is a constantly growing field of study. That happens in the context of the Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPAR Theory), which expanded the research in early childhood, since 2012, adding the psychometric tools Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire/ECARQ (Rohner & Giotsa, 2012), Early Childhood Best Friend Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire/ECBFARQ (Rohner, 2021), as well as Early Childhood Teacher Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire/ECARTQ (Rohner, 2021).

As for the Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire, even if Greece was the first country, where the psychometric tool was used in pilot studies (Giotsa & Kaminiotis, 2014), international research data has also become available. Specifically, over the past decade, relevant research is conducted in different countries, including Bulgaria (Koltcheva, 2016; Koltcheva & Djalev, 2017, 2019; Koltcheva & Kurshumova, 2014), Turkey (Okur, 2015; Okur & Berument, 2016) and Portugal (Peixoto et al., 2023). Researchers in Bulgaria (Koltcheva, 2016; Koltcheva & Djalev, 2017, 2019; Koltcheva & Kurshumova, 2014) focused mostly on the structure of the questionnaire, suggesting a two-factor model.

On the other hand, researchers in Turkey (Okur, 2015; Okur & Berument, 2016) were interested in cases of poverty and they concluded that perceived parental acceptance or rejection, as well as further characteristics of the familial environment, seem to affect the connection drawn between poverty and school readiness. Moreover, Portuguese research (Peixoto et al., 2023) focused on the preschoolers' social and emotional competence, showing that children who perceived more maternal rejection tended to have fewer social skills. What is more, a recent research by Leijten and colleagues (2024) focused on the daily maternal parenting cognitions and behaviors, associated with disruptive child behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. They concluded that nonlinear patterns of parent-child interactions are very important in cases of disruptive behaviors, especially in times of family stress, such as the pandemic-related stress.

Focusing on research in Greece, regarding the usage of the ECPARQ, Greek researchers (Theodoropoulos, 2017; Theodoropoulos & Giotsa, 2020) attempted a wide research in early childhood with a sample of 1000 preschool and first-school aged children and their parents, using the ECARQ. They stated that the tool is characterized by high internal reliability, while their main conclusions were the following: (a) girls experience higher levels of acceptance than boys, (b) mothers perceive their behavior towards their children as more acceptive than the fathers, (c) children whose behavior is rated as more negative by the parents tend to have more negative perceptions about the acceptance they experience from the parents as well and (d) the parents' perceptions of acceptance and rejection they provide their children are more positive than the way their children evaluate them. More recent research (Giotsa &

Mitrogiorgou, 2024; Mitrogiorgou, 2020; Mitrogiorgou & Giotsa, 2022), which was conducted, focusing on the relationships among preschool children and their parents, resulted in similar conclusions for the modern Greek family.

The continuous evolution of the theory in research regarding preschool children's perceptions may be obvious by the proposed structure of ECARQ. Specifically, Rohner and Ali (2016) suggest that ECARQ has the same structure, in four scales, as proposed for Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire/PARQ as well, given that questions are not differentiated, whereas only verbally simplified to be understood by young children. Nevertheless, recent research data in Greece (Giotsa & Kaminiotis, 2014; Giotsa & Kyriazos, 2019; Giotsa et al., 2018), with the participation of a large sample of preschool and first-school aged children (more than 1000 participants), suggest the development of three factors. The Exploratory Factor Analysis by Giotsa and Kaminiotis (2014) showed a preferred model of three factors. The reliability indicators in this study ranged from adequate to very good levels ($\alpha = 0.69$ to $\alpha = 0.82$).

Additionally, aiming at the standardization of the Greek version of the questionnaire, Giotsa and Kyriazos (2019) proceeded to further analysis, regarding the structure. In a previous Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the same researchers (Giotsa & Kyriazos, 2017, as cited in Giotsa & Kyriazos, 2019), the structure of the three factors was confirmed. In particular, the following factors emerged: (a) Warmth, (b) Indifference/Neglect and (c) Hostility/Rejection (a new factor including Hostility/Aggression and Undifferentiated Rejection). The aforementioned three-factor structure was also confirmed by Giotsa and Kyriazos (2019), who studied the psychometric properties of the questionnaire using a sample of 1000 Greek children.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Purpose of the present study

The present paper focuses on the relationship between parents and their children, within the familial context, facing some kind of crisis stress. Recent parental unemployment, divorce or separation, as well as moving or immigration for work-related reasons, all are incidents which are possible to result in destabilization, affecting all aspects of the family's living. Precisely, during the present research, the families were facing one of the aforementioned cases of crisis for 24 months or less.

It is obvious through the literature review, that there is a gap in research of the perceived parental warmth by the preschool children, during family crisis stress. Even the research by Leijten and colleagues (2024), who focused on the pandemic-related stress in families, examined a parents-consisted sample, not including preschool children's views. Consequently, this paper's main purpose is to study Greek preschool children's perceptions of maternal and paternal acceptance and rejection, when their families struggle with specific cases of crisis stress (unemployment, divorce/separation, moving or immigration for work-related reasons).

Research questions and hypotheses

Based on the main purpose of the present research, the following research questions are posed:

- (a) Are the participants' perceptions of the maternal and paternal warmth, indifference and hostility/rejection differentiated by their gender?
- (b) Are the participants' perceptions of the parental warmth, indifference and hostility/rejection differentiated by their parents' gender?
- (c) Are the participants' perceptions of the maternal and paternal warmth, indifference and hostility/rejection differentiated by the experience or not of crisis within their family?
- (d) In cases of family crisis, are the participants' perceptions of the maternal and paternal warmth, indifference and hostility/rejection differentiated according to the crisis case (unemployment, divorce/separation, moving/immigration)?

Taking into account the literature review and especially the research data in Greece, the following research hypotheses are stated:

- (a) Boys will perceive their parents as less warm and/or more indifferent or hostile than girls.
- (b) Children will perceive mothers as warmer than fathers, while fathers as more indifferent or hostile than mothers.
- (c) In cases of unemployment, children will perceive higher levels of warmth from the unemployed parent, with whom they spend more time.
- (d) In cases of divorce/separation, children will perceive the parent who does not live with them as less warm and more indifferent.
- (e) In cases of immigration/moving, children will perceive the parent who lives with them as more affectionate, but at the same time will not perceive the moving parent as more indifferent or hostile.

Sampling

The sample consisted of 550 children of preschool age ($M=4.91$ years, $SD=.56$). Out of 550 participants, almost half (48.9%) were boys ($N=269$) and almost half (51.1%) were girls ($N=281$). The participants came from different regions, all around Greece (Table 1). The research was conducted following the Code of Ethics of the University of Ioannina and all the participants took part, after their parents completed and signed a written informed consent form. All data was anonymous and processed confidentially by the researchers.

Table 1.

Allocation of the participants, per region, in the present sample, and in the formal demographics data of Greece (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2021)

| | Frequency in Sample | Percent in Sample | Frequency in Greece | Percent in Greece |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| North Greece | 155 | 28.2 | 73,589 | 27.3 |
| Central Greece | 139 | 25.3 | 64,955 | 24.1 |
| Attica | 240 | 43.6 | 96,932 | 35.9 |
| Aegean Islands and Crete | 16 | 2.9 | 34,269 | 12.7 |
| Total | 550 | 100.0 | 269,742 | 100.0 |

During the procedure of sampling, a specific criterion was considered, regarding the familial context the participants came from. As the main purpose of the research was to study families in crisis, the participants were members of families struggling or not with some kind of crisis. For the purposes of this research, as well as based on the literature review, regarding the most common consequences of the financial crisis in Greece, we focused on three cases of crisis: (a) parental unemployment, (b) parental divorce or separation and (c) migration of at least one parent for work related reasons.

Consequently, half of the resulting sample (50.4%, N=277) consisted of children who were members of families without crisis and half (49.6%, N=273) consisted of children who were members of families with crisis. Additionally, out of the 550 participants, 25.3% came from families facing recent parental unemployment, 12.9% came from families facing parental divorce or separation and 11.5% came from families where at least one of the parents immigrated and was absent for long periods of time due to work-related reasons.

It has to be mentioned that in case of divorce/separation, most of the participants live with the mother (81.7%), while a small percentage lives with the father (11.3%) and even less with both parents (7%). Additionally, in case of immigration, the parent who is absent is mostly the father (82.5%), while quite fewer mothers tend to be absent for long periods of time due to work-related reasons (17.5%).

It has to be declared that a time limit of 0 to 24 months was set, among the families in crisis, from the moment that they started struggling with unemployment, divorce/separation or migration. This time limit was crucial, so as to consider them as participants in the sample of the present research. This limit was set taking into account that the consequences of the crisis are more evident during the first months, when the family tends to face a destabilization.

Psychometric tools and Procedure

As for the instrumentation, all the participants answered the Greek version of the Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire/ECARQ (Rohner & Giotsa, 2012) for mother and father. It is a self-referring psychometric tool for preschool children, aiming at assessing the respondent's perceptions concerning the perceived parental acceptance and rejection. It has 24 items which the participants assess according to a 4-point Likert scale (from 1=Almost never to 4=Almost always). For the preschool children, the procedure took place with the support of the researcher, using two flashcards with the symbols "O" (true) and "Ø" (not true), as they could not read and answer in written. The researcher read the statement to the respondent and asked them first, if the statement was true or not true, using the two flashcards. In case the respondent answered that the statement was true for their parent, then the researcher asked if it "Almost always" or "Sometimes" used to happen. In case the respondent answered that the statement was not true, then the researcher asked if it "Rarely" or "Almost never" happened. The demographic information for the participants (age, gender, information for their parents and families etc.) was collected through a demographic information form.

The sampling method used in the present study was the stratified random sampling method. It tends to be used in cases, where it is considered important for the sample to include specific groups or strata, which in our study has to do with the criterion we set, namely the crisis variable. According to this method, the population is divided into groups with homogeneous characteristics (in present paper's case: family in crisis, family not in crisis) and then the researcher selects the expected sample size (Bryman, 2016). It should be mentioned though, that due to a lack of statistical data and other corresponding data, it was not possible to determine the exact number of participants per crisis case, in order to speak of proportional sampling, as there were no lists available of all families with preschool children throughout Greece, which would include data on unemployment, divorce/separation and parental immigration.

Regarding the data analysis, at first all data was coded anonymously in SPSS Statistics. The data analysis was based on the three-factors structure, as proposed and confirmed by Giotsa and Kyriazos (2019), who studied the psychometric properties of the questionnaire using a sample of 1000 Greek children. As a result, the respondents' answers were quantitatively analyzed, using the following factors: (a) Warmth, (b) Indifference/Neglect and (c) Hostility/Rejection (a new factor, including Hostility/Aggression and Undifferentiated Rejection).

RESULTS

The Greek version of the Early Childhood Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire is shown to have a really high reliability indicator, according to research (Giotsa & Kaminiotis, 2014; Giotsa & Kyriazos, 2019; Theodoropoulos & Giotsa, 2020; Giotsa et al., 2018; Theodoropoulos, 2017). More specifically, before the data analysis, the internal consistency was examined for the present sample, as well, measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Nunnally, 1978). The results confirmed that the internal consistency of the ECARQ versions for mother ($\alpha=.91>.7$) and father ($\alpha=.91>.7$) was very high, indicating high levels of reliability.

Table 2.

T-test for ECARQ (mother version) as per children's gender

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | | | |
|---------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|
| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Warmth | .90 | .77 | -.29 | 546 | .770 |
| Indifference | 1.74 | .19 | -.88 | 546 | .381 |
| Hostility/Rejection | 11.23 | .00 | -1.00 | 538.65 | .316 |

Proceeding to the first research question of the present study, we ran t-test (independent samples tests, Table 2 and 3), in order to examine if there are statistically significant differences concerning the participants' perceptions of the maternal and paternal warmth, indifference and hostility/rejection, by their gender. The results do not reveal statistically significant differences by the participants' gender, concerning their perceptions neither of their mothers nor of their fathers.

Table 3.*T-test for ECARQ (father version) as per children's gender*

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Means | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----|------|-----|-----------------|
| | Variances | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Warmth | 1.31 | .25 | .12 | 532 | .908 |
| Indifference | .16 | .69 | -.55 | 532 | .583 |
| Hostility/Rejection | .40 | .53 | .17 | 532 | .868 |

As for the second research question of the present study, we ran t-test (paired samples t-test, Table 4), in order to examine if there are statistically significant differences among the participants' perceptions of the maternal and of the paternal warmth, indifference and hostility/rejection. The results reveal statistically significant differences regarding the Warmth scale ($p<0.001$), as specifically the mean of maternal Warmth scale resulted to be statistically significantly higher than the mean of paternal Warmth. It should be noted that the results are presented with no reverse in the Warmth scale. Also, there is statistically significant difference regarding the Hostility/Rejection scale ($p<0.001$), as in detail the mean of maternal Hostility/Rejection resulted to be statistically significantly higher than the mean of paternal Hostility/Rejection, in the present sample.

Table 4.*Paired samples t-test for ECARQ scales, as per the parents' gender*

| | | Paired Differences | | | | |
|---------------|--|--------------------|----------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|
| | | Mean | Std. Deviation | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Pair 1 | M_Warmth-F_Warmth | .67 | 4.10 | 3.80 | 531 | <.001 |
| Pair 2 | M_Indifference-F_Indifference | -.08 | 3.21 | -.61 | 531 | .543 |
| Pair 3 | M_Hostility/Rejection-F_Hostility/Rejection | .68 | 3.95 | 3.95 | 531 | <.001 |

Continuing to the examination of the third research question, we ran t-test (t-test for equality of means, Table 5 and 6), in order to check for any statistically significant differences concerning the participants' perceptions of the maternal and paternal warmth, indifference and hostility/rejection, by the experience or not of crisis within their family. The results reveal statistically significant differences regarding the maternal Indifference ($p=0.039$) and the Hostility/Rejection ($p=0.002$) scales, where children coming from families in crisis tend to perceive their mothers as more indifferent and hostile. Additionally, there are statistically significant differences regarding all the paternal scales, Warmth ($p=0.002$) Indifference ($p=0.003$) and Hostility/Rejection ($p=0.004$), where children coming from families with crisis tend to perceive their fathers as more indifferent, hostile and less warm at the same time.

Table 5.*T-test for ECARQ (mother version) as per the existence of crisis or not*

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
|----------------------------|--|------------|------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Warmth | 3.97 | .05 | -1.19 | 538.82 | .233 |
| Indifference | .04 | .85 | 2.07 | 546 | .039 |
| Hostility/Rejection | 13.42 | .00 | 3.08 | 522.73 | .002 |

Table 6.*T-test for ECARQ (father version) as per the existence of crisis or not*

| | Levene's Test for Equality Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
|----------------------------|--|------------|------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Warmth | 12.19 | .00 | -3.09 | 511.54 | .002 |
| Indifference | 8.54 | .00 | 2.99 | 516.73 | .003 |
| Hostility/Rejection | 11.99 | .00 | 2.91 | 506.35 | .004 |

Last, according to the fourth research question posed, we examined if the participants' perceptions of the maternal and paternal warmth, indifference and hostility/rejection are differentiated, according to the crisis case (unemployment, divorce/separation, moving/immigration). Examining the part of the sample with participants coming from families in crisis ($N=273$), we ran Levene tests and then one-way ANOVA, as per the case of crisis for both maternal and paternal scales (Table 7 and 8).

Table 7.*One-way ANOVA for ECARQ (mother version) as per the case of crisis*

| | | Sum Squares | of df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------|----------------|------|------|
| Warmth | Between groups | 43.40 | 2 | 21.70 | 1.30 | .275 |
| | Within groups | 4486.82 | 268 | 16.74 | | |
| | Total | 4530.22 | 270 | | | |
| Indifference | Between groups | 13.10 | 2 | 6.55 | .74 | .477 |
| | Within groups | 2365.86 | 268 | 8.83 | | |
| | Total | 2378.97 | 270 | | | |
| Hostility/Rejection | Between groups | 35.75 | 2 | 17.87 | .52 | .595 |
| | Within groups | 9199.78 | 268 | 34.33 | | |
| | Total | 9235.53 | 270 | | | |

Table 8.*One-way ANOVA for ECARQ (father version) as per the case of crisis*

| | | Sum Squares | of df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Warmth | Between groups | 101.63 | 2 | 50.82 | 2.03 | .134 |
| | Within groups | 6600.98 | 26 | 25.10 | | |
| | Total | 6702.62 | 265 | | | |
| Indifference | Between groups | 97.26 | 2 | 48.63 | 4.01 | .019 |
| | Within groups | 3192.15 | 263 | 12.14 | | |
| | Total | 3289.41 | 265 | | | |
| Hostility/Rejection | Between groups | 3.19 | 2 | 1.59 | .04 | .957 |
| | Within groups | 9544.04 | 263 | 36.29 | | |
| | Total | 9547.22 | 265 | | | |

Through further analyses (Multiple comparisons tests, LSD/Tamhane) the results reveal statistically significant differences only for the paternal Indifference scale (Table 9) as following:

(a) In the perceived paternal Indifference scale, among families facing unemployment and families facing divorce/separation ($p = 0.010$), where children of divorced parents perceived their fathers as more indifferent, than children coming from families with unemployment.

(b) In the perceived paternal Indifference scale, among families dealing with immigration and families dealing with divorce/separation ($p = 0.017$), where children of divorced parents also perceived their fathers as more indifferent, than children coming from families with immigration.

Table 9.

Multiple comparisons (LSD/Tamhane) for the Indifference scale of ECARQ (father version) as per the crisis case

| Dependable Variable | Crisis case (I) | Crisis case (J) | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------|-------------|
| Indifference (father) | Unemployment | Divorce/separation | -1.37 | .52 | .010 |
| | Unemployment | Immigration | .11 | .53 | .830 |
| | Divorce/separation | Immigration | 1.48 | .62 | .017 |

DISCUSSION

The present research attempted to study Greek preschool children's perceptions of maternal and paternal acceptance and rejection, when their families struggle with specific cases of crisis (unemployment, divorce/separation, moving or immigration for work-related reasons). In general, the participants' mothers and fathers of the specific sample seem to provide their children with high rates of warmth (mean of maternal Warmth scale=32.08, mean of paternal Warmth scale=31.36). At the same time, they were shown to provide their children with low rates of indifference (mean of maternal Indifference scale=9.73, mean of paternal Indifference scale=9.85) and hostility or rejection (mean of maternal Hostility/Rejection scale=16.12, mean of paternal Hostility/Rejection scale=15.5). This data confirms conclusions of relevant research concerning the close relationships in the Greek family, especially for young children (Georgas, 2002; Giotsa, 1999, 2019; Giotsa & Mitrogiorgou, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2016; Giotsa & Touloumakkos, 2014, 2016; Mylonas et al., 2006; Theodoropoulos, 2017; Tsaousis et al., 2012). Proceeding to the review of the research hypotheses, the results did not reveal any statistically significant differences by the participants' gender, concerning the maternal and paternal Warmth, Indifference and Hostility/Rejection scales. Consequently, the first research hypothesis, that boys would perceive their parents as less warm and/or more indifferent or hostile than girls, is rejected. Although previous research (Chung et al., 2008; Demetriou & Christouliides, 2006; Giotsa et al., 2016; Kausar & Kasmi, 2011; Theodoropoulos, 2017; Theodoropoulos & Giotsa, 2020) concluded that girls tend to perceive their parents as warmer,

compared to boys, it is important to mention that they were mostly based on samples of older children than the ones participating in the present research.

Furthermore, comparing the perceptions of maternal and paternal warmth, the results revealed that the mothers seem to be perceived as warmer than fathers. At the same time, though, the children evaluated their mothers with statistically significantly higher rates in the Hostility/Rejection scale than their fathers. Consequently, the second research hypothesis is partially confirmed, as children indeed perceive mothers as warmer than fathers, but they do not perceive fathers as more indifferent or hostile than mothers.

Even though this finding could be characterized as contradictory, the statistically significantly higher rates of maternal Warmth and Hostility/Rejection may be attributed to the fact that, in all crisis cases (unemployment, divorce/separation and immigration), the majority of the children of the sample spend more time with their mothers. Additionally, this conclusion may be associated with the members' roles within the family, as it is suggested in relevant literature (Georgas, 1997, 1999; Georgas, 1989, 1991; Georgas et al., 1996; Georgas & Mylonas, 2006; Giotsa, 1999; Giotsa & Mitrogiorgou, 2014c; Papadimou, 1999) that modern Greek families tend to reject traditional, hierarchical roles of the father, who had in the past complete control over the rest of the family, following very strict rules and using authoritarian methods. Moreover, focusing on the results concerning the families in crisis, statistically significant differences were identified only in the scale of paternal Indifference, indicating that in families dealing with divorce/separation fathers are perceived as more indifferent, compared to fathers in families facing either unemployment or immigration. According to this result, the third (In cases of unemployment, children will perceive higher levels of warmth from the unemployed parent, with whom they spend more time) and fifth (In cases of immigration/moving, children will perceive the parent who lives with them as more affectionate, but at the same time will not perceive the moving parent as more indifferent or hostile) research hypotheses, are rejected. However, the fourth research hypothesis, that in cases of divorce/separation, children would perceive the parent who does not live with them as less warm and more indifferent, is partially confirmed for the Indifference scale.

The findings, regarding the perceived paternal indifference, are likely to be related to the fact that the fathers of the sample are the ones who tend to be away from the children for long periods of time, either due to immigration or divorce/separation. As it is mentioned in relevant literature (Booth et al., 2010; Dush et al., 2011; Flouri, 2006; Giotsa & Mitrogiorgou, 2016; King & Sobolewski, 2006), when there are changes in the familial context, often one of the parents tends to take full care of the children. It may be perceived as indifference by the side of the other parent, as the communication with the absent parent is decreased.

Finally, it is very interesting to find that in cases of divorce/separation, children perceive their fathers as more indifferent, even compared to cases of immigration, when the father tends to be absent for perhaps longer periods of time. This finding may be linked to the limited research data found in the literature, on this type of family, according to which, in this case, the

communication with the absent parent is maintained and fully supported by the present parent (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016).

Concluding, it is obvious that parental divorce/separation is the case of family crisis to be related the most with the perceived parental acceptance and rejection. Having to do with a sensitive age group, the preschool children, the perception of higher rates of paternal indifference, in divorce/separation cases, underline the importance of the relationship between father and child, even if the father does not live in the same house anymore. What is more, as this research focuses on an early stage of the child's development, we should highlight the importance of an early intervention, in cases of family distress or destabilization. Prevention, building young child's resilience in crisis, as well as an early intervention, could be the key to overcome difficulties in a more effective way.

As for the limitations of the present study, it is obvious that we should not generalize the results for the Greek population, especially due to the sample's geographical allocation (Table 1). What is more, we focused on limited family crisis cases, unemployment, divorce/separation and migration. It would be really interesting to study further family crisis cases in the future, focusing also in different children's age groups. Additionally, the father's role in the couple and in the modern Greek family, as well as the dynamics created in new family types are some interesting future directions in the research of interpersonal acceptance and rejection in Greece.

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