

# **The Profile of People Claiming Food and Material Support Benefits Due to Extreme Poverty: Data from the Region of Crete**

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## **Abstract**

The financial crisis of the last decade has increased the number of people living in extreme poverty in Greece and those excluded from social benefits. The development of material support agencies was a new phenomenon necessitated by the increase in the number of vulnerable groups and families living on the edge and below the poverty line. The current study reports on the socioeconomic circumstances and psychosocial profile of 798 people confronted with severe poverty in the region of Crete in Greece. The study was funded by the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FAED), which is specialized in Greece through the “Food and/or Basic Material Assistance” Operational Program (Crete Regional Unit). All the people that were registered at their regional or local social service agencies in Crete as beneficiaries for material support benefits, were eligible to be included in the study. A structured questionnaire was employed to investigate the profile, living conditions, health, and mental health status of the participants. A combination of socio-economic and psychosocial problems was recorded. A huge health and mental health burden was evident among the participants (50.0% mild to severe depression; 40.0% with symptoms of anxiety; 5.0% with severe alcohol/drug related problems; 25.0% with certified disability, 50.0% with chronic disease). People experienced long periods of unemployment (mean time 4.2 years), bad housing and living conditions (e.g., 18% lacking heating) and absence of a supportive social/family network (e.g., 12.0% lacking trusted others). Family-focused care seems necessary to meet the complex bio-psychosocial needs of people living in extreme poverty. The need to strengthen mental health counseling services in the community emerged as a priority.

**Keywords:** poverty, psychosocial needs, mental health, living circumstances, housing conditions, social issues

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