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Socioeconomic profile and study choice. The case of university students in Greece

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Abstract
The aim of this research is to examine whether or not, and to what extent, the social status of university students influences their decision making or their preference concerning their choice of academic major. In order to attain this objective, the social characteristics of the students' families have been taken into consideration, which, according to studies and experience, affect young people's preferences and choices and make them choose different academic paths. The research sample consisted of 420 students from various Faculties of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Results indicate that there is a close correlation between a student's preference regarding their university choice, and their social and class background.

Keywords
Study choice, Social mobility, Inequalities in Education, Higher Education, Educational capital.

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Education and social mobility in Greece

Historically, the demand for higher education has always been very strong in Greece, and the role of a university diploma very important. The aim of this research is to examine whether or not, and to what extent, the social status of university students influences their decision making or their preference concerning their choice of academic major. For many years, the entrance to Greek tertiary education has been based upon very strictly organized national exams. Although the main idea remains the same, there have been many and very frequent changes mainly concerning some general conditions but not the general idea behind the exams (Kyridis et al., 2012). The upper class seeks to legitimize the position of its children in the social hierarchy through the appropriate education, while the middle and lower classes regard the degree as a passport for the social development of their children and a means of finding a stable job, mainly in the public sector (Fragoudaki, 1985; Tsoukalas, 1986; Katsikas & Kavvadias, 2000; Haveman & Smeeding, 2006; Kyridis et al., 2012; Malczyk & Lawson, 2019). However, while in the early post-war decades higher education did indeed serve as a "passport" for a well-paid job for middle-class children, in recent years the prospects of social or class mobility have become more difficult for children from lower social classes (Hendel et al., 2005; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

Brown (2003), argues that equal opportunities, promised by the official political rhetoric regarding the expansion of participation, are not only a myth, but a “trap” as well, as the individuals from the lower classes are made to believe that they will benefit from the extended labor market opportunities. According to Bourdieu, the opportunity of certain social classes to access an educational level that they were excluded from in the past, creates expectations that they can now take advantage and benefit from this opportunity (Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010). Soon, however, they are disappointed and confronted with the harsh reality of an inevitable exclusion. Raftery & Hout (1993: 60) mention that once the access and participation of all social classes to higher education is consolidated, privileged social groups try to find other ways to serve their interests, something they seem to eventually achieve. This concept is in agreement with Bourdieu’s reproduction theory which states that societies tend to reproduce their social structures and consequently their social classes according to their own interests. In this attempt, the educational system plays an important role in legitimizing and establishing social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1984). Other studies have shown that financial ability or

constraints affect the choice of studies for undergraduate students. More specifically, working class students take into account their family's economic status and, thus, choose to study at a university near their place of residence, even though they could be admitted to a "privileged school" that can offer better career prospects. Instead, middle and upper-class students, whose families have a respectable economic capital, are interested in the academic reputation of the university (Forsyth & Furlong, 2000: 83).

On the other hand, students from lower social classes are faced with restrictions that lead to self-exclusion and to inevitable, random choices. Even if their academic performance is high, they often choose schools with low academic prestige but more familiar for them (Reay et al., 2001; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2006: 45). Furthermore, they choose academic departments that promise them a career in the public sector, which offers sustainability and security through long term employment. They choose schools such as military and police academies, pedagogical and foreign language studies, as well as technological educational institutions that lead to professions that are high in demand in the labor market (Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010). These findings correspond to those of Jackson et al. (2007: 224), who conclude that students from the less privileged social strata, even though their academic performance is very good, are less ambitious and less driven to choose a school and an academic career. Despite the mass access to school for all social classes, experimental studies show that social inequalities still exist (Raftery & Hout, 1993). They also indicate that there is a direct correlation between the academic choices and the socioeconomic and educational background of the family (Archer et al., 2003; Morley & Aynsley, 2007). In fact, as the participation rate increases in higher education, the percentage of students from the lower social classes who study at elite universities with a high position in the academic hierarchy decreases, no matter how high grades they gain (Fragoudaki, 1985: 194; Thomas, 2002; Katsikas & Therianos, 2008). According to research, there is a strong relation between the social origin of the individuals and their choices and preferences regarding their academic studies (see Hatcher, 1998: 18).

Even today, in Greek society, there is a strong sense of faith in the relationship between higher education and social mobility (Sianou-Kyrgiou & Tsiplakides, 2011). There is a generalized educational "syndrome" that ignores or does not care for the nature and the quality of education but rather focuses on professional career, financial security and social advancement (Tsoukalas, 1987, as cited in Katsikas & Kavvadias, 2000: 30). Children and their families live in social formations where educational

qualifications either as certificates or as results of evaluations are considered to be important social values and achievements and are treated as such by school and society in general. In other words, they live and socialize in social systems where education is not an independent social value but has been transformed into a bureaucratic system with levels, ratings and evaluations that ultimately provide social prestige, social mobility and class identity and inclusion (Zeng, 1999). Thus, children and their families, in order to survive in a society where the "worship of education" in combination with the fact that educational achievements constitute strong social and family goals, they necessarily resort to educational choices that exist outside the formal education system, such as private supplementary tutoring (Kassotakis & Verdis, 2013). The educational success and the subsequent entrance in prestigious university departments depend on a set of social characteristics that determine family identity, such as father's occupation, parents' education, geographical origin and family's cultural capital (Katsillis & Robinson, 1990; Kyridis, 1996; Green & Vryonides, 2005). Even in the case of equal performance of children at school, the chances of them continuing their education at a higher level vary according to their social background, which is a key factor in differentiating individuals during their transition from school to higher education (Thanos, 2012; Kyridis et al., 2017). And in this respect, the investments of parents in the education of their children reflect the different economic backgrounds of families and the emphasis they place on their upward social mobility (Kamarianos et al., 2019; Malczyk & Lawson, 2019). In all modern social environments, children's studies align with the desires and dreams of their parents (Mylonas, 1991).

The factors that differentiate school performance have their roots in students' social background and in their family's characteristics. First of all, upper-class parents have high expectations from their children and invest plenty of money in their education, even if their performance in school is poor (Katsikas & Kavvadias, 2000; Wilder, 2014; Koshy et al., 2019). However, the catalyst when it comes to school success is none other than cultural capital. Indeed, in the case of students from the same social class, the level of education of their parents is what determines the success of their children (Tzani, 1983; Davis-Kean, 2005; Steinmayr & Spinath, 2009; Stull, 2013). Therefore, cultural capital is the most important factor for academic, professional and social success (Bourdieu, 1977 & 1986). The high educational level and cultural capital of the family has a positive impact on school success, as children of these families perform better in all areas of knowledge (literacy, maths e.tc.), have greater

academic achievements and more years of studies (Tourtouras, 2010). To further prove this conclusion, Bourdieu (1966: 329) cites the research conducted by M. Paul Clerc in 1964, who showed that pupils from families with the same educational background but with a different financial level did not differ in their school performance. In contrast, students from families with the same financial situation but with different educational backgrounds differ significantly in their performance.

According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (HSA) in 1961, the occupational categories of farmers, stockbreeders, fishermen, workers, and craftsmen represented about 76% of the workforce in Greece, while at the same time university students with a father belonging to these categories represented only 37.8%. Correspondingly, in 1971 the same categories are represented in the workforce with 70.5% and in the student population only with 43.4% (Katsikas & Kavvadias, 2000). In 1981 those occupational categories represented 57.8% of the workforce, while the students from lower classes represented only 41% of the total student population. The HSA data from 1999 to 2008 lead to the same conclusions. In other words, the unequal participation of students in higher education based on the father's occupation remains constant. Young people with a father pursuing a freelance science or an office job are more likely to study in a university than young people whose parents are farmers or laborers (Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010).

Research questions and methodology

The central question of the study is: how are students' choices of a higher education institution influenced by their social background? The individual research questions focused on the degree to which the family and its socio-economic characteristics shape students' preferences, as well as how the cultural-educational capital of the family influences the university preferences and choices of students.

The study was conducted in 2018 and the questionnaire of the study consists of 25 closed-ended questions and aims to gather as much information as possible about how students' social background and family characteristics have contributed to their study and career choices. For the construction of the questionnaire we relied on three key points: the literature review, the questionnaires of other researchers dealing with the same topic (Liabas & Tourtouras, 2008a; Liabas & Tourtouras, 2008b; Liabas & Tourtouras, 2010), and the pilot research. The corpus of data was analyzed in cardinal

unrelated factors-axes (Factor Analysis). Sampling adequacy, according to Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin, demonstrated that the sample was appropriate for Factor Analysis and Bartlett's test (sign<0.01) thus indicating that Factor Analysis is significant. The specific analysis allowed the grouping of the data on the basis of their correlation in order to develop more specific categories, which would offer a thorough presentation of the students' attitudes towards the research objective. The consistency of the questionnaire statements was estimated in terms of Alpha Coefficient (Gronbach's a), which was applied because it is not dependent on the statement layout. For all the analyses, the significance level was set at 5%, that is, p=0.05, while apart from the homogeneity of variances test, the significance level was set at 1%, that is, p=0.01.

Demographic Data

Table 1: Distribution of the sample by gender

Gender		**Age**			
Gender	%	**Age**	%		
Male	41.7	18 – 24	96.2		
Female	58.3	25 – 32	3.8		
Occupation			**Parent's Education**		
	Mother (%)	Father (%)		Father (%)	Mother (%)
Higher	13.3	22.4	Illiterate	0.7	0.7
Medium	26.8	32.0	Graduate of elementary school	4.8	3.4
Inferior	34.8	31.7	Graduate of secondary education	18.1	21.8
Teachers - Professors	25.1	13.9	Graduate of post-secondary education	21.0	15.7
			Graduate of higher education	40.1	43.3
Department			**Family's' Monthly income (€)**		
Prestigious Departments	47.9		0 – 700		6.2
Departments of average prestige	19.8		701 – 1100		23.1
Departments of low prestige	32.4		1101 – 1600		26.0
			>1601		44.8

Table 2: Distribution of the sample by Department/School of study

Department/School	**Frequency**	**%**	**Department/ School**	**Frequency**	**%**
Law	36	8.6	French Literature	15	3.6
Medicine	32	7.6	German Literature	11	2.6
Dentistry	7	1.7	Italian Literature	7	1.7
Veterinary medicine	10	2.4	Mathematics	11	2.6
Pharmacy	9	2.1	Physics	14	3.3
Architecture	10	2.4	Biology	5	1.2
Civil Engineering	15	3.6	Informatics	6	1.4
Electrical Engineering	27	6.4	Geology	4	1.0
Mechanical Engineering	5	1.2	Economics	7	1.7
Chemical Engineering	6	1.4	Political science	8	1.9
Surveying Engineering	4	1.0	Primary Education	19	4.5
Planning Engineering	5	1.2	Preschool Education	19	4.5
Psychology	25	6.0	Physical Education & Sports	6	1.4
Philology	10	2.4	Agriculture	23	5.5
History & Archaeology	15	3.6	Forestry	3	0.6
Philosophy & Pedagogy	6	1.4	Theology	16	3.8
English Literature	11	2.6	Pastoral Theology	13	3.1
Total				**420**	**100.0**

As one can see from Table 2 above, the sample of the research consists of 420 students from all the schools of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the biggest tertiary educational institution in Greece, based on the number of its students. The research aims to represent students of all faculties and departments of the university and to ensure proportionality in the representation and composition of the sample in terms of faculty, gender and social class. The sample includes students from 11 faculties and a total of 41 departments and schools. There are plenty of disciplines and schools of different statuses, while in these departments there are students that achieved low to very high scores in the annual university entrance exams, with a variety of career paths and future perspectives. In the entrance exams, grades are given on a grade point scale of 0-20, and while it is not hard for the candidates to be admitted to a University, it is hard to enter the University of their choice. Good schools and popular majors that are in high demand fill their spots quickly, leaving behind a lot of average-performing students to fight for a seat in departments with lower prestige and status.

Furthermore, some faculties, such as Law School and Medical School, enjoy high social standing, as their graduates, in addition to high financial remuneration, tend to have a crucial impact on the social and political life of the country. Last but not least,

the difficulty of obtaining a degree, as well as obtaining a license to pursue a profession, plays an important role in determining the social status of each faculty.

Table 3: Classification of faculties by social prestige

Prestigious Faculties	**Faculties of average prestige**	**Faculties of low prestige**
Faculty of Health Sciences	Faculty of Economics & Political Science	Faculty of Theology
Law School	Faculty of Science	Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Environment
Polytechnic School/Faculty of Engineering	Faculty of Philosophy	Faculty of Education
Faculty of Philosophy		Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences

For the purposes of the study, the Departments, Schools, and Faculties of the sample are divided into "privileged" and "non-privileged" categories according to their professional and economic prospects, and in particular according to the social prestige they hold in Greek society. All this “prestige” is also reflected in the score that is required in order to be admitted to each department. Subsequently, the average score achieved in the national academic exams of the last 6 years was taken into account[6] in order to categorize the departments according to their “prestige”.

Table 4: Classification of the Schools based on exam score

Prestigious Schools	**Schools of average prestige**	**Schools of low prestige**
Medical School (Average Score: 18900)	School of Informatics (Average Score:16097)	School of French Language & Literature (Average Score: 9548)
School of Dentistry (Average Score: 18338)	School of Political Science (Average Score:16192)	School of German Language & Literature (Average Score: 13318)
Veterinary School (Average Score: 17928)	School of Mathematics (Average Score:15954)	School of Italian Language & Literature (Average Score:6821)
School of Pharmacy (Average Score: 18200)	School of Physics (Average Score: 15714)	School of Geology (Average Score: 13144)

[6] In order to include schools requiring five or six years of study, such as the School of Health Sciences and the Polytechnic School.

Law School (Average Score:18360)	School of Chemistry (Average Score: 15979)	School of Theology (Average Score**:** 11296)
School of Architectural Engineering (Average Score: 19642)	School of Primary Education (Average Score: 16166)	School of Forestry and Natural Environment (Average Score**:** 11799)
School of Civil Engineering (Average Score:16870)	School of Preschool Education (Average Score: 15273)	School of Pastoral and Social Theology (Average Score**:** 10634)
School of Computer Engineering (Average Score: 18170)	School of Economic Studies (Average Score: 14658)	School of Spatial Planning and Development (Average Score**:** 12898)
School of Mechanical Engineering (Average Score: 17956)	School of History & Archeology (Average Score: 16247)	School of Agriculture (Average Score**:** 14188)
School of Chemical Engineering (Average Score: 16480)	School of Philosophy & Pedagogics (Average Score**:** 15901)	School of Physical Education and Sport Science (Average Score**:** 15589)
School of English Language & Literature (Average Score: 20433)	School of Rural and Surveying Engineering (Average Score: 14891)	
School of Psychology (Average Score: 17836)		
School of Biology (Average Score: 17708)		
School of Philology (Average Score: 17104)		

Table 5: Final categorization of schools and faculties by both score and social prestige

Prestigious Departments	**Departments of average prestige**	**Departments of low prestige**
Faculty of Health Sciences	**Faculty of Economic and Political Sciences**	**Faculty of Philosophy**
School of Medicine *School of Veterinary Medicine* *School of Dentistry* *School of Pharmacy*	*School of Economics* *School of Political Sciences*	*School of French Language and Literature, School of German Language and Literature, School of Italian Language and Literature*
Law School	**Faculty of Sciences**	**Faculty of Theology**
	Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, *Biology, Informatics*	*School of Theology* *School of Pastoral and Social Theology*
Polytechnic School – Faculty of Engineering	**Faculty of Philosophy**	**Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences**

School of Civil Engineering, School of Architecture, School of Rural and Surveying Engineering, School of Mechanical Engineering, School of Electrical and Computer Engineering, School of Chemical Engineering, School of Spatial Planning and Development	*School of History and Archaeology, School of Philosophy and Education, School of English Language and Literature*	
Faculty of Philosophy		**Faculty of Science**
School of Psychology, School of Philology		*School of Geology*
		Faculty of Education
		School of Primary Education, School of Early Childhood Education
		Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Environment
		School of Agriculture, School of Forestry and Natural Environment

Educational paths and the socio-economic background of the family. Research findings

From the statistical correlation of the variables "parents' occupation" and "type of university department" of students, a statistically significant relationship was found both for father's and mother's occupation.

Table 6: Correlation between the occupation of the students' father and the prestige of faculties

Father's Occupation	**Departments-Faculties**			**Total**
	Prestigious Departments	**Departments of average prestige**	**Departments of low prestige**	
Higher	(60) 64.5%	(17) 18.3%	(16) 17.2%	(93) 100.0%
Medium	(64) 48.1%	(23) 17.3%	(46) 34.6%	(133) 100.0%

Inferior	(42) 31.8%	(24) 18.2%	(66) 50.0%	(132) 100.0%
Teachers/Professors	(33) 56.9%	(19) 32.8%	(6) 10.3%	(58) 100.0%
Total	**(199)** **47.8%**	**(83)** **20.0%**	**(134)** **32.2%**	**(416)** **100.0%**

$x^2(6) = 47.375$, $p=0.0005 <0.05$

Table 7: Correlation between the occupation of the students' mother and the prestige of faculties

Mother's Occupation	**Departments-Faculties**			**Total**
	Prestigious Departments	**Departments of average prestige**	**Departments of low prestige**	
Higher	(36) 65.5%	(9) 16.4%	(10) 18.2%	(55) 100.0%
Medium	(56) 50.5%	(19) 17.1%	(36) 32.4%	(111) 100.0%
Inferior/Low	(45) 31.3%	(31) 21.5%	(68) 47.2%	(144) 100.0%
Teachers - Professors	(63) 60.6%	(22) 21.2%	(19) 18.3%	(104) 100.0%
Total	**(200)** **48.3%**	**(81)** **19.6%**	**(133)** **32.1%**	**(414)** **100.0%**

$x^2(6) = 36.176$, $p=0.0005 <0.05$

According to Tables 6 & 7, it is found that the majority of the students coming from parents pursuing one of the higher-ranked professions or the teaching profession have been admitted to privileged faculties, while the proportion of students from these occupational categories that have "succeeded" in non-privileged schools is very small. On the other hand, students with parents practicing any of the lower-ranked occupations are mostly admitted to non-privileged faculties. Therefore, parents of higher occupational status, as well as educators, encourage their children to attend prestigious university schools, as opposed to parents of lower in status occupations, who mostly send their children to mediocre ones.

From the correlations of the variables "parents' educational level" and "type of university department" of students, a statistically significant relationship was found for both parents.

Table 8: Correlation between the father's educational level and the prestige of faculties

Father's Educational Level	**Departments- Faculties**			**Total**
	Prestigious Departments	**Departments of average prestige**	**Departments of low prestige**	
Illiterate	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(3) 100.0%	(3) 100.0%
Graduate of elementary school	(9) 45.0%	(2) 10.0%	(9) 45.0%	(20) 100.0%
Graduate of secondary education	(28) 36.8%	(17) 22.4%	(31) 40.8%	(76) 100.0%
Graduate of post-secondary education	(32) 36.4%	(19) 21.6%	(37) 42.0%	(88) 100.0%
Graduate of higher education	(96) 57.1%	(29) 17.3%	(43) 25.6%	(168) 100.0%
Holder of Postgraduate Degree	(36) 56.3%	(16) 25.0%	(12) 18.7%	(64) 100.0%
Total	**(201) 48.0%**	**(83) 19.8%**	**(135) 32.2%**	**(419) 100.0%**

$x^2(10) = 28.702$, $p = 0.001 < 0.05$

Table 9: Correlation between the mother's educational level and the prestige of faculties

Mother's Educational Level	**Departments- Faculties**			**Total**
	Prestigious Departments	**Departments of average prestige**	**Departments of low prestige**	
Illiterate	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(3) 100.0%	(3) 100.0%
Graduate of elementary school	(5) 35.7%	(2) 14.3%	(7) 50.0%	(14) 100.0%
Graduate of secondary education	(37) 40.6%	(15) 16.5%	(39) 42.9%	(91) 100.0%
Graduate of post-secondary education	(26) 39.4%	(15) 22.7%	(25) 37.9%	(66) 100.0%
Graduate of higher education	(100) 54.9%	(39) 21.4%	(43) 23.7%	(182) 100.0%
Holder of Postgraduate Degree	(32) 50.8%	(12) 19.0%	(19) 30.2%	(63) 100.0%
Total	**(200) 47.8%**	**(83) 19.8%**	**(136) 32.4%**	**(419) 100.0%**

$x^2(12) = 22.502$, $p=0.032 < 0.05$

As can be seen from Tables 8 and 9, students whose parents are educated to low and upper secondary level are overwhelmingly admitted to non-privileged schools. On the other hand, students whose parents have a high level of education are mostly admitted to privileged ones.

Regarding the correlation between family income and type of faculty there was a strongly statistically significant relationship. In other words, students whose families earn a high income (>1601 €) in their majority enter privileged schools, when on the other hand, students of low-income families mostly enroll in non-privileged schools (see Table 10 below).

Table 10: Correlation between the monthly family income of students and the prestige of faculties

Monthly Family Income	**Departments- Faculties**			**Total**
	Prestigious Departments	**Departments of average prestige**	**Departments of low prestige**	
0 - 700€	(3) 11.5%	(4) 15.4%	(19) 73.1%	(26) 100.0%
701 - 1100€	(25) 25.8%	(23) 23.7%	(49) 50.5%	(97) 100.0%
1101 - 1600€	(44) 40.4%	(28) 25.7%	(37) 33.9%	(109) 100.0%
>1601€	(129) 68.6%	(28) 14.9%	(31) 16.5%	(188) 100.0%
Total	**(201) 47.9%**	**(83) 19.7%**	**(136) 32.4%**	**(420) 100.0%**

x^2 (6) =78.363, p=0.0005<0.05

At this point, it is important to consider in more detail two specific faculties, which serve as an example, in order to make the differences more apparent between the prestige of faculties and their departments and the social background of students attending them. These faculties are the Faculty of Health Sciences from the "privileged" category and the Faculty of Theology from the "non-privileged".

Table 11: Parents' occupations of students studying in the Faculties of Health Sciences and Theology

Occupation	**Faculty of Health Sciences**		**Faculty of Theology**	
	Father	***Mother***	***Father***	***Mother***
Higher	(24) 41.4%	(13) 22.4%	(4) 13.8%	(1) 3.4%
Medium	(17) 29.3%	(16) 27.6%	(8) 27.6%	(7) 24.2%
Inferior/Low	(5) 8.6%	(6) 10.3%	(16) 55.2%	(21) 72.4%
Teachers – Professors	(12) 20.7%	(23) 39.7%	(1) 3.4%	(0) 0%
Total	**(58)** **100.0%**	**(58)** **100.0%**	**(29)** **100.0%**	**(29)** **100.0%**

Table 12: Parents' educational level of students studying in the Faculties of Health Sciences and Theology

Educational level	**Faculty of Health Sciences**		***Faculty of Theology***	
	Father	***Mother***	***Father***	***Mother***
Illiterate	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(1) 3.4%	(1) 3.4%
Graduate of elementary school	(1) 1.7%	(1) 1.7%	(3) 10.3%	(5) 17.3%
Graduate of secondary education	(6) 10.3%	(6) 10.3%	(9) 31.1%	(10) 34.5%
Graduate of post-secondary education	(4) 6.9%	(4) 6.9%	(7) 24.2%	(1) 3.4%
Graduate of higher education	(33) 56.9%	(32) 55.2%	(4) 13.8%	(10) 34.5%
Holder of Postgraduate Degree	(14) 24.2%	(15) 25.9%	(5) 17.2%	(2) 6.9%
Total	**(58)** **100.0%**	**(58)** **100.0%**	**(29)** **100.0%**	**(29)** **100.0%**

Table 13: Family monthly income of students studying in the Faculties of Health Sciences and Theology

Family income	**Faculty of Health Sciences**	**Faculty of Theology**
0 - 700€	(0) 0%	(6) 20.7%
701 - 1100€	(2) 3.4%	(14) 48.3%

1101 - 1600€	(11) 19.0%	(5) 17.2%
>1601 €	(45) 77.6%	(4) 13.8%
Total	**(58)** **100.0%**	**(29)** **100.0%**

According to Tables 11, 12 & 13, the majority of students in the Health Sciences Faculty have parents with higher-ranked occupations or the teaching profession (especially mothers), who are educated to a high level and receive a high income. In contrast, in the Faculty of Theology, most students have parents with lower-ranked occupations, who have an average level of education and a low monthly income.

Discussion and Concluding remarks

Concerning the extent to which the family and its socioeconomic characteristics influence students' preferences and guide them toward specific university studies, the data analysis of the present study showed that the variables "type of occupation", "educational level" and "monthly income" of parents play a crucial role in shaping the preferences of the students as regards their choice of specific university studies.

The present study showed that the higher the educational level, monthly income and social status of the parents' profession, the more their children's academic choices are geared towards the elite and privileged faculties of higher education, such as the Faculty of Health Studies, the Faculty of Law, and the Faculty of Engineering – Polytechnic School. This finding is entirely consistent with previous research data on this topic showing that the choice to attend "more privileged" schools is strongly related with the social and educational background of the students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Kontogiannopoulou-Polydoridis, 1999; Leathwood, 2004; Thomas & Bell, 2008; Liabas & Tourtouras, 2008a; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2008; Rønning Haugen, 2020). As Du Bois-Reymond (1998) states, the decision of the upper-class youth to enter the privileged faculties of the university is a predictable educational choice influenced by the "tacit expectations of the social environment". It is, namely, the natural evolution of their career, their destiny predefined by their family and social class. According to Snyders (1981: 170), a process of "internalizing the objective destiny of their class" is identified in the choices of the young people of the upper class. Of course, this process is done unconsciously, as subjects live "with the well-founded illusion of creating innovation,

but in fact do nothing more than to repeat their past and the past of their class" (Snyders, 1981: 171). Upper-class families want to maintain both their class identity and their place in the social hierarchy. A decisive role in this is played by educational capital, through the recognized credentials provided by the formal educational system (Harman, 1994; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010). However, candidates along with their families seek not just access to any school, but access to the university's "Grandes Ecoles", as Bourdieu calls them, in order to have the best professional and academic prospects (Power et. al, 2003). By graduating from these schools, upper-class families seek to ensure the social advancement of their children and to ensure they remain part of the social elite. This creates a vicious cycle and reproduces class status along with social and educational inequalities (Kontogiannopoulou-Polidoridis, 1995; Hursh, 2007).

Furthermore, this research showed that the majority of children with at least one parent working in education manage to enter privileged faculties, while the percentage of those enrolled in non-privileged schools is very low. Therefore, on the one hand, educators seem to invest money from their mid-level financial capital to educate their children and on the other hand, with their high educational-cultural capital, show their children strategies and ways in order to follow a successful educational path.

Also, the research found that students whose parents belong to the lower socioeconomic strata, have lower social status, are poorly educated, and receive low incomes, are mostly admitted to "underprivileged" schools, a finding that strongly confirms similar findings of older research (Bourdieu, 1970; Lambiri-Dimaki, 1974; Kontogiannopoulou-Polydoridis, 1999; Thomas, 2002; Sianou-Kirgiou, 2006; Raveaud & Van Zanten, 2007).

The consequence of the above is to create on a symbolic level two different university networks, one that produces the leading professions and one that produces a subordinate workforce. In conclusion, we could say that the State and the members of the upper class once again benefit. Thus, on the one hand, they maintain the ruling class of the elite in society and on the other hand, they transform the students from the middle and lower classes into a "scientific proletariat" staffing the public sector and private enterprises (Katsikas & Kavvadias, 2000: 55-56).

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