



## FAMILY AND LEISURE: PARENTS' VIEWS ON THEIR CHILDREN'S LEISURE TIME AND THEIR ROLE IN IT

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### **Abstract:**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the views of parents on issues of managing their children's leisure time, and in particular, to investigate the participation of parents themselves in the leisure time of their children. According to the results of the research, the organization and planning of children's leisure are based on two main principles. The first concerns the involvement of children in creative activities that offer them pleasure and the second principle concerns investing in activities that will strengthen their educational capital. Parents seek to create a supportive environment that encourages the effective use of free time in a variety of ways. As a framework for family interaction, the family's free time includes daily activities, sports interests, and also outings and excursions. Our research has shown that parents spend most of their personal free time on family responsibilities and the degree of their participation varies according to the age group and gender of the parent. However, mothers and fathers with the highest level of education, parents aged 20-40 and parents with children in lower school classes participate more in the children's free time.

**Keywords:** family leisure, extracurricular leisure, leisure time, parental involvement

### **1. Introduction**

Leisure time is considered a framework for learning opportunities (Opic & Duranovic, 2014), psychosocial development and socialization of children and adolescents (McHale, Crouter & Tucker, 2001). It is also a framework for the development of social - communication skills (Bartko & Eccles, 2002), and a framework allowing for relaxation from daily stress (Shannon, 2006). It also works as a framework for parent-child

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interaction, enhancing family cohesion (Schwab & Dustin, 2015; Melton, 2017; Harrington, 2015).

Family time is one of the most important factors that contribute to family cohesion and at the same time indicates the healthy development and socialization of children (Schwab & Dustin, 2015). The role of parents has emerged as a dominant factor influencing children's leisure choices (Shannon, 2006; Shannon & Shaw, 2008; Pereira, 2011; Wheeler, 2014; Arisoy & Tutkun 2012; Gracia, 2015). In the context of leisure, parents and children sharing common activities and common interests reflect the parental roles and the meaning that the family gives them (Shaw, 2008). In particular, family leisure is considered a framework for developing and maintaining positive interaction as well as shaping quality relationships between children and parents (Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Turtiainen, Karvonen & Rahkonen, 2007). It is also a framework for the healthy development and socialization of children (Schwab & Dustin, 2015), and for the creation of pleasant experiences (Daly, 2001).

Parental involvement in children's leisure has two dimensions. On the one hand, they are involved as guides in the children's leisure activities, and on the other hand, they participate in these activities with their children. Therefore, on the one hand, they influence their children's choices and enhance their interests, while on the other hand, they organize and fund leisure activities and act as role models for their children (Wheeler, 2014).

Regarding the first dimension, the role of parents emerges as a dominant factor influencing children's leisure choices (Pereira, 2011, Shannon, 2006). In fact, in many cases, parents recognize that their desire to encourage, strengthen and help children to develop interests in their free time, is an important component of the overall upbringing they want to give them, and the role models they want to set for them (Shannon & Shaw, 2008). The support and guidance that parents provide to their children in terms of leisure activities are associated with their role as organizers and financiers of the activities alongside their responsibility, for moving the children to leisure sites (Wheeler, 2014). In summary, parents are involved in their children's free time as they share common activities in the context of family leisure.

Regarding the second dimension of parental involvement in children's leisure time, it is indisputable that parents and children share common activities and common interests in their leisure time. These common activities can be classified in different ways and evaluated accordingly.

### **1.1 Family leisure activities models**

One model (Orthner, 1975) divides them into two major categories depending on their location. On the one hand, the activities that take place within the narrow context of the home space, and on the other, those that take place in the wider context of outdoor spaces outside the home. The activities are also classified into two additional categories based on the degree of interaction between family members. The first category consists of activities that require great interaction between the participating members (Joint), while

the second category, e.g. watching TV, is one in which many or all family members can be involved without interacting specifically with one another (Parallel).

Another model for categorizing leisure activities is that of Zabriskie, & McCormick (2001), and is called the Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning. Here leisure activities are divided into "Core", i.e. daily activities such as family meals, which are characterized by stability and intimacy and enhance family cohesion. On the other hand, the Balance activities entail new and innovative experiences, such as those which accompany family trips and travel as well as participation in cultural events. These activities meet the needs of family members regarding a change in environment and daily routine (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001).

A more recent model for categorizing family leisure activities is the one proposed by Melton (2017), which incorporates the basic theoretical dimensions of the two previous models. This is the "Family Activity Model (FAM)", which divides family leisure activities into four categories. These combine both differences in the environment of activities (Core & Balance Model) proposed by Zabriskie & McCormick (2001), and differences in the degree of family interaction when the members are involved in leisure activities (Joint & Parallel) proposed by Orthner (1975) and (Melton, 2017).

The categories of the Melton (2017) model were as follows: First Core - Joint, i.e. activities that take place in a familiar environment and family members interact strongly with each other. Second Balance - Joint, i.e. activities that take place in a new environment and are characterized by high interaction. Thirdly Core - Parallel, which includes activities in a familiar environment but with low interaction between the participants, such as watching TV, and finally, Balance - Parallel which consists of activities that the family enjoys in a new environment, but which are not characterized by particularly high interaction.

## **1.2 The influence of the socio-economic status, and the level of education of the parents on the free time of the children**

Family leisure is not an isolated field of family action, but is directly linked to the social context and social relations, broadening the field of research, and increasing the interest of many researchers (McCabe, 2015).

Many studies have focused on how parents' education, type of employment and socioeconomic status can affect the family's leisure time and the experiences they share (Bourdieu, 1983; Wight, Price, Bianchi, Hunt, 2009; Zeijl et al., 2000; Craig, 2006b; Arisoy & Tutkun, 2012; Hille, Arnold, & Schupp, 2014; Gracia, 2015). Middle-class parents promote more organized activities, that improve and develop their children's autonomy skills, while low-income parents engage in less organized activities and emphasize family cohesion and companionship (Harrington, 2002, 2015).

A study of teenagers found that the way they manage and organize their free time often depends on the family context. Parental characteristics, such as level of education, as well as work and income may guide adolescents' choices towards certain leisure activities that are pleasant to parents, are mainly related to homework, and depend on the restriction of television viewing (Wight, Price, Bianchi, Hunt, 2009). The higher the

level of education of the parents, the more guidance they give regarding children's leisure activities. Specific structured activities for educational purposes are usually preferred (Thoidis, 2000; Arisoy & Tutkun, 2012). When parents have higher education, it seems that they invest more time in activities related to the development of human capital, i.e. in the development of skills and abilities that will ensure children a better working future (Craig, 2006b). Parents with a higher level of education tend to spend more time with their children, sacrificing their personal time (England & Srivastava, 2013).

### **1.3 The gender of the parent**

Mothers play a central role in organizing and shaping children's free time, while fathers are more involved in outdoor activities at weekends.

Apart from the amount of time that parents dedicate to their children, a very important factor is the quality of the time that is given to them, which is determined by the activities they engage in. The mothers who participated in a study stressed that daily activities, such as family meals, short walks and similar routine activities, serve the same multiple purposes, such as interaction and communication with their children, the opportunity to share experiences and offer advice and guidance, and the transmission of important family values (Tubbs, Roy & Burton, 2005).

According to research data, mothers spend more time with their children, have the responsibility for organizing and planning their free time, as well as taking care of homework (Thoidis, 2000; Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Sayer et al., 2004; Craig, 2006a; Folbre & Yoon, 2007; Shaw, 2008).

Fathers usually participate in the children's leisure time at weekends, mainly in sports and outdoor activities (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth, 2001; Brotherson, Dollahite & Hawkins, 2005; Harrington, 2006).

Specifically with younger children, family meals are highlighted by both parents and children as one of the most common family activities, as these create a pleasant and highly constructive atmosphere, offering moments of relaxation, laughter, discussion and exchange of views between family members (Turtiainen et al., 2007; Jayne, Fulkerson, Story, Neumark-Sztainer, Rydell, 2008). Outdoor activities that do not fall into the daily routine of the family, such as excursions and trips during the holidays, and also visits to various attractions and museums, seem to have a positive effect on both children and parents as well as the family as a whole.

## **2. Method**

The aim of the current research was to investigate parents' perceptions of their children's leisure time and their role in it. Firstly, an attempt was made to investigate the views of parents on issues related to the management of their children's leisure time and the role they play in the planning and organization of leisure activities for their children. Furthermore, the goal was the examination of family leisure time activities and the satisfaction that comes from the free time that parents and children share.

Based on the previous literature review, the following research questions were formulated:

- a) How do parents participate in their children's free time (advice, stimuli, discussion, accompaniment to activities)?
- b) What is the opinion of parents about their children's free time and how do parents wish their children to use their free time?
- c) What kind of activities and interests does family leisure include and what degree of satisfaction do parents gain from them?
- d) What is the involvement of parents in children's homework and what are the views on the importance of children's learning resources in their spare time?
- e) Whether, and to what extent, do the family members share time and activities in family?

All of the above questions are also considered in terms of the individual characteristics of parents such as gender, age and work.

## 2.1 Participants

The research involved 300 parents in Western Macedonia, a Greek region with children at each of the three levels of education (primary school, middle school, and high school).

**Table 1:** Demographic description of participants ( $n = 300$ )

Parental Data	Gender	Male	132	44%
		Female	168	56%
	Age	20-30	7	2.4%
		31-40	138	46%
		41+	151	50.3%
	Fathers Education	Junior/Secondary school	20	15.4%
		6th Form/Technical college	58	44.6%
		Higher/University Ed.	52	40%
	Mothers Education	Junior/Secondary school	20	11.8%
		6th Form/Technical college	78	45.9%
Higher/University Ed.		72	42.3%	
Employment Status of Parents	A parent	128	42.7%	
	Two parents	172	57.3%	
Children's Data	Child's gender	Boy	153	51%
		Girl	147	49%
	School Level	Primary school	202	67.3%
		Middle school	61	20.3%
		High school	37	12.4%

## 2.2 Instruments

To conduct the research, a structured written questionnaire was constructed based on a relevant study by Furtner - Kallmünzer, Hössl, Janke, Kellermann & Lipski (2002), entitled "In der Freizeit for the living. A Study on the Interests of Schulkindern" and the Family Leisure Activity Profile (FLAP), and the Family Leisure Satisfaction Scale (FLSS) by Zabriskie & McCormick (2001).

The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part includes questions about parents' involvement in their children's leisure time, whether that involvement is in homework, or other leisure activities. It also explores their agreement on how to make use of it and their personal wishes for their children's free time. The second part concerns the family leisure time, i.e. the common interests and common activities that the family shares, and the satisfaction that results from their participation in them. Five (5) closed-ended questions were used in which a 5-point Likert scale was used (0 = never, 1 = rare, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = always). The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was good (Cronbach's alpha = .86).

### **2.3 Procedure**

The research (survey) was conducted during the period from June 2017 until December of the same year. The representativeness of the sample was sought through its random selection.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1 How parents participate in children's free time**

In order to examine whether the subjective assessments of the participants regarding their participation in the children's leisure time, are dictated by some latent factors, an exploratory principal component analysis (with varimax rotation) was applied. The analysis revealed two factors with eigenvalues above one, which explained 62.2% of the total variance. The value of Bartlett's sphericity was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and Kaiser sampling adequacy measurement was acceptable ( $p > 0.50$ ). The factors made sense and highlighted the structure of the questionnaire. The first factor (F1) was named "Enhancing Environment", accounted for 44.4% of the total variance (five items,  $\alpha = .83$ ). The second factor (F2) accounted for 17.8% of the total variance (two items,  $\alpha = .40$ ). This factor was named "Restrictive Environment".

Then, to evaluate the reproduction of the factors, two-factor analyses were performed with orthogonal rotation of the Varimax type axes. The orthogonal rotation was chosen as the simplest case, based on the assumption of independent factors that maximized the difference between high and low loads on the same factor, and facilitated the interpretation of the structure. However, a side axis rotation was applied on the basis that the factors were related, which gave the exact same structure with relatively different loads of questions. The application of the two factors satisfied a number of criteria: (a) the satisfactory rate of variation interpreted by each factor; (b) the rate chart is declined after the second factor c) this solution has a pedagogical meaning and is compatible with the existing theoretical approaches that refer to the parental involvement in the out-of-school time of the children. The mean score for each factor and subscale was calculated to examine possible individual differences. The factors with the corresponding sentences and charges are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Factor analysis carried out on responses regarding parental participation in children's leisure

Items	Factor	
	1	2
Discussion	.810	
Stimuli & tips	.810	
Recognition	.790	
Provision of knowledge	.784	
Escort	.740	
Prohibition of activity		.789
Non-support of high-cost activities		.778
Percentage of explicable variance	44.4%	17.8%
Eigenvalues	3.11	1.24

\*All loading factors under .400 are missing

Regarding gender, a statistically significant difference was observed through the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test, in Factor 1: Enhancing Environment ( $U = 7557.5$ ,  $Z = -4.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ). There was a statistically significant difference between women ( $M. = 3.5$ ,  $S.D. = .69$ ) and men ( $M. = 3.03$ ,  $S.D. = .52$ ). Mothers are more supportive of children's out-of-school activities than fathers. Regarding fathers' education, a statistically significant difference was observed through the non-parametric Kruskal Wallis analysis, in Factor 1: Reinforcing Environment ( $\chi^2 (2) = 17.59$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The fathers with the highest level of education ( $M. = 3.33$ ,  $S.D. = .52$ ) agreed significantly more than the others (Elementary/High School:  $M. = 2.76$ ,  $S.D. = .57$ , Lyceum / Technical School:  $M. = 2.81$ ,  $S.D. = .13$ ).

### 3.2 Parents opinions on the use of children's free time

Parents wanted their children's free time to include activities that pleased them "I want him to do what pleases him" ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = .68$ ), and activities that contribute to their educational capital "I want him to do something that will help him succeed later" ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = .87$ ). Parents also monitored the people involved in the free time of their children "I monitor where and with whom he/she spends his/her free time" ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .82$ ).

The suggestions that "their children in their free time prefer having their own area without the adults interfering" ( $M = 1.74$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) scored an average of below 2. The statement that the parents had a "lack of time for engaging in the free time of their children " also gained a low average score of two ( $M. = 1.11$ ,  $SD = .98$ ).

The same score was gained for the statement that "I have no time for the free time of my child " ( $M = 0.77$ ,  $SD = .92$ ).

**Table 3:** Parents opinions on the use of children's free time

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I want him to do what pleases him.	3.38	.686
I want him do something that will help him succeed later.	3.32	.877
I monitor where and with whom he / she spends his / her free time.	3.30	.818
I show that I am interested in his leisure activities.	3.24	.764
I'm happy with how my child spends his free time.	3.17	.713
I want him to do something meaningful.	3.15	.850
I prefer him to do whatever he wants, as long as it is not dangerous / forbidden.	2.42	1.14
He wants to have his own separate space.	1.74	1.04
I have no time for my child's free time.	1.11	.982
He does whatever he wants and often I don't know what he's doing.	0.77	.918

With respect to the gender of the parent, the parametric T-Test showed statistically significant differences between the statements "the child in his free time does what he wants and often I don't know what he's doing" [(male:  $M = 1.00$ ,  $SD = .89$ , female:  $M = .58$ ,  $SD = .89$ ),  $t(292) = 3.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ] and "I have no time at all for my child's free time" [(male:  $M = 1.32$ ,  $SD = .93$ , female:  $M = .95$ ,  $SD = .99$ ),  $t(295) = 3.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. The fathers reported a greater degree of agreement with the statements than the mothers.

Mothers differed from fathers in regard to "monitoring where and with whom their children spend their free time" [(male:  $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = .83$ , female:  $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = .77$ ),  $t(296) = -4.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ] but also in regard to "interest showing to their children's activities" [(male:  $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = .71$ , female:  $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = .79$ ),  $t(297) = -2.79$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. In the above statements mothers reported a greater degree of agreement in comparison to fathers.

Regarding the relationship between parents' age and their views on their children's leisure time, both the T-Test test and the Mann-Whitney non-parametric test, showed statistically significant differences between parents aged 20 to 40 and parents over 40.

In particular, statistically significant differences were noted in response to the statements "I show that I am interested in his leisure activities" [(20 to 40:  $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = .75$ , over 40:  $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = .87$ ),  $t(293) = 3.37$ ,  $p < .05$ ], "I want him to do what pleases him" [(20 to 40:  $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = .60$ , over 40:  $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = .74$ ),  $U = 8560.5$ ,  $Z = -3.40$ ,  $p < .05$ ], "I watch where and with whom he spends his free time" [(20 to 40:  $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = .75$ , over 40:  $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = .87$ ), ( $U = 9068.5$ ,  $Z = -2.61$ ,  $p < .05$ )] and "I am happy with how my child spends his free time" [(20 to 40:  $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = .71$ , over 40:  $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = .70$ ), ( $U = 8559.0$ ,  $Z = -3.49$ ,  $p < .05$ )]. Parents in the 20 - 40 age group had higher, more statistically significant, average scores in response to the above statements, than parents in the older age group. Parents over 41 years of age reported greater agreement with the statement "I have no time for my child's free time" [(20 to 40:  $M = .90$ ,  $SD = .92$ , over 40:  $M = 1.31$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ),  $t(291) = -3.63$ ,  $p < .05$ ], and "he does what he wants and I often do not know what it is" than parents over 41 [(20 to 40:  $M = .53$ ,  $SD = .74$ , over 40:  $M = 1.00$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ), ( $U = 7667.5$ ,  $Z = -4.33$ ,  $p < .05$ )]. This difference was statistically significant.

ANOVA analysis showed that the class that their child attended also influenced the differences in parent's responses. Significant differences arose in parent's response to



the statement concerning the monitoring of where and with whom their child spends his free time [(primary school:  $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ , middle school and high school:  $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = .87$ ),  $F(2,295) = 10.46$ ,  $p < .05$ ], and the interest shown by parents in their free time [(primary school:  $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ , middle school and high school:  $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = .84$ ),  $F(2,296) = 6.85$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. Parents with primary school children agreed more with these statements than parents with children in middle school and high school.

### 3.3 Family leisure activities and the satisfaction they derive from them

Regarding the activities that compose the family leisure time, the answers of the parents' responses showed that "family meals" were the activity from which they received the greatest satisfaction ( $M = 3.02$ ). After that, the most satisfying activities were identified in the following order as, "family vacations" ( $M = 2.97$ ), the "monitoring of activities of family members" ( $M = 2.54$ ), the "visits of friends and neighbors" ( $M = 2.24$ ), the "religious and spiritual activities", such as the participation in the holy service ( $M = 2.13$ ), "television watching" ( $M = 2.12$ ), "board games" ( $M = 2.07$ ) and "outside games" ( $M = 2.01$ ), "eating out" ( $M = 1.80$ ), "adventurous sports activities" ( $M = 1.70$ ), "attending shows and concerts" ( $M = 1.53$ ) and the "museum visits" ( $M = 1.48$ ).

Regarding the statistically significant differences observed between the two sexes of the parents, the T-Test test showed statistically significant differences in the activities "family meals" [ $t(294) = -2.45$ ,  $p < .05$ ], and "outside games" [ $t(294) = -2.64$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. In these activities, the mothers seemed significantly more satisfied with their participation, than the fathers.

The same test showed statistically significant differences in the responses of parents in different age groups with parents aged 20 to 40 having significantly higher averages than parents aged 41 and over, for the following items: more specifically, in family meals [ $t(290) = 2.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ], in outdoor games [ $t(292) = 4.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ], in outside games [ $t(290) = 6.11$ ,  $p < .05$ ], monitoring the activities of family members [ $t(289) = 3.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ], visiting friends / neighbors [ $t(292) = 4.46$ ,  $p < .05$ ], eating out [ $t(291) = 3.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ], in museum visits [ $t(290) = 2.67$ ,  $p < .05$ ], theatrical performances and concerts [ $t(291) = 2.67$ ,  $p < .05$ ] and also in adventurous sports activities [ $t(292) = 2.03$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

Regarding parents' education and the satisfaction, they felt from participating in family leisure activities, the ANOVA analysis showed statistically significant differences in their responses to the following activities: "family meals" ( $F(2,127) = 8.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ), "visits to museums / archeological sites" ( $F(2,126) = 3.37$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and "family excursions / vacations" ( $F(2,125) = 3.97$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Fathers with the highest level of education stated that they participated more often in the above activities than fathers with high school/technical school education. In addition, according to ANOVA analysis and Kruskal Wallis non-parametric analysis, statistically significant differences were found between the responses of parents with different levels of education in relation to the following items "outside games" ( $F(2,295) = 8.43$ ,  $p < .05$ ) "outdoor games" ( $F(2,293) = 11.41$ ,  $p < .05$ ), monitoring the activities of family members ( $\chi^2(2) = 17.006$ ,  $p < .05$ ), visiting friends / neighbors ( $F(2,295) = 4.44$ ,  $p < .05$ ), "eating out" ( $F(2,294) = 4.74$ ,  $p < .05$ ), museum visits ( $F(2,293) = 4.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and theatrical performances / concerts ( $F(2,294) = 6.04$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

<.05) and "adventurous sports activities" ( $F(2,295) = 3.51, p < .05$ ). In all previous family activities, the parents of primary school children were more satisfied with their participation than the others.

### 3.4 Involvement of parents in arranging children's homework

A significant part of the children's free time outside the school was occupied by homework from school. The statement "check whether he has done the school work" gathered the highest average ( $M = 3.08, SD = 1.15$ ). The statement with the next highest average ( $M = 3.07, SD = .87$ ), was the "discussion of school issues". The next highest average ( $M = 2.64, SD = 1.07$ ) was "help with homework" and the statement that "the child is preparing for school on his own" ( $M = 2.63, SD = 1.17$ ). Conflicts over homework collected the lowest average ( $M = 1.67, SD = 1.06$ ).

In order to identify gender differences between parents concerning the children's homework, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test was applied. The test showed statistically significant differences between the statements: "help with children's homework" ( $U = 8745.0, Z = -3.26, p < .05$ ), "child screening for homework" ( $U = 8172.0, Z = -4.22, p < .05$ ) and "discussion between parents and children about school issues" ( $U = 8593.0, Z = -3.30, p < .05$ ). For all these statements, the mothers appeared with statistically more significant averages in comparison to the fathers.

Regarding the ages of the parents and their participation in the children's homework, the T-Test parametric control and the Mann-Whitney non-parametric control showed statistically significant differences between the statements "discussion on school issues" [ $t(291) = 2.99, p < .05$ ], "homework help" ( $U = 8128.5, Z = -3.98, p < .05$ ) and "homework check" ( $U = 7550.5, Z = -4.97, p < .05$ ). Parents aged 20 to 40 agreed significantly more on the above statements, than parents aged 41 and over. A statistically significant difference was also observed for the statement "the child prepares himself for school" ( $U = 7836, Z = -4.30, p < .05$ ) where the older parents (41 years and over) agreed significantly more than the younger ones (20 up to 40 years).

Regarding the children's classes and the parents' answers, there were statistically significant differences between the statements: "help with homework" ( $\chi^2(2) = 22.53, p < .05$ ), "control of children for homework assignments" ( $\chi^2(2) = 58.22, p < .05$ ) and "discussion on school issues" ( $\chi^2(2) = 20.20, p < .05$ ). For the above statements, the parents with children in primary school classes agreed significantly more. A statistically significant difference was also observed in the statement "the child prepares himself for school" ( $\chi^2(2) = 33.09, p < .05$ ), where the parents with children in high school agreed significantly more than the parents of middle and elementary school children.

Regarding the differences in the work situation between families, families in which both parents worked had statistically significant differences from families in which one parent worked, in regard to the statement "control of homework", where the second group scored higher averages ( $M = 3.27, SD = .986$ ) than the first group which scored ( $M = 2.94, SD = 1.243$ ), ( $U = 9544.5, Z = -2.13, p < .05$ ).

Regarding the independent variable of the child's gender, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test showed a statistically significant difference for the statement

concerning "conflicts for homework" ( $U = 9688.5$ ,  $Z = -2.16$ ,  $p < .05$ ). For the above statement the parents of boys agreed significantly more ( $M = 1.78$ ,  $SD = .993$ ) than the parents of girls ( $M = 1.54$ ,  $SD = 1.124$ ).

Regarding the statement concerning the "discussion with children about school issues", the analysis of variance showed a statistically significant difference between fathers with the highest level of education, who agreed more with the statement, than fathers who had a high school/ technical education and fathers who had high school / technical education ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) who had completed compulsory education ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = .94$ ), [ $F(2,127) = 7.66$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

### 3.5 Share time and activities in family

Regarding the question in which it was investigated whether within the family its members try to share time and activities, the parents answered more often that they prefer "to spend their free time with each other" ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = .81$ ), "to do things together" ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = .75$ ) and "to share hobbies and activities in their free time" ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = .85$ ). The proposal concerning "the difficulty of thinking about activities" to share as a family ( $M = 1.17$ ,  $SD = .91$ ).

Regarding the differences that arose in the parent gender, the T-Test test showed a significant difference in the sentence "family members share interests and hobbies" [ $t(296) = -2.75$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. Women had a higher mean ( $M = 2.68$ ,  $SD = .87$ ) with a significant difference from men ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = .793$ ). Mann-Whitney non-parametric control also showed a statistically significant difference in the sentence "family members prefer to spend their free time together" ( $U = 8837.0$ ,  $Z = -3.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ), as well as women ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = .773$ ) agreed significantly more than men ( $M = 2.7$ ,  $SD = .835$ ).

Parents' education and its relationship to their views on the existence of family leisure were examined through ANOVA analysis. Specifically, in all the sentences of the question, statistically significant differences were identified between the levels of education of the fathers. The fathers with the highest level of education showed higher averages than the others in the sentences: "family members do things together" [ $F(2,127) = 5.73$ ,  $p < .05$ ], "family members share interests and hobbies" ( $F(2,127) = 6.52$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and "family members spend their personal free time with other members of their family" [ $F(2,127) = 5.43$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

Regarding the age of the parents, statistically significant differences were observed in the sentences "family members do things together" ( $U = 8776.5$ ,  $Z = -3.005$ ,  $p < .05$ ), "family members share interests and hobbies" [ $t(292) = 3.59$ ,  $p < .05$ ] and "family members prefer to spend their free time together" ( $U = 8151.0$ ,  $Z = -4.009$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In the above sentences the parents from 20 up to 40 years old differed statistically significantly, recording higher averages compared to parents 41 years old and older.

There were statistically significant differences in the views of parents with children in different classes of compulsory and non-compulsory education. Specifically, the ANOVA variance analysis showed a statistically significant difference in the proposal regarding how often their family members share interests and hobbies ( $F(2,295) = 6.68$ ,  $p$

<.05), with a higher average showing the parents with primary school children ( $M = 2.69$ ), followed by the parents of lyceum ( $M = 2.32$ ) and high school children ( $M = 2.30$ ).

A statistically significant difference was noted in the sentence which was related to the difficulty they may face in thinking of things they can do as a family [ $F(2, 295) = 5.66, p < .05$ ], where on average the parents of the children in high school ( $M = 1.43$ ) and lyceum ( $M = 1.42$ ) had a greater difficulty and less the parents of primary school children ( $M = 1.05$ ). Kruskal Wallis non-parametric analysis showed a statistically significant difference in the frequency with which the family in their free time does things together, ( $\chi^2(2) = 8.62, p < .05$ ), with the parents of children attending high school ( $M = 2.89$ ) and primary school ( $M = 2.86$ ) to collect higher averages in relation to the parents of children attending high school ( $M = 2.55$ ). Also, the same analysis showed a statistically significant difference in the frequency with which parents and children prefer to spend their free time together, [ $\chi^2(2) = 14.50, p < .05$ ], where parents with children in primary school ( $M = 2.97$ ) showed a higher average ( $M = 2.97$ ) compared to other parents with children in high school ( $M = 2.78$ ) and high school ( $M = 2.49$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

Regarding the first research question, based on the parent's subjective perception (as to the most suitable) of the type of parental involvement in children's leisure time, the analysis revealed two groups of parents. The first is called "Enhancing Environment" and the second "Restrictive Environment". The first group of parents, "Enhancing Environment", appeared to participate mainly through the knowledge, stimuli and advice they provided to their children about leisure activities. They gave their children recognition when they succeeded in leisure activity and took responsibility for moving to activities that involved them. This means that this group of parents, as Wheeler (2014) argues, take on the role of mentor of their child's activities through organization, funding, transportation, and as shown by the present research, encouragement, discussion and the provision of knowledge and advice. The second group of parents "Restrictive Environment" didn't allow their children to participate in more costly leisure activities and they prohibited activities with which they didn't agree. Differences in mother-gender and father-education were observed in relation to the supportive environment. Mothers mainly took responsibility for planning and organizing the children's free time and the family, devoting more time to the children.

Regarding the second research question, about parents' views on how their children manage their free time, it seems that most parents are happy with the way their children use their free time. The research showed two dominant trends in parents' desires regarding how their children used free time. In regard to the first trend, the parents encouraged their children's participation in activities that met their needs for pleasure. In regard to the second trend, parents encourage activities which helped children to cultivate skills which would allow them to secure a better future. As in other research, the majority of parents want their children's free time to be structured with activities that cultivate knowledge and skills, thus promoting structured activities that take place in

organized contexts, which contribute to the psychosocial development of children (Fletcher et al., 2003; McHale et al. 2000). These activities should also contribute to achieving higher academic performance and providing opportunities for the development of leadership and collaborative relationships (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000).

The activities that make up family leisure time were mainly daily activities such as family meals, board games and watching TV. The only activities that seemed to stand out from the others within the family's daily routine, were family vacations and excursions. In the present study, the parent's preferences for simple, everyday activities, were in line with several other studies. In these studies, activities which fell into the family's daily routine, such as watching T.V, offered opportunities for relaxation, interaction and communication and created a pleasant atmosphere among members without great financial burden (Tubbs, 2005; Turtiainen et al., 2007; Turtiainen & Jayn, 2008; Schwab & Dustin, 2015). At the same time, family vacations were a pleasant break from obligations and offered opportunities for fun (Gram, 2005; Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Fountain et al., 2015).

Based on the above conclusions about family leisure activities, a connection could be made to the three popular classifications of family activities mentioned. The activities that parents preferred, and felt more satisfied when they participated in, allowed a fairly large degree of interaction between family members (Joint). This was true with the exception of watching TV, which is a more passive activity that does not offer many opportunities for interaction and communication (Parallel). Based on the second categorization of activities by Zabriskie & McCormick (2001), the parents' preference for activities at home was obvious. This was because they preferred activities which fell into the category aimed at family cohesion (Core), including activities such as family vacations and excursions that fall into the second category (Balance), and meet the needs of members for a change of environment. Regarding the latest classification of Melton (2017) which is a combination of the two previous models, the family leisure activities of the present research fall mainly into the first category Core - Joint, i.e. activities that occur in a familiar environment, where there is a high degree of interaction.

Homework represents a special case of parental involvement in children's extracurricular activities. This is a time that is not really free but essentially schooled. Homework takes up a significant portion of the family's free time. The results showed that parents are actively involved in children's homework, mainly through the control they exercise over the child in carrying out the tasks, and also through the discussion between parent and child about school issues. These findings reinforce the results of other research showing that parents not only participate in supporting and encouraging their children during homework (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Wheeler, 2014; Kukka et al., 2015), but they also seek homework and feel great satisfaction participating in this activity because they consider that they contribute to the school progress of their children (Solomon et al., 2002; Thoidis & Chaniotakis, 2008). It was observed that there were differences in the degree of involvement according to the gender and age of the parent: mothers were more involved. Parents aged 20 to 40 engaged in more discussion, gave more help and exercised more control.

The results of the present research are supported by previous research which also showed that parents are interested in and participate in their children's free time, promoting a supportive environment for the effective use of their free time. The supportive environment provided by parents includes their participation in communication practices, through which they promote knowledge and provide advice and stimuli for leisure. Although the majority of parents express their interest and participate in the children's leisure time and also in the family leisure time, there are obvious differences between them. Gender, their own age and the age of the child and their educational level are factors that shape their participation. The mother's participation in both the children's leisure time and the family's leisure time is much more intensive. The findings of the present study support and extend the findings of other studies that have concluded that mothers are primarily responsible for planning and organizing children's leisure time and family, devoting more time to children (Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Sayer et al., 2004; Craig, 2006a; Folbre & Yoon, 2007; Shaw, 2008). Although the fathers' involvement is required to enhance family cohesion (Buswell et al., 2012), research has shown that fathers' involvement is higher when the educational level increases, as more highly educated fathers have higher levels of participation in both leisure time of the children and the family. Another difference between the two genders concerns the activities in which they participate together with their children. Mothers mainly prefer activities that take place at home while fathers mainly prefer outdoor and sports activities. The age of the parents and the children is a factor that influences the participation of the parents in the free time of the children and the family. Younger parents are more interested in their children's leisure time and participate more often in activities with their children. This also seems to be related to the age of the children as younger parents have younger children attending lower classes. As other researchers have concluded, children's ages shape their interests and leisure activities differently. Younger children spend more time with their parents (Zeijl, 2000), while adolescents engage mainly in social activities with friends in order to relax from daily stress (Zeijl, 2000; Shannon, 2006; Opic & Duranovic, 2014) resulting in parents having difficulty planning family leisure activities. The higher the children's class at school is, the lower the level of parental participation in leisure time activities is, as well. Parents of adolescents participate mainly in a supportive rather than an active way (Solomon et al., 2002). Although many studies have concluded that higher parental education is associated with a greater awareness of structured time investment in children's activities related to their educational capital (Harrington, 2002; Craig, 2006b; England & Srivastava, 2013; Wheeler, 2014; Gracia, 2015; Harrington, 2015), there is also greater guidance of children in organized leisure activities related exclusively to themselves (Zeijl, 2000; Wight & Price, 2009; Arisoy & Tutkun, 2012; Hille et al., 2014). In the present study the results agreed only on the degree of the involvement of the father who appeared to be significantly influenced by his level of education and not on the involvement of the mother.

If we wanted to close with an observation, we would say that parents who took part in the research recognize the importance of their children's free time and work in a

supportive way to ensure that this free time is both pleasant and creative for both their present and the future.

One limitation of the current study was that it was conducted in a relatively small sample in specific geographical areas of Greece, thus not permitting the drawing of general conclusions. Yet, the findings could have an impact on current policies and practices regarding family support policies and after-school programs. Moreover, the results have important implications for the creation of a comprehensive all-day school system.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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