



MOTIVATIONS AND BARRIERS TO EMPLOYED WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract:

This study examines the motivations and barriers faced by employed women in the public and private sectors in Greece when participating in Adult Education programs. A mixed-methods research design was adopted. The sample consisted of 200 women (100 from each employment sector), who completed a structured questionnaire, while four semi-structured interviews were conducted to further explore the quantitative findings. The quantitative and qualitative research took place during March–April 2025. The results indicated that women demonstrate a strong willingness for training and professional development despite the multiple barriers they encounter. The main motivations identified were increased financial rewards, professional advancement, broadening intellectual horizons, the desire to serve as role models for their children, and the pursuit of better employment opportunities. The key barriers reported included participation costs, program duration, childcare responsibilities, inconvenient scheduling, and lack of information—barriers largely related to situational and institutional factors.

Keywords: adult education, women in adult education, motivations, barriers, lifelong learning programs

1. Introduction

Adult participation in lifelong learning programs has been the focus of numerous studies, which demonstrate that women, in particular, are motivated by specific factors but also

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face barriers, mainly due to their multiple roles within the family and the workplace (Karalis, 2021, 2024).

According to recent European data from Eurostat (2023, 2024), women in the European Union tend to exhibit slightly higher participation rates in adult education and training programs compared with men, with the difference amounting to approximately one percentage point in favor of womenⁱⁱ. However, this difference is not uniform and varies significantly depending on the type of program, the level of education, and the socioeconomic background. Women tend to participate more frequently in non-formal education and vocational training programs related to their employment needs, while, according to some comparative analyses, men exhibit slightly higher participation rates in formal adult education programs — especially in professional and technical fields (Boeren 2011; OECD, 2023). Furthermore, women's participation appears to be more strongly influenced by social and occupational factors: low socioeconomic background, low educational attainment, unemployment, and temporary employment constitute more significant barriers to their participation in lifelong learning (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009; Boeren, 2011). Women's family responsibilities, particularly childcare, as well as lack of time, are cited as the main reasons for their non-participation in adult education (Stoilova, Boeren & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2023). In the study conducted by Pöyliö and McMullin (2025) in two European countries with high adult education participation rates (the United Kingdom and Finland), it was confirmed that family responsibilities related to the care of young children limit women's participation to a greater extent than men's in both countries. It is further highlighted that the institutional framework of each country affects parents' equitable access to adult education and upskilling opportunities. In Finland, the participation of social groups with limited resources, such as single parents and families with multiple children, is facilitated, whereas in the United Kingdom, participation in formal adult education remains higher among individuals without children or with a stable family situation. The findings underline the importance of institutional arrangements in ensuring equal opportunities for access to educational programs and qualification attainment, and they highlight that women's motivations and barriers to participation in adult education are closely linked to the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of each country.

National-level studies reveal differences in the types of programs in which women participate. For example, a study conducted in the Czech Republic (Vaculíková, Kalenda & Kočvarová, 2020) showed that although men and women participate quantitatively to a similar extent in lifelong learning programs, women tend to focus more on educational activities related to their family responsibilities rather than their professional advancement. In Belgium, the study by Boeren (2011) confirmed that women participate

ⁱⁱ Eurostat reports adult participation in education and training using different indicators. Broader annual participation rates refer to involvement in any formal or non-formal learning activity during the previous 12 months among adults aged 25–64, while the standard lifelong learning indicator—commonly used for cross-country comparisons—measures participation during the four weeks preceding the survey. These indicators refer to the adult population as a whole and are not restricted to employed individuals.

less in both formal and non-formal education programs, mainly due to financial constraints, lack of time, and lower levels of support from their employers.

International studies also point to key factors that hinder women's participation in educational programs, such as patriarchal social structures, male dominance, and gender stereotypes (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022; Stalker, 1998; MacKeracher *et al.*, 2006).

In Greece, Karalis has conducted several studies investigating the motivations and barriers to adult participation in educational programs during the years 2011, 2013, 2016, and 2019. In the 2011 study, the sample consisted exclusively of private sector employees, while in the 2013, 2016, and 2019 studies, the samples included employees from both the public and private sectors (Karalis, 2021). Participation rates among women were found to be at similar levels to those of men, while from 2018 onwards, women participated to a greater extent than men. Across the 2013, 2016 and 2019 studies, it was consistently observed that public sector employees participate more frequently than private sector employees; those reporting sufficient family income show higher participation rates; participation is associated with years of employment; and educational attainment is the factor most strongly correlated with participation in non-formal education programs, with higher education graduates participating more than those with post-secondary/upper secondary or lower secondary education.

According to Eurostat data (2023), in Greece, the overall participation rate of employed women in education and training programs is 4.2%, significantly lower than the European average (12.5%). For unemployed women, the participation rate is 3.5% compared with the European average of 9.3%, while for inactive women it is 1.2%, compared with 5.8% in the EU.

In this context, the investigation of working women's motivations and barriers in Greece acquires particular importance. The present study focuses on the motivations and barriers to participation in adult education programs among working women in the public and private sectors in Greece. A primarily quantitative methodological approach is adopted, based on data collected from 200 questionnaires, complemented by qualitative data from four interviews.

2. Theoretical Framework on Motivations and Barriers

This section provides a concise presentation of the theoretical framework on motivations and barriers to participation in adult education programs on which the present study is based, along with certain adaptations deemed necessary for the purposes of the research.

2.1. Educational Participation Scale - EPS (Boshier)

Houle (1961, 1980) was the first to investigate motivations for participation through a qualitative study involving 22 adult learners, aiming to understand the reasons why adults take part in educational programs. Following the completion of his study, he proposed a typology of adult learners: goal-oriented learners, activity-oriented learners, and learning-oriented learners, each driven by different types of motivations. Tough (1968) later developed the Anticipated Benefits Model. Through his research, he

demonstrated that adults do not participate in a program for a single reason but rather for multiple motivations, with one of his main findings being that learners seek to apply the knowledge they gain from their studies.

Boshier (1971), influenced by Houle, developed the Congruence Model and, based on Houle's typology, created the Educational Participation Scale (EPS), emphasizing not only the types of learners but also the motivations for participation derived from their learning orientations (Boshier, 1971, 1973). Boshier, together with other researchers (Miller, 1992; Gordon *et al.*, 1990), applied the EPS in different populations and adult education contexts, leading to a more recent version of the scale that includes seven motivational factors and several sub-items. Responses are provided on a four-point Likert-type scale, meaning that a neutral option is not available (Boshier, 1991).

The seven motivational factors measured in the EPS are: Communication Improvement, Social Contact, Educational Preparation, Professional Development, Family Togetherness, Social Stimulation, and Interest in Learning.

2.2 Barriers in Adult Education (Cross 1981)

To investigate barriers to participation, the well-established framework developed by Cross (1981) was adopted. Cross argues that learning can become an addictive process, and she categorizes barriers into three types:

- a) **Situational barriers:** These refer to barriers arising from an adult's life circumstances at a specific point in time and include factors such as financial difficulties, lack of time, and childcare responsibilities.
- b) **Institutional barriers:** These relate to organizational policies and structures that discourage or exclude adults from participating in programs, such as scheduling constraints, admission requirements, and limited program availability. Thus, these barriers are connected to the institutions and organizations that provide or regulate adult education opportunities.
- c) **Dispositional barriers:** These involve attitudes toward learning and adults' perceptions of themselves as learners. For instance, older adults may believe they are "too old" to learn, while adults with limited educational backgrounds may doubt their ability to successfully complete a program.

According to Roosmaa and Saar (2016), women tend to face more situational and institutional barriers to participation in adult learning compared to men, but fewer dispositional barriers.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The main purpose of this study was to record the views of employed women in the public and private sectors regarding the motivations and barriers they face when participating in Adult Education programs.

The research questions were:

RQ1: How does employment in the public or private sector influence women's motivations and barriers to participation in educational programs?

RQ2: How do demographic characteristics (marital status, number of children, age, years of employment) affect women's motivations and barriers to participation in educational programs?

3.2 Participants

A total of 204 employed women from both the public and private sectors participated in the study.

Participation of the women who completed the questionnaire (200 participants) and those who took part in the interviews (4 participants) was based on the following criteria:

- 1) being employed in either the public or the private sector,
- 2) being adults,
- 3) having sufficient knowledge of the Greek language to understand the questionnaire and/or interview questions, and
- 4) voluntary participation.

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 29. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using content analysis.

The demographic characteristics of the women who completed the questionnaire and those who took part in the interviews are shown in Table 1. Regarding the quantitative survey, most women (37%) were aged 38–42, with representation across all age groups. Married women accounted for 47.5%, single women 47%, and divorced or widowed women 5.5%. Some 49% had no children, while 51% had one or more. In 91% of the cases, the children were under 18 years of age. These findings align with the broader demographic trend in the country, where births in 2024 declined by 4.2% compared to 2023, and the number of marriages continues to drop (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2024).

Regarding education, 58.5% held postgraduate or doctoral degrees, 24% held only a bachelor's degree (university or TEI), making approximately 82% of the women holders of at least an undergraduate degree (with or without further MSc/PhD), while a smaller proportion (17.5%) held a high-school diploma or vocational certificate. In terms of employment sector, the majority (54%) worked in the private sector, and 46% in the public sector. Most respondents (38%) reported 11–20 years of work experience, and cumulatively 79.5% had up to 20 years of employment. A significant proportion had already participated in some form of continuing education (89%), and a similarly large proportion (84.5%) expressed the intention to enroll in a new program within one year. Consequently, we can consider that the women in our sample are highly motivated to participate in adult education (Ahl, 2006), which is also consistent with the higher participation rates of women compared to men in adult education in our country (Eurostat, 2025).

Table 2: Demographic and general questions

	Quantitative research (N=200)		Qualitative research (N=4)
Demographic characteristics	Items	Percentages	Percentages
Age	23–27 years old	5.5%	25%
	28–32 years old	8.0%	
	33–37 years old	12.0%	
	38–42 years old	37.0%	
	43–47 years old	23.0%	
	48–52 years old	9.5%	
	53 years and older	5.0%	
Marital status	Married	47.5%	50%
	Single	47.0%	50%
	Divorced/Widowed	5.5%	
Number of children	No children	49.0%	50%
	1 child	20.0%	50%
	2 children	24.5%	
	3 or more children	6.5%	
Children's age	Under 18 years old	91.0%	100%
	Over 18 years old	9.0%	
Educational level	MSc/PhD	58.5%	50%
	University or Technol. Inst. Dipl.	24.0%	25%
	Secondary educ./ Post- secondary (IEK)	17.5%	25%
Years of employment	Up to 5 years	15.5%	25%
	6–10 years	26.0%	
	11–20 years	38.0%	
	21–30 years	19.0%	
	More than 30 years	1.5%	
Employment sector	Private sector	46.0%	50%
	Public sector	46.0%	25%
	Self-employed	8.0%	25%
Previous participation in a training program	Yes	89.0%	100%
	No	11.0%	
Do you intend to attend a new training program in the next 12 months?	Yes	84.5%	100%
	No	15.5%	

As shown in Table 1, the distribution of characteristics among the women who participated in the interviews is similar. Their ages range from 28 to 47 years, with half of them being married with two children under the age of 18, while the other half are not married. A considerable proportion (75%) hold a university or TEI degree, while three are employed in the private sector and one in the public sector.

3.3 Research Instrument and Data Collection

The study was conducted using an electronic questionnaire and personal interviews. The questionnaires were distributed in March and April 2025, while the interviews were conducted in late April 2025.

The questionnaire included two sections focusing on the motivations and barriers that employed women face when participating in adult education programs. The same thematic axes were used in the interviews.

Motivations were measured using 32 items on a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = No influence, 2 = Low influence, 3 = Moderate influence, 4 = High influence). Barriers were measured using 24 items on the same scale. Participants were additionally asked to indicate the three most important motivations and the three most important barriers.

To measure motivations for participation, the Educational Participation Scale (EPS) was used, consisting of 32 items on a four-point Likert-type scale, translated into Greek for the purposes of this study.

Additional items were included in the questionnaire beyond those proposed in previous studies, such as Karalis (2018). These items were developed following an extensive literature review in order to better reflect the socioeconomic context of Greece.

A total of 11 new items were added to the EPS:

- Social Contact: *"To feel accepted by people around me"* (M9), *"To communicate better with my friends"* (M26).
- Educational Preparation: *"I could not complete my studies in the past the way I wanted"* (M16).
- Professional Advancement: *"To be respected in my workplace"* (M21), *"To have the status recognized by my employer"* (M22), *"To move from the private to the public sector"* (M32).
- Personal/Family Life: *"To feel adequate in meeting my children's needs"* (M18).
- Social Participation: *"To feel equal in society"* (M30), *"To gain social acceptance"* (M31).
- Interest in Learning: *"I like to broaden my intellectual horizons"* (M6), *"To feel happy through learning"* (M20).

Barriers were measured using a questionnaire based on the categories of Cross's typology (1981)—situational, institutional and dispositional barriers—adapted from Karalis (2021), which includes 22 items. Two additional items related to barriers were included in order to examine more dimensions of the barriers that employed women may face when participating in adult education programs under the current socio-economic conditions in Greece. The statements that were added to the situational barriers category are: *"Due to single parenthood"* (B5) and *"I prefer to spend the money on my children's education"* (B24).

A preliminary analysis of internal consistency was conducted using Cronbach's alpha for both motivation and barrier scales. The full list of items and their categorization is provided in the Appendix. Cronbach's alpha values indicated five categories for the 32 motivation items: *Professional Development* (9 items, $\alpha = 0.751$), *Certification/Recognition of Education* (5 items, $\alpha = 0.709$), *Interest in Learning* (3 items, $\alpha = 0.768$), *Personal/Family Life* (3 items, $\alpha = 0.945$), *Social Participation* (12 items, $\alpha = 0.890$).

Regarding the 24 barrier items, Cronbach's alpha was: *Situational barriers* (10 items, $\alpha = 0.768$), *Institutional barriers* (7 items, $\alpha = 0.728$), and *Dispositional barriers* (7 items, $\alpha = 0.765$).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Quantitative Research Results

Initially, the mean values of the summed scores for each category of motivations and barriers were compared. Regarding motivation, it was found that the *socialization* factor was detected to a greater extent ($M = 28.11$), followed by *professional development* ($M = 27.66$), *certification/recognition of education* ($M = 15.72$), *interest in learning* ($M = 10.52$), and *personal/family life* reasons ($M = 7.28$). As for the barriers, the results indicated that *situational barriers* were detected to a greater extent ($M = 25.09$), followed by *institutional barriers* ($M = 16.60$), and, to a lesser extent, *dispositional barriers* ($M = 8.98$), consistent with the findings of Liodaki and Karalis (2024).

Subsequently, the ten most important motivations and barriers most frequently selected by the participating women are presented (Tables 2 and 3). The motivation with the highest frequency of selection is increased financial earnings (M4), with 146 responses (73%), followed by professional advancement (M3), broadening of intellectual horizons (M6), the desire to serve as a role model for their children (M7), and finding better employment (M5), among others. In his study, Karalis (2021), referring to the final phase of his research (2019), notes that Greek women mainly report as motivations their enjoyment of learning new things, workplace efficiency, the belief that education should continue throughout life, the enhancement of their formal qualifications, and increased financial earnings. In the same study, women report to a greater extent than men motivations related to finding better employment, enhancing their formal qualifications, obtaining a participation certificate, and improving their work effectiveness and productivity.

Table 2: The top 10 most significant motivations for women (3 choices, 588 responses)

Motivations	N	%	% of cases
M4. To increase my financial earnings	146	24.8	73.0
M3. To advance professionally	71	12.1	35.5
M6. I enjoy broadening my intellectual horizons	53	9.0	26.5
M7. To be a role model for my children	47	8.0	23.5
M5. To find a better job	45	7.7	22.5
M8. To improve my formal qualifications	39	6.6	19.5
M17. To be more effective/efficient in my work	36	6.1	18.0
M32. To move from the private to the public sector	23	3.9	11.5
M23. To be able to better manage problems that arise in the workplace	19	3.2	9.5
M28. To acquire new skills	17	2.9	8.5

Correspondingly, the most frequently selected barriers are: the cost of participation (B1) with 156 responses (or 78%), the long duration of the programs (B2) and the lack of time due to childcare (B3), the programs being held on days and at times that are inconvenient (B12), the lack of information about the days and times of the programs (B4), etc. The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Karalis's studies over time (2021),

as the main factor that discourages women from participating is cost, while the impact of barriers related to lack of time due to family obligations is also significant.

Table 3: The top 10 most significant barriers for women (3 choices, 566 responses)

Barriers	N	%	% of cases	Top 10
B1. Participation cost	156	27.6	78.0	
B2. The educational program lasts too long	68	12.0	34.0	
B3. Lack of time due to taking care of children	68	12.0	34.0	
B12. The educational program takes place in days and times I cannot attend	58	10.2	29.0	
B4. Lack of information regarding available programs	47	8.3	23.5	
B9. A certificate of attendance is not provided	36	6.4	18.0	
B24. I would rather allocate the money for the educational programs to my children's education	34	6.0	17.0	
B14. Lack of time due to work obligations	21	3.7	10.5	
B20. Transportation difficulties	14	2.5	7.0	
B23. The quality and organization of educational programs are not to my standards	14	2.5	7.0	

When designing the questionnaire, care was taken to carefully word the barriers related to caring for children or relatives, as the general wording "family obligations" does not help respondents (Liodaki & Karalis, 2024). Thus, lack of time due to childcare was selected by one-third of the participants (34%), while the barrier of caring for a relative was selected by a small percentage (2.5%) and ranked 16th. The barriers "long duration of programs" and "programs held on inconvenient days and times", which in the case of women in this study are ranked high, are obviously linked to a lack of time and the inability to commit to long periods of educational programs due to family and professional obligations. These results are consistent with the quantitative research of Roosmaa and Saar (2016), according to which women tend to experience more situational and institutional barriers to participation in adult learning than men, but fewer dispositional barriers.

In order to address the research questions, the non-parametric Mann–Whitney and Kruskal–Wallis statistical tests were applied. The results of these analyses are presented in the following subsections.

4.1.1 Results Regarding Employment Sector (RQ1)

The results for women's motivations in relation to the employment sector are presented in Table 4, while those for barriers are presented in Table 5.

Women working in the public sector differ from women working in the private sector in terms of their motivations: they consider it more important to broaden their intellectual horizons (M6) and to acquire the necessary knowledge to continue their studies in the future (M15), they are more likely to say that they want to be more effective in their work (M17), consider to a greater extent that they feel joy through learning (M20) and state to a greater extent that their participation is mandatory by their employer (M24). These findings are like those of Karalis (2021), as well as to those of public sector

employees over time, provided that their employment is permanent (Article 103, para. 4 of the Constitution) and their remuneration follows specific salary scales, rank as more important motivators 'being more efficient in their work', 'enjoying learning new things', and 'education should be a lifelong process'. Furthermore, Karalis (2021) reports in his research that those who have stable jobs, such as public sector employees in this case, are more likely to participate in training programs.

Table 4: Statistically significant differences in terms of employment sector and motivations for participation (Mann-Whitney)

Motivation	Employment sector	N	Ranks and Test statistics		
			Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	p<0.05
<i>"To find a better job."</i> (M5)	Public	92	68.01	6256.50	.000
	Private	102	124.10	12658.50	
	Total	194			
<i>"I like to broaden my intellectual horizons."</i> (M6)	Public	92	103.88	9557.00	.033
	Private	102	91.75	9358.00	
	Total	194			
<i>"To acquire the necessary knowledge for future studies."</i> (M15)	Public	92	105.14	9672.50	.028
	Private	102	90.61	9242.50	
	Total	194			
<i>"I could not complete my studies in the past the way I wanted."</i> M16	Public	92	84.98	7818.50	.000
	Private	102	108.79	11096.50	
	Total	194			
<i>"To be more effective/efficient in my work."</i> (M17)	Public	92	104.78	9639.50	.019
	Private	102	90.94	9275.50	
	Total	194			
<i>"To feel happy through learning."</i> (M20)	Public	92	106.01	9752.50	.028
	Private	102	89.83	9162.50	
	Total	194			
<i>"It is mandatory by my employer."</i> (M24)	Public	92	109.45	10069.50	.003
	Private	102	86.72	8845.50	
	Total	194			
<i>"To move from the private sector to the public sector."</i> (M32)	Public	92	61.54	5662.00	.000
	Private	102	129.93	13253.00	
	Total	194			

Similarly, the motivations that lead women working in the private sector to choose an adult education program, as opposed to women working in the public sector, are as follows: in order to find a better job (M5), because they were previously unable to complete their studies (M16), and finally in order to move to the public sector (M32).

The difference in motivation between women in the public and private sectors is obviously related to the permanence of civil servants in Greece (Article 103, para. 4 of the Constitution) and are consistent with the results of Karalis' research (2021), where private sector employees state at much higher rates that they are motivated to find a better job than public sector employees. Indicatively, we note that in the latest survey of 2019, while

public sector employees state that finding a better job is their most important motivation at a rate of 1.5%, the percentage among private sector employees ranged from 5.3% to 10%, depending on the sector of employment (trade, manufacturing, services) (ibid.).

Table 5: Statistically significant differences in terms of
employment sector and barriers to participation (Mann-Whitney)

Barrier	Employment sector	N	Ranks and Test statistics		
			Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	p<0.05
<i>"Lack of information about the programs offered."</i> (B4)	Public	92	105.21	9679.50	.041
	Private	102	90.54	9235.50	
	Total	194			
<i>"No certificate or attendance certificate is provided."</i> (B9)	Public	92	106.90	9834.50	.015
	Private	102	89.02	9080.50	
	Total	194			
<i>"I do not have the necessary qualifications to attend."</i> (B15)	Public	92	88.24	8118.00	.001
	Private	102	105.85	10797.00	
	Total	194			
<i>"I am too old to learn now."</i> (B16)	Public	92	87.99	8095.50	.001
	Private	102	106.07	10819.50	
	Total	194			
<i>"The selection process. I don't think I have a chance of being selected."</i> (B17)	Public	92	86.29	7938.50	.000
	Private	102	107.61	10976.50	
	Total	194			
<i>"Difficulty traveling to the location where the program is held."</i> (B20)	Public	92	107.65	9904.00	.007
	Private	102	88.34	9011.00	
	Total	194			
<i>"I do not have the formal qualifications required for attendance."</i> (B22)	Public	92	85.14	7832.50	.000
	Private	102	108.65	11082.50	
	Total	194			
<i>"The quality and organization of the programs are not at the desired level."</i> (B23)	Public	92	109.09	10036.00	.003
	Private	102	87.05	8879.00	
	Total	194			

All four barriers faced by women working in the public sector compared to women in the private sector are institutional (Cross, 1981): lack of information (B4), failure to provide a certificate (B9), difficulty in traveling to the program location (B20), and poor quality and organization of programs (B23). Possibly, the reason that contributes to some of the above difficulties faced by women in the sample who work in the public sector compared to the private sector is their higher level of education (83.7% of civil servants hold an MSc or PhD, compared to 37.3% of employees in the private sector, and only 1.1% are secondary school graduates compared to 20.6% in the private sector, with $p < .001$), which makes them more demanding/selective in their training. In Karalis' latest survey (2021) in 2019, apart from cost, which is the biggest barrier reported (75%) by employees (men and women) in the public sector, the second highest percentage is accounted for by the statement "the quality and organization of the seminars are not at the desired level" (65.9%), followed by "difficulty traveling to the program venue" (44.3%) and "lack of

information" (41.6%), while the statement "no certificate provided" comes last in the options with a percentage of 23.7%. The deterioration in the quality of adult education programs provided in Greece is highlighted in the Greek literature and by other researchers (Kokkos *et al.*, 2021).

Similarly, for women employed in the private sector, the following are the most significant barriers: that they do not have the essential (B15) and formal (B22) qualifications, respectively, that they feel too old to learn (B16), and that they have no chance of being selected (B17). Therefore, in the case of women employed in the private sector, the barriers are institutional, but there is also a dispositional barrier: "*they feel too old to learn*" (Cross, 1981).

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4.1.2 Results Regarding the Marital Situation (RQ2.1)

The Kruskal-Wallis tests concern married (N=95), unmarried (N=94), widowed (N=2), and divorced (N=9) women. The significant differences in motivation in relation to marital status are as follows:

- Unmarried women: increased financial rewards (M4, $p = .021$), obtaining a certificate of participation (M12, $p = .009$), acquiring necessary knowledge for future studies (M15, $p = .007$), and removing boredom and tedium from their lives (M27, $p = .042$).
- Widows: to communicate better with their friends (M26, $p = .045$).
- Divorced: to become a role model for their children (M7, $p < .001$), to be accepted by their environment (M9, $p = .033$), to feel adequate for the needs of their children (M18, $p < .001$), to be able to answer their children's questions (M19, $p < .001$), to feel equal in society (M30, $p = .001$) and be accepted by society (M31, $p = .030$).

Similarly, the significant differences in barriers related to marital status are as follows:

- Married: due to childcare (B3, $p < .001$).
- Widows: the training program plays no role in improving their work situation (B7, $p = .028$), they are too old to learn now (B16, $p = .014$), and they can learn what they would learn from a training program in other ways (B19, $p < .001$).
- Divorced women: due to single parenthood (B5, $p < .001$), no certificate of attendance is issued (B9, $p = .027$), and they prefer to spend the program funds on their children's education (B24, $p < .001$).

The findings of this study, regarding married women and those with children, are consistent with the literature on the roles of men and women in the family and how, in the case of women, this affects their participation, as they have to combine caring for their family and other responsibilities with attending educational programs (Boaren, 2011; Siddle, 2011; Stoilova, *et al.*, 2023; Gouthro, 2009). In addition, according to Eurostat data for 2016 in the 28 EU countries, women cite family care as the second most important barrier to their participation in educational programs, at 39.8%, compared to men, who cite it as the fourth most important barrier, at 24.2% (Eurostat, AES 2016, data code: [trng_aes_176]).

4.1.3 Results Regarding the Number of Children (RQ2.2)

Next, statistically significant differences in terms of the number of children were examined regarding motivations and barriers. The five groups of women with respect to the number of children are as follows: no child (N=98), one child (N=40), two children (N=49), three children (N=11) and more than 3 children (N=2).

The significant differences in motivations in four groups out of five are the following:

- No child: want to make the most of their free time (M10, $p = .017$), seek to obtain a certificate of participation (M12, $p = .005$), wish to acquire knowledge for future studies (M15, $p = .003$) and acquire new skills (M28, $p = .022$).
- One child: they want to feel adequate in meeting their children's needs (M18, $p < .001$) and be able to answer their children's questions (M19, $p < .001$).
- Two children: seek acceptance from their environment (M9, $p = .042$).
- More than 3 children: increase their financial earnings (M4, $p = .006$) and become role models for their children (M7, $p < .001$).

Accordingly, the significant differences between the barriers indicate that:

- No child: the fact that no certificate/certificate of attendance is provided is considered a barrier (B9, $p = .015$).
- One child: the lack of time due to childcare (B3, $p < .001$) and the allocation of money to their children's education (B24, $p < .001$) are considered barriers.

In Karalis' research (2021), employees (both men and women), regardless of whether they have children and how many, consistently choose statements such as "I like learning new things," "to be more efficient at work," "because education should be a lifelong process," "to improve my formal qualifications," and "to increase my financial rewards". Since their study did not provide women-only data, no direct comparison can be made with the results of the current research.

4.1.4 Results Regarding Women's Age (RQ2.3)

Subsequently, statistically significant differences in relation to the age of women were studied in terms of motivations and barriers. The data indicate the following number of women in each of the 7 groups with respect to their age: 23–27, eleven; 28–32, sixteen; 33–37, twenty-four; 38–42, seventy-four; 43–47, forty-six; 48–52, nineteen; 53 and over, ten.

Women are driven by different motivations in five of the seven age groups, as follows:

- 23 - 27: they seek to find a better job (M5, $p = .003$).
- 28 - 32: they want to move from the private to the public sector (M32, $p = .008$).
- 33 - 37: they want to increase their formal qualifications (M8, $p = .013$) and have the prestige defined by their employer (M22, $p = .037$).
- 48 - 52: want to complete their studies that they were previously unable to (M16, $p < .001$), want to be more effective at work (M17, $p = .016$), and be able to better manage problems that arise in their workplace (M23, $p = .034$).
- 53 and over: they want to be accepted by those around them (M9, $p = .015$), they know it is mandatory by their employer (M24, $p = .026$), want to interact with new

people (M25, $p = .025$), and want to communicate better with their circle of friends (M26, $p = .026$).

Similarly, the following significant differences emerged in terms of barriers and age groups:

- 33–37: the certificate of participation is not considered a qualification in their work environment (B11, $p = .002$).
- 38 - 42: lack of information and awareness about the programs (B4, $p = .001$), no certificate of attendance is given (B9, $p < .001$), lack of time due to work commitments (B14, $p = .012$), difficulty traveling to the location where the programs are held (B20, $p < .001$), and the quality and organization of the programs are not at the desired levels (B23, $p < .001$).
- 43 - 47: lack of time due to caring for a relative (B10, $p = .009$).
- 48 - 52: cost of participation (B1, $p = .001$), long duration of programs (B2, $p = .001$), health problems (B6, $p = .009$), programs take place on days and at times when they cannot attend (B12, $p < .001$), dislike attending programs that remind them of school (B13, $p = .009$), do not have the necessary qualifications to attend (B15, $p = .018$), are too old to learn now (B16, $p = .007$), they believe that the selection process means they have no chance of participating (B17, $p = .001$), they do not have the formal qualifications required to participate (B22, $p < .001$).

From the findings, we observe that in the younger age groups, the barriers that negatively affect the participation are "institutional" and "situational," while in the 48-52 age group, apart from the "institutional" and "situational" barriers, they also report and show significant statistical differences in two dispositional barriers, which are linked to their previous school experiences and their perception of the possibility of learning at their age (Cross, 1981).

4.1.5 Results Regarding the Years of Employment (RQ2.4)

In addition, statistically significant differences in relation to women's years of employment were studied in terms of motivations and barriers. According to the data, the five categories of women's years of employment include individuals as follows: up to 5 years of work: thirty-one; 6-10 years: fifty-two; 11-20 years: seventy-six; 21-30 years: thirty-eight; and over 30 years: three individuals.

The significant differences in motivation in four of the five categories are as follows:

- Up to 5 years: acquisition of new skills (M28, $p = .005$).
- 6-10 years: professional development (M3, $p = .001$), increase in financial rewards (M4, $p < .000$), broadening of intellectual horizons (M6, $p = .037$), increase in formal qualifications (M8, $p = .001$), acquisition of a certificate of participation (M12, $p = .038$), acquisition of knowledge for future studies (M15, $p = .001$) and they enjoy learning continuously (M29, $p = .008$).
- 11-20 years: finding a better job (M5, $p < .001$), being more effective/efficient at work (M17, $p = .016$) and moving from the private to the public sector (M32, $p = .003$).

- 21-30 years: previously unable to complete their studies (M16, $p < .001$) and communicate better with their circle of friends (M26, $p = .029$).

In Karalis' latest survey (2021), referring to the 2019 data, employees with up to 5 years of service and those with 6–10 years of service reported similar motivations. Beyond the statements with the highest percentages—"to be more productive at work" (29.9% and 29%, respectively) and "to increase my financial earnings" (21.1% and 31.5%, respectively)—12.5% and 6.6%, respectively, stated that they wished "to increase their formal qualifications," which is expected, as they still have many years of professional career ahead of them.

Similarly, the significant differences in barriers in relation to years of work are as follows:

- 6–10 years: due to health problems (B6, $p = .012$).
- 21–30 years: due to lack of information and awareness about the programs (B4, $p = .038$), the selection process, because they believe they have little chance of being selected (B17, $p = .001$), and because they feel they do not have the formal qualifications required to participate (B22, $p < .001$).
- Over 30 years: they do not like to attend programs that remind them of school (B13, $p < .001$), they consider themselves too old to learn anymore (B16, $p < .001$) and because they can learn what they would learn from a program in other ways (B19, $p = .004$).

Women with 6-10 years of work experience, who cite situational barriers (Cross, 1981) "health problems" usually refer to pregnancy, as most are of reproductive age. As for the category of women with 21-30 years of work experience, the barriers they report are "institutional," while in the category with more than 30 years of work experience, the factors that prevent women from participating in educational programs are "dispositional" (Cross, 1981).

4.2 Qualitative Research Results

After conducting the four interviews and transcribing them, the main conclusions regarding the two research questions were recorded. The interviews confirmed the results of the quantitative research. Women who work in the private sector and have children cite the following as their motivations: to broaden their intellectual horizons (M6), to be a role model for their children (M7), to communicate better with their friends (M26), to eliminate boredom and monotony from their lives (M28), and to learn continuously (M29), while facing barriers such as: lack of time due to childcare (B3), not being considered a qualification in their workplace (B11), lack of time due to work commitments (B14), and negative attitudes from family or friends (B21).

Similarly, women who work in the private sector but do not have children cite the following as their motivations: professional development (M3), increasing formal qualifications (M8), acquiring new skills (M28), and moving from the private to the public sector (M32). They face barriers such as the cost of participation (B1), lack of time due to caring for a relative (B10), lack of time due to professional obligations (B14), and negative attitudes of family or friends (B21).

Finally, women who work in the public sector and do not have children cite the following as their motivations: increased financial rewards (K4), broadening of intellectual horizons (K6), increased formal qualifications (K8), broadening of social circles with people who share common interests (K14), improvement in effectiveness/efficiency at work (K17), and the opportunity to interact with young people (K25). They cite as barriers the lack of time due to professional obligations (E14) and the difficulty of traveling to the location where the training programs are held (E20).

5. Conclusions

The study recorded the motivations and barriers faced by women working in the private or public sector in Greece when participating in adult education programs, through quantitative and qualitative research. The most important motivations for women were increased earnings, professional development, broadening their intellectual horizons, and becoming role models for their children, while the most significant barriers were the cost of participation, the duration of the training programs, lack of time due to childcare, and the implementation of programs on days and at times that are inconvenient. The results of the qualitative research were similar.

The analyses revealed significant differences in motivations and barriers. In terms of employment, women in the public and private sectors are motivated or hindered for different reasons. In particular, for women working in the public sector, their motivations fall into the categories of "interest in learning" (broadening their intellectual horizons, feeling happy through learning), "professional development" (being effective at work, participation is mandatory by the employer/supervisor) and "certification/recognition of education" (acquiring the necessary knowledge for future studies). Similarly, for women working in the private sector, their motivations fall into the categories of "interest in professional development" (finding a better job, moving to the public sector), and "certification/recognition of education" (they did not complete their studies in the past). Therefore, the two groups of women are similar in terms of the categories of motivation "professional development" and "obtaining certification/recognition of education," but differ in terms of the "interest in learning" motivation group, which motivates civil servants more.

Regarding female public sector employees, the barriers they face fall into the categories of Situational (difficulty traveling to the program location) and Institutional (lack of information, no certificate/diploma awarded, quality and organization are not at the desired levels). Similarly, the barriers faced by private sector employees fall into the categories of Institutional barriers (I do not have the essential qualifications required to attend, I do not have the formal qualifications required to attend, selection method - I don't think I have a chance of being selected) and Dispositional barriers (I am too old to learn now). Therefore, the two groups of women are similar in terms of institutional barriers but differ in terms of situational barriers, which are more commonly reported by public sector employees, and dispositional barriers, which are more commonly reported by private sector employees.

Many similar differences emerged in relation to demographic data (marital status, number of children, age of women, years of employment) in terms of motivations and barriers.

Combining the statements on the five most important motivators/barriers and the results of the research questions, the following conclusions can be drawn. The motivation to increase financial rewards, which was chosen by the overwhelming majority of participants (73%), has a greater impact on unmarried women, those with more than three children, and those who have been working for 6 to 10 years, indicating both aspirations for financial advancement and greater support for the family through participation in lifelong learning programs. Similarly, the motivation for professional development has a greater impact on women who have been working for 6 to 10 years, i.e. those who have room for development in the coming years of their career. Next, the motivation to broaden intellectual horizons has a greater impact on women who have a permanent job in the public sector or have between 6 and 10 years of previous work experience. The motivation to "be a role model for my children" has a greater impact on divorced women or those with more than 3 children, highlighting women's attitude towards their children, which they combine with the benefits of adult education. The motivation to "find a better job" has a greater impact on women who work in the private sector or are aged 23-27 or have 11-20 years of previous work experience. In general, women with 6-20 years of work experience are more motivated by the five factors stated as the most important, while the subgroup of women with 6-10 years of work experience is more common, a fact that should be taken into account by policymakers responsible for education and/or adult education.

Similarly, the barrier of participation costs, which was selected by the majority of participants (78%), has a greater impact on women aged 48 to 52, possibly due to the multiple financial obligations at this age from family, children studying, etc. Subsequently, the barrier of the long duration of training programs, similarly, affects women aged 48 to 52 to a greater extent, possibly due to the multiple activities at this creative age that are not compatible with the many hours of training/education. The barrier of lack of time due to childcare affects married women or women with one child more, which is to be expected given the multiple roles of women. The barrier "the days and hours of the programs do not suit me" affects women aged 48 to 52 the most. Next, the barrier "lack of information about educational programs" affects women who work in the public sector or are aged 38-42 or have been working for 21-30 years the most. In general, women aged 38 to 52 are most hindered by the five barriers identified as most significant, while the subgroup of women aged 48 to 52 is more frequently affected, a fact that should be considered by policymakers and institutional regulators in order to ensure equal access opportunities for men and women. It is also noteworthy that, according to the findings of this study, older women and women with more than 30 years of work experience report dispositional barriers.

The limitations of this study include the small sample size. Furthermore, convenience sampling in quantitative research raises the issue of generalizing the results, even though an effort was made to establish specific criteria for participation. Similarly,

the small number of interviews is also a limitation. Future research should take the above into account and aim for a larger sample and, why not, simple random sampling, using a specific sampling frame.

However, the findings of this study are useful in that they highlight aspects and opinions on the motivations and barriers to participation in lifelong learning programs, enriching the existing literature on the specific issue of women's participation. Furthermore, the findings are useful as they concern women only, while corresponding longitudinal studies in Greece are conducted on both men and women, so it is not always clear whether the conclusions focus more on one gender or the other. The subtle differences that emerged in this study—regarding employment sector, marital status, number of children, age group, and years of employment—reinforce the above.

Therefore, future research should continue to investigate the motivations and barriers faced by Greek women in participating in adult education programs, to capture the diversity or consistency of their views. For example, strengthening the welfare state and gradually improving conditions that encourage women to participate in educational programs may be a factor in changing women's views, something that remains to be seen in the future.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge and thank all participating women for their willingness to share their experiences and for the insights that made this research possible.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix: Motivations and Barriers

Motivations (M1 – M32)	Category
1. To be more sociable	Social Participation
2. To make new friends	Social Participation
3. To advance professionally	Professional Development
4. To increase my financial earnings	Professional Development
5. To find a better job	Professional Development
6. I like to broaden my intellectual horizons	Interest in Learning
7. To be a role model for my children	Personal/Family Life
8. To improve my formal qualifications	Certification/Recognition of Education
9. To feel accepted by people around me	Social Participation
10. I want to make the most of my free time	Social Participation
11. To be a more active citizen	Social Participation
12. To obtain a certificate of participation	Certification/Recognition of Education
13. To disengage from the problems of everyday life	Social Participation
14. To expand my social circle with people who share common interests	Social Participation
15. To acquire the necessary knowledge for future studies	Certification/Recognition of Education
16. I could not complete my studies in the past the way I wanted	Certification/Recognition of Education
17. To be more effective/efficient in my work	Professional Development
18. To feel adequate in meeting my children's needs	Personal/Family Life
19. To be able to answer my children's questions	Personal/Family Life
20. To feel happy through learning	Interest in Learning
21. To be respected in my workplace	Professional Development
22. To have the status recognized by my employer	Professional Development
23. To be able to better manage problems that arise in the workplace	Professional Development
24. It is mandatory by my employer	Professional Development
25. To interact with new people	Social Participation
26. To communicate better with my friends	Social Participation
27. To remove boredom from my life	Social Participation
28. To acquire new skills	Certification/Recognition of Education
29. I like to learn continuously	Interest in Learning
30. To feel equal in society	Social Participation
31. To gain social acceptance	Social Participation
32. To move from the private to the public sector	Professional Development

Barriers (B1 – B24)	Category*
1. Participation cost	S
2. The educational program lasts too long	I
3. Lack of time due to taking care of my children	S
4. Lack of information about the programs offered	I
5. Due to single parenthood	S
6. Due to health problems	S
7. Training programs play no role in improving my work situation	D
8. I have learned enough so far	D
9. No certificate or attendance certificate is provided	I
10. Lack of time due to caring for a relative	S
11. It is not considered a qualification in my work environment	D
12. The educational program takes place in days and times I cannot attend	S
13. I dislike attending programs that remind me of school	D
14. Lack of time due to work obligations	S
15. I do not have the necessary qualifications to attend	I
16. I am too old to learn	D
17. The selection process. I don't think I have a chance of being selected	I
18. Lack of time due to other activities	S
19. I can learn what I would learn from a training program in other ways	D
20. Difficulty traveling to the location where the program is held	S
21. Negative attitude of my family or friends	D
22. I do not have the formal qualifications required for attendance	I
23. The quality and organization of the programs are not at the desired level	I
24. I prefer to spend the money on my children's education	S
*Categorization of barriers: S – Situational, I – Institutional, D – Dispositional	