

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OCCASIONAL PAPERS

**A BROAD CHURCH INDEED – THE SOCIAL PROFILE OF
GREEK ORTHODOX IN AUSTRALIA**

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Religious Education Occasional Papers is a series of articles on religion. They deal with theoretical, policy and empirical issues related to faith. The views expressed are those of the author.

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A BROAD CHURCH INDEED – THE SOCIAL PROFILE OF GREEK ORTHODOX IN AUSTRALIA

The study of Greek Orthodox in Australia is a topic that has both theoretical and practical significance but is one on which little academic work has been undertaken. This is despite the fact that Australia is home to one of the largest Greek communities in the world. There have been isolated community studies but no large-scale picture of Greek Orthodox in Australia even though they form part of the seventh largest ethnic group in Australia based on the census in 2016.

In discussion with Greek-Australians, there are many views about the make-up of the Greek Orthodox population in Australia. In part, this may be due to newspaper reports, hearsay or other announcements that are made in good spirit. Also the perception of one’s local community seems to colour ideas about Greek Orthodox throughout Australia. When these well-meaning stereotypes are challenged, they do not appear to have a formal basis.

The focus of this report is the Greek Orthodox in Australia who comprise the largest component of the Greek-Australian community as well as the largest proportion of the Eastern Orthodox faithful in Australia. The purpose is to provide a social profile of Greek Orthodox in Australia based on the official data. This information can serve as a benchmark for planning community services on the basis of evidence rather than intuition.

The information in this report is derived from the national census in 2016 in response to the question on one’s religion (see Figure 1). At the same time the Census collected other social information that may be of wider relevance to religion. This report might be read usefully in conjunction with the earlier paper in this series: *Greek Orthodox in Australia – the big picture*. That report documented some basic demographic statistics on Eastern Orthodox and Greek Orthodox in Australia.

<p>19 What is the person's religion?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answering this question is OPTIONAL. • Examples of 'Other': LUTHERAN, SALVATION ARMY, JUDAISM, TAOISM, HUMANISM. • Remember to mark the box like this: <input type="checkbox"/> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> No religion <input type="checkbox"/> Catholic <input type="checkbox"/> Anglican (Church of England) <input type="checkbox"/> Uniting Church <input type="checkbox"/> Presbyterian <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhism <input type="checkbox"/> Islam <input type="checkbox"/> Greek Orthodox <input type="checkbox"/> Baptist <input type="checkbox"/> Hinduism Other (please specify) <table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 40px; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td><td style="width: 25px; height: 15px;"></td></tr> </table>																

Figure 1. 2016 Census question on religion.

Introduction

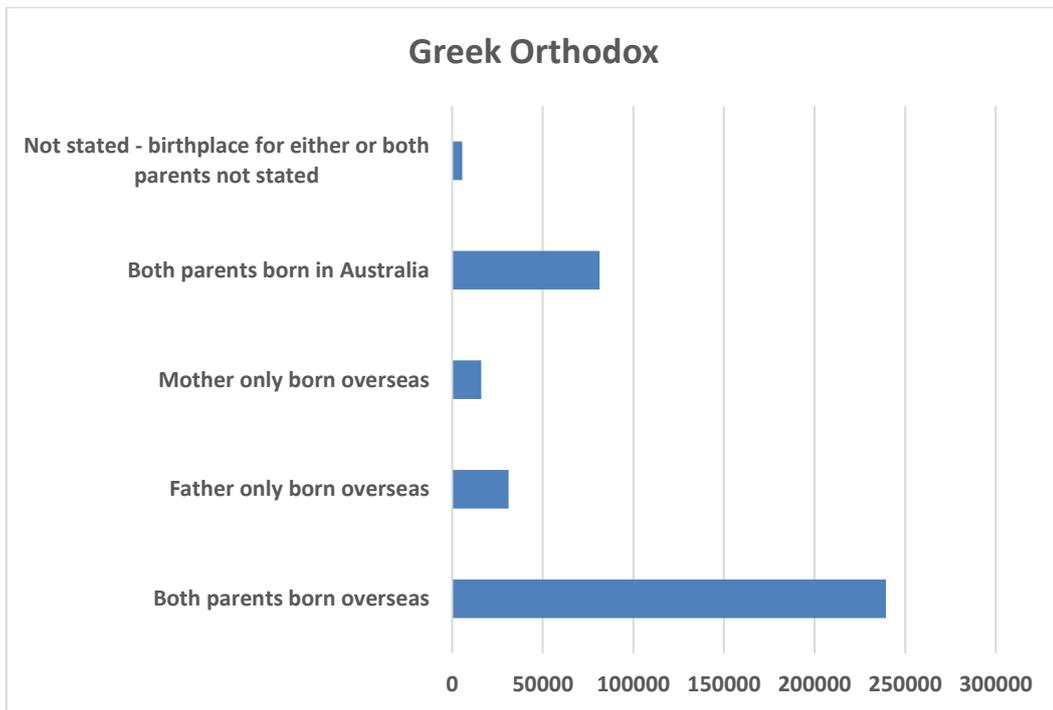
There are 373,589 people in Australia who indicated that they are Greek Orthodox. Possibly there are some who did not answer the question accurately in the Census. For instance, they may have indicated “Orthodox” or “Christian” instead of “Greek Orthodox”. It seems likely that there is some under-estimate but this is still the most valid information available on Greek Orthodox in Australia.

The 373,859 who indicated that they were Greek Orthodox are 0.0159 in a population of 23,401,891. At this level the margin of error is very small. There is a 99% level of confidence that the actual number is up to 374,400 and it seems extremely unlikely that the total number of Greek Orthodox is anywhere near even 400,000 or more that some assert. The general point is that these figures provide a reasonable basis for describing the Greek Orthodox population in Australia.

The following sections consider topics such as ancestry, language spoken at home, English proficiency, education, occupation, income and marital or household status. For ease of reference the various charts are depicted bilingually.

What is the overseas ancestry of Greek Orthodox?

Overwhelmingly, Greek Orthodox in Australia are a migrant community. Whilst this will change over time, only 22% (all percentages rounded) of Greek Orthodox have both parents born in Australia. If one adds those whose father only was born overseas or those whose mother only was born overseas then this rises to 34% as second generation. Figure 2 outlines the parental backgrounds of Greek Orthodox.



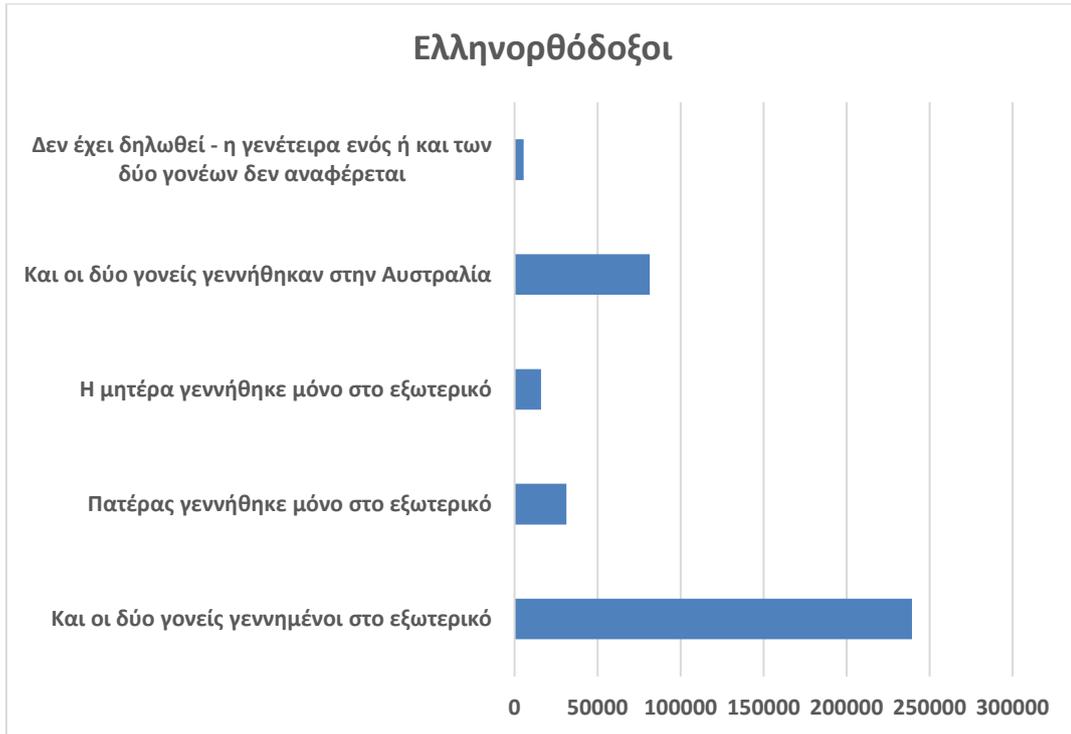


Figure 2. Parental background of Greek Orthodox.

Is Greek spoken at home?

The Census assessed familiarity with the Greek language (Figure 3), which is an important component of maintenance of cultural heritage.

16 Does the person speak a language other than English at home?

- Mark one box only.
- If more than one language other than English, write the one that is spoken most often.
- Remember to mark the box like this:

- No, English only ▶ Go to 18
- Yes, Mandarin
- Yes, Italian
- Yes, Arabic
- Yes, Cantonese
- Yes, Greek
- Yes, Vietnamese
- Yes, other (please specify)

No, English only ▶ Go to 18
 Yes, Mandarin
 Yes, Italian
 Yes, Arabic
 Yes, Cantonese
 Yes, Greek
 Yes, Vietnamese
 Yes, other (please specify)

Figure 3. 2016 Census question on religion.

In Australia, Greek is spoken at home by 215,506 Greek Orthodox out of a total of 373,589 (i.e., 57%). Of course, this does not show the extent of knowledge of Greek.

Are Greek Orthodox proficient in the English language?

Equally important for educational, social and vocational adjustment in Australia is the knowledge of English. A person’s self-assessed proficiency in English was indicated in the Census. This question applied only to those people who spoke a language other than English at home (see Figure 4). Amongst Greek Orthodox, 33% speak only English.

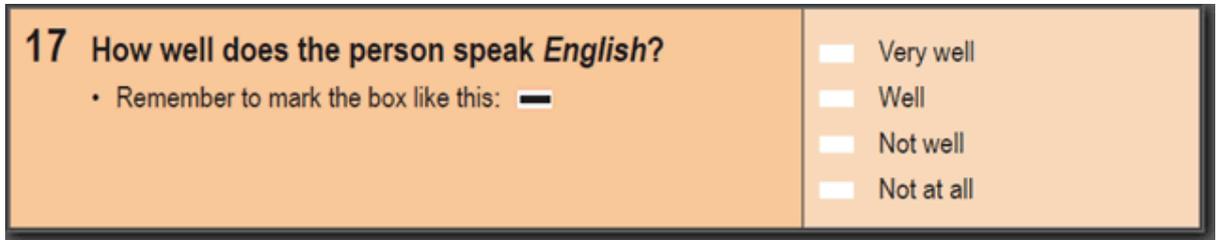
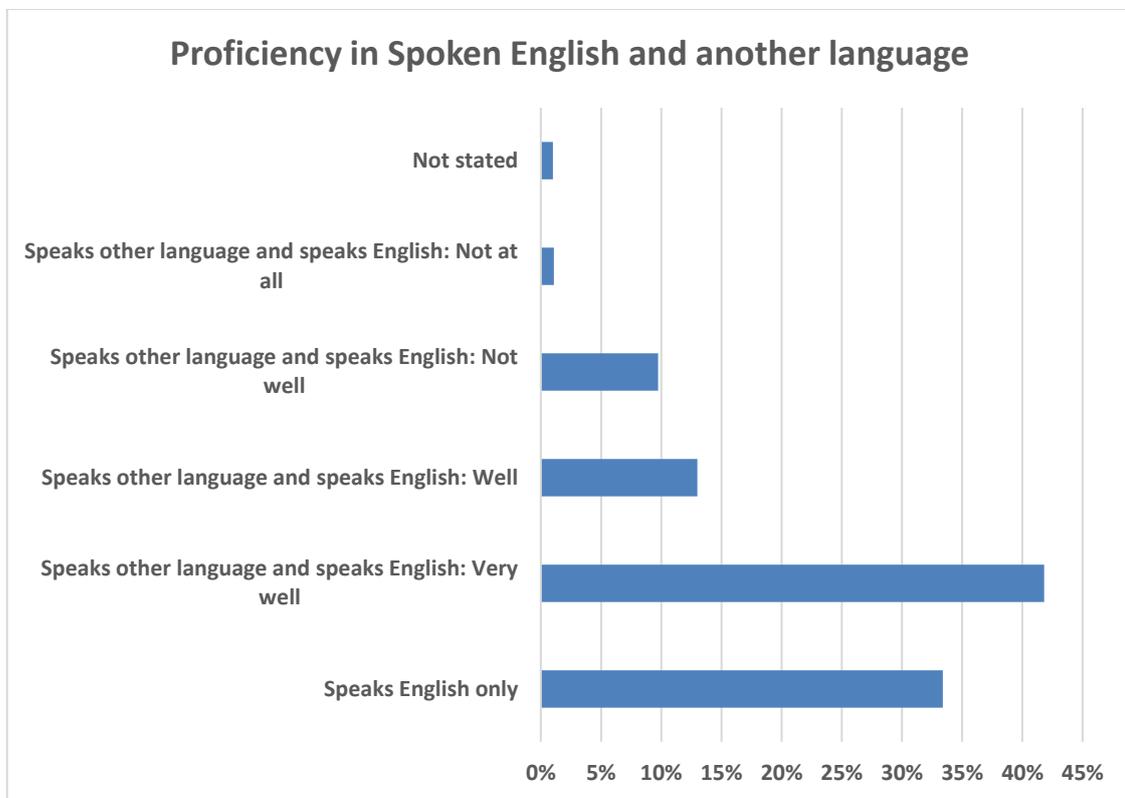


Figure 4. 2016 Census question on religion.



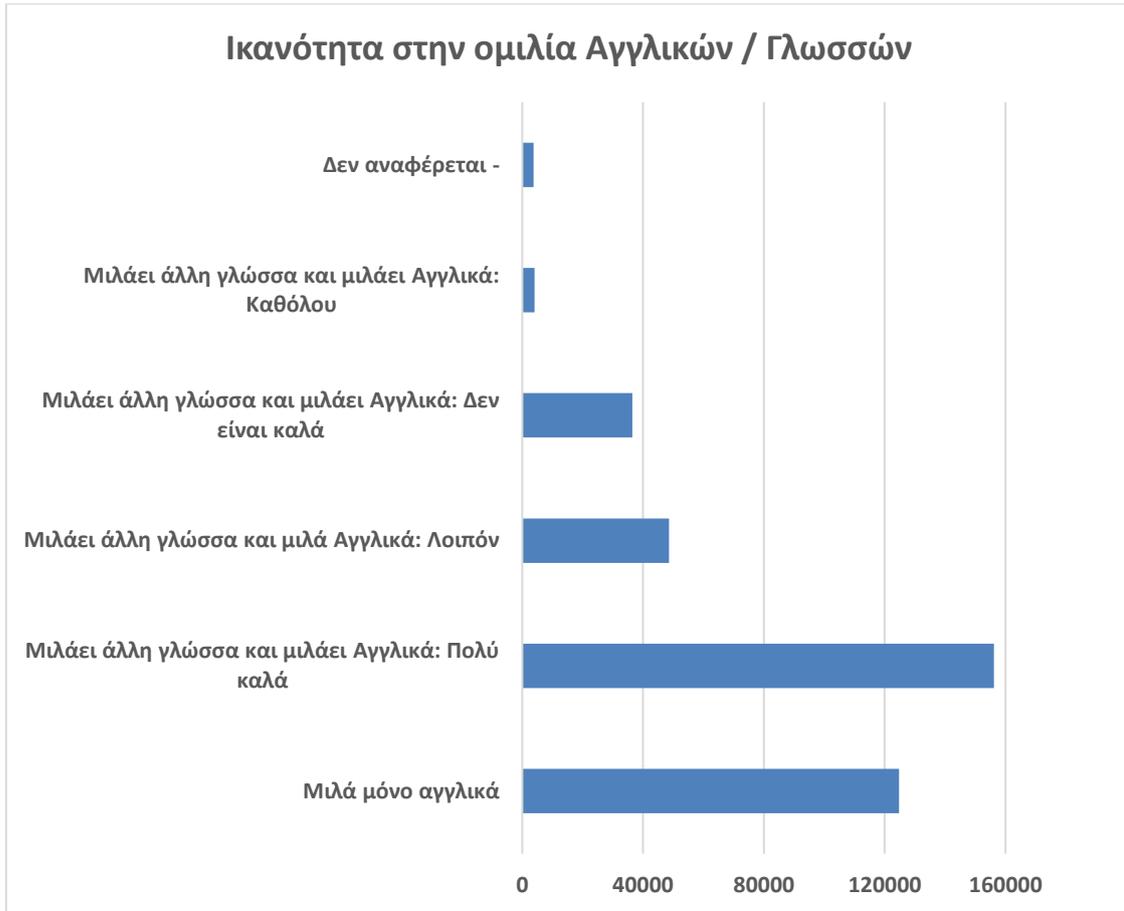


Figure 5. English language proficiency.

For the purposes of this report it will be assumed that those Greek Orthodox who indicate “not applicable” do not speak another language at home but are proficient in English. This means that 75% of the Greek Orthodox population are very proficient in English.

There are, however, just over 40,000 Greek Orthodox who speak another language at home (probably Greek) and who do not speak English well or do not speak English at all.

What is the occupational background of Greek Orthodox?

The occupational distribution of Greek Orthodox is not as straightforward as some might imagine. At the outset, occupation was not even applicable for 47% of the Greek Orthodox population in Australia (that is, they were not employed or in the labour force). This compares with 45% for the remainder of the general population

It is true that the 33,337 Greek Orthodox who are professionals are the largest of all the major occupational groups. There are more in this category than any other but there are also 24,603 Greek Orthodox who are managers; 26,627 are clerks; 21,587 are technicians or trade workers; and some 20,480 are sales workers. So, the distribution is fairly uniform across occupational groups.

Anecdotal accounts imply pride in achieving professional occupational status especially for those from a migrant or disadvantaged background. There might be a view that the children of migrants

are high achievers and that there are proportionally more Greek-Australians (and hence Greek Orthodox) in the professional group than the rest of the population. This view is mistaken.

The available evidence points to an overestimate of the number of Greek Orthodox who are professionals. Around 11% of Greek Orthodox are professionals whereas 12% of the remaining general population are professionals.

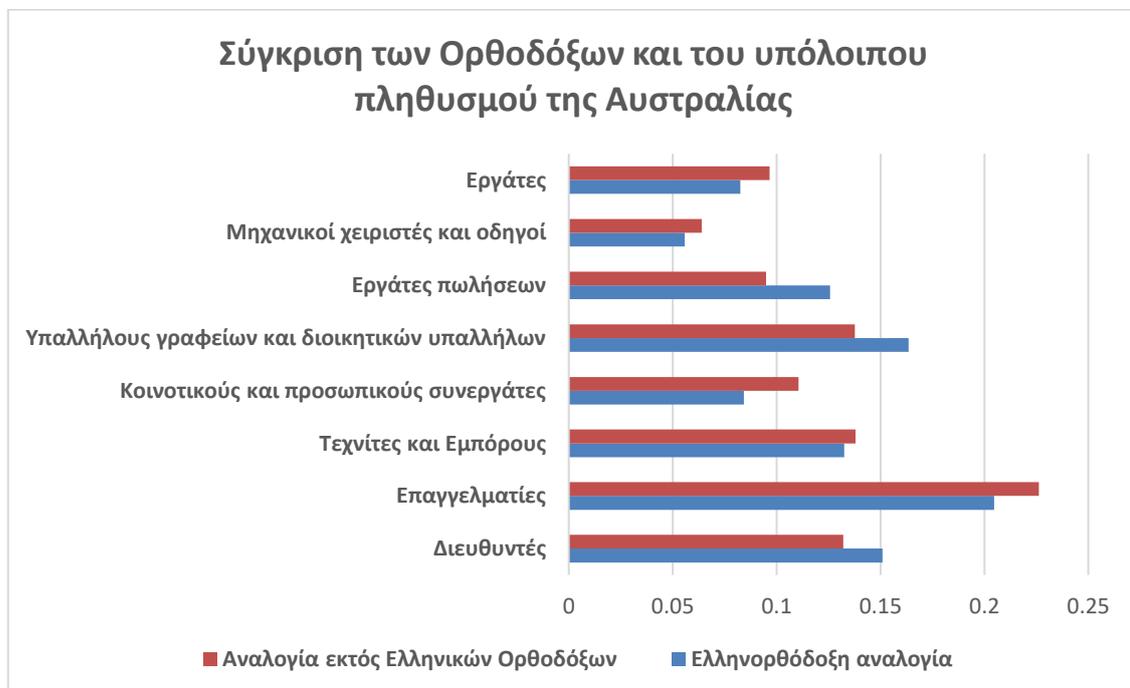
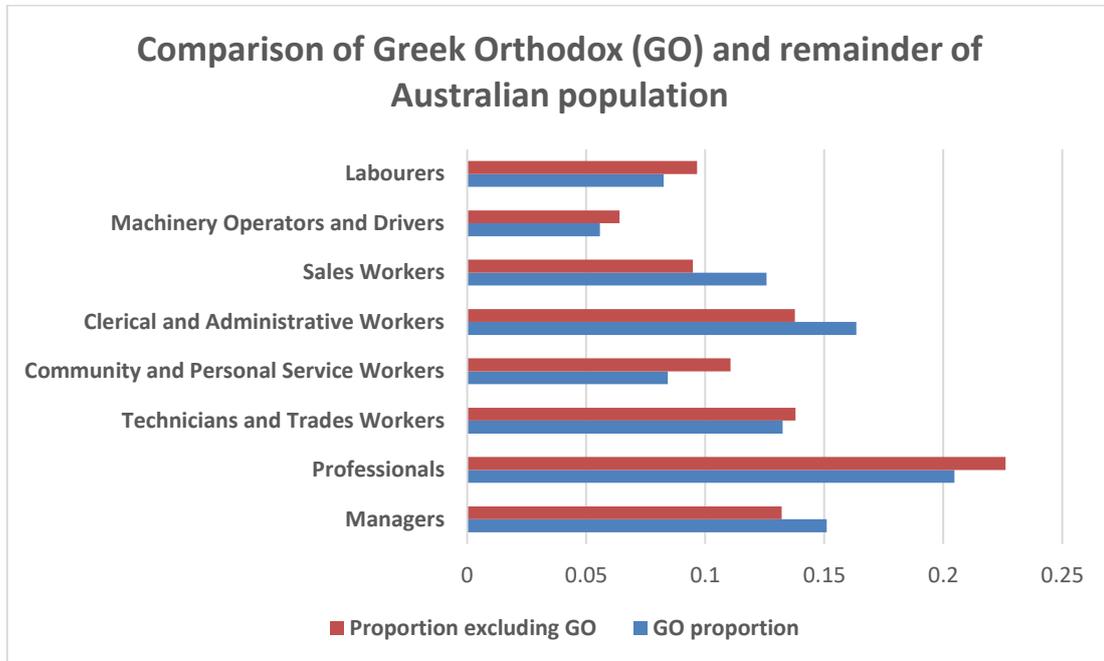


Figure 6. Occupational distribution of Greek Orthodox in Australia.

The proportion across the major occupational group is shown in Figure 6. It tracks fairly closely the same proportions as those in the general population (when those who inadequately

described, did not state their occupation, or for whom occupation was not applicable are excluded). As far as professionals from a Greek Orthodox background are concerned there are around 1 in 5 and this is slightly less than the proportion in the overall population.

How is income distributed across the Greek Orthodox?

Income levels are related to occupational status. In the Greek Orthodox population, the median level of income is probably less than imagined. The median was in the range \$26,000-\$33,799 for those 299,368 Greek Orthodox who listed an income level.

The smaller number than the total of 373,859 who indicated that they were Greek Orthodox may reflect those on social security benefits such as aged pensions. Naturally for young children and others there may not be any declared income. The breakdown of incomes of those who are Greek Orthodox is shown in the figure below and it appears fairly evenly distributed.

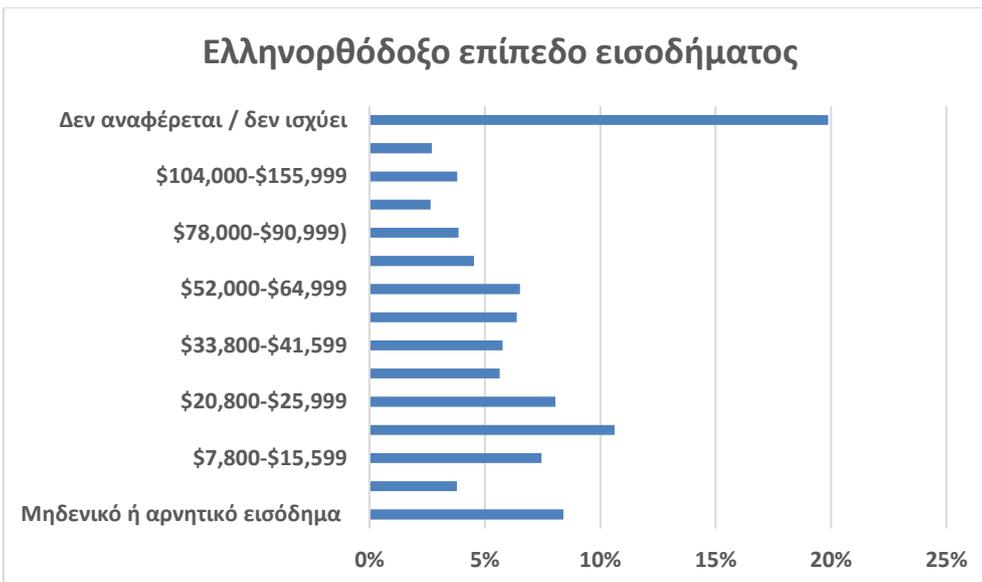
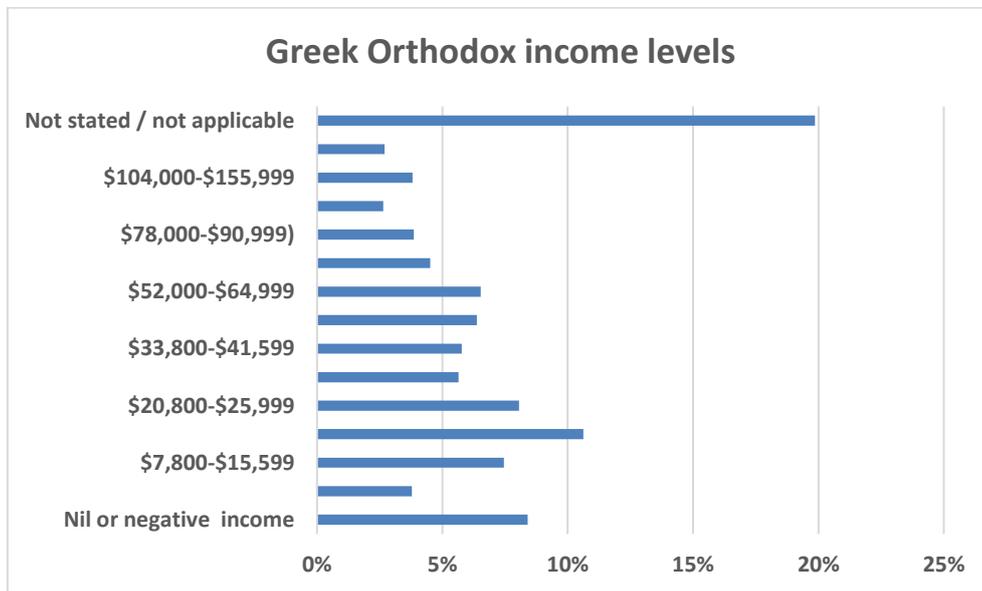


Figure 7. Greek Orthodox income levels.

The median income of Greek Orthodox, which is around \$26,00-\$33,799, is slightly less than for other Christian, Hindu, Judaism or Secular or No religion groups. The group with the largest number in the highest earning category (\$156,000 or more) is Judaism with 12% compared with 3% for Greek Orthodox. Greek Orthodox with nil or negative income are 10% compared with 17% for Hindu, 18% for Buddhism and 20% for Islam.

What is the educational level of Greek Orthodox?

Educational achievement is also related to occupational pathways and income levels. Again, Greek Orthodox are not as distinguished in the area of education as one might have imagined (see Figure 8).

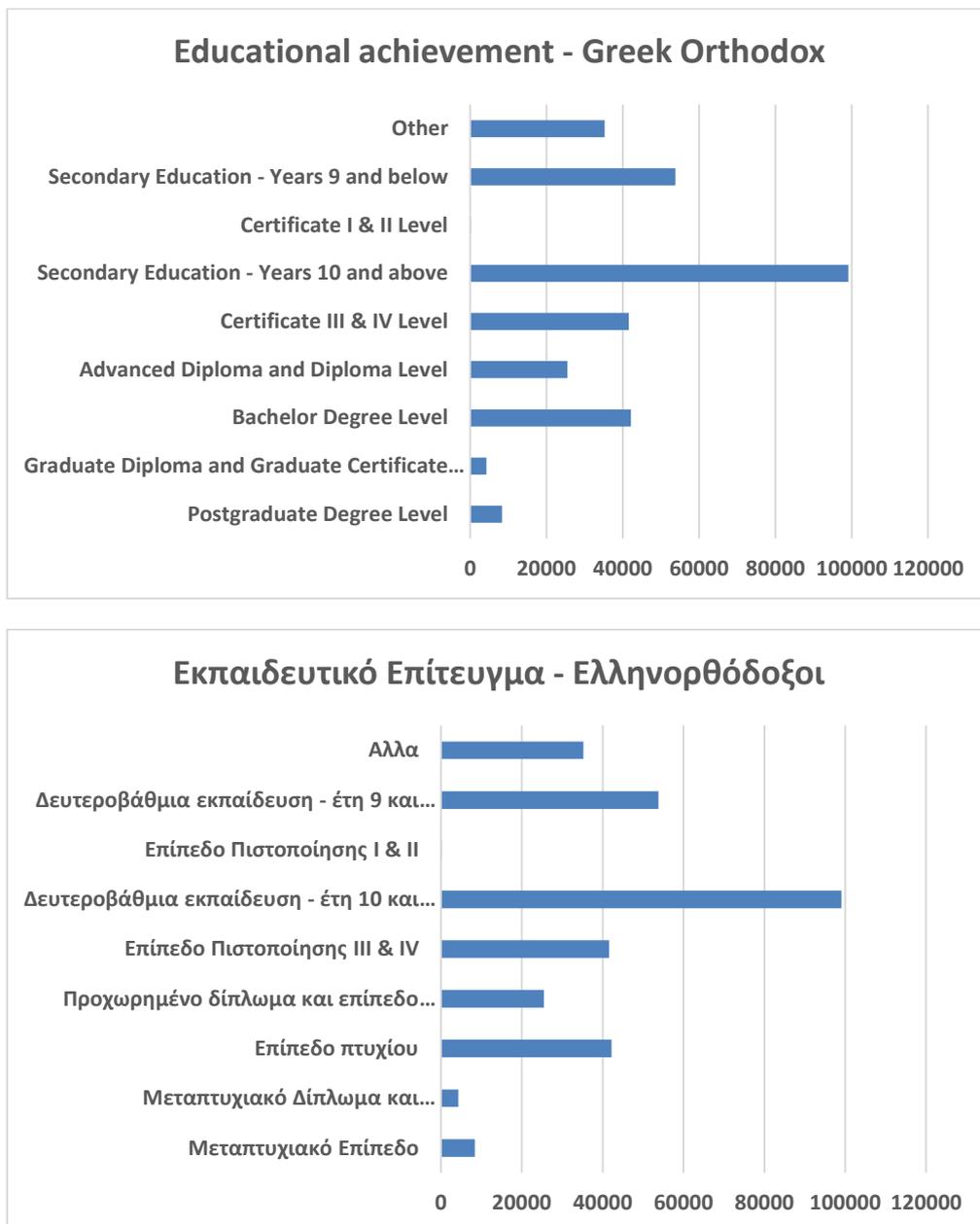


Figure 8. Educational achievement of Greek Orthodox.

The proportion of those with postgraduate degrees (3%) is far lower than those from Hinduism (23%) or Judaism (12%). The proportion of Greek Orthodox with a degree is 14% and again this compares poorly with Hinduism (32%), Judaism (32%), Buddhism (21%), no religion (18%) or Islam (17%) (see Figure 9).

Amongst Buddhism, other Christian, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism or no religion groups, the Greek Orthodox have the highest proportion (17%) of those with the lowest level of education (i.e., Year 9 and below). This low proportion may reflect the effects of post-war migration.



Figure 9. Comparisons of Greek Orthodox and other religions – Degree qualifications and Year 9 and below schooling.

What do we know about the marital and household status of Greek Orthodox?

The registered marital status of Greek Orthodox for whom this is applicable is mainly married or widowed (Figure 10). Just over a quarter have never married (28%), 7% are widowed, 3% separated. 8% divorced and 54% married.

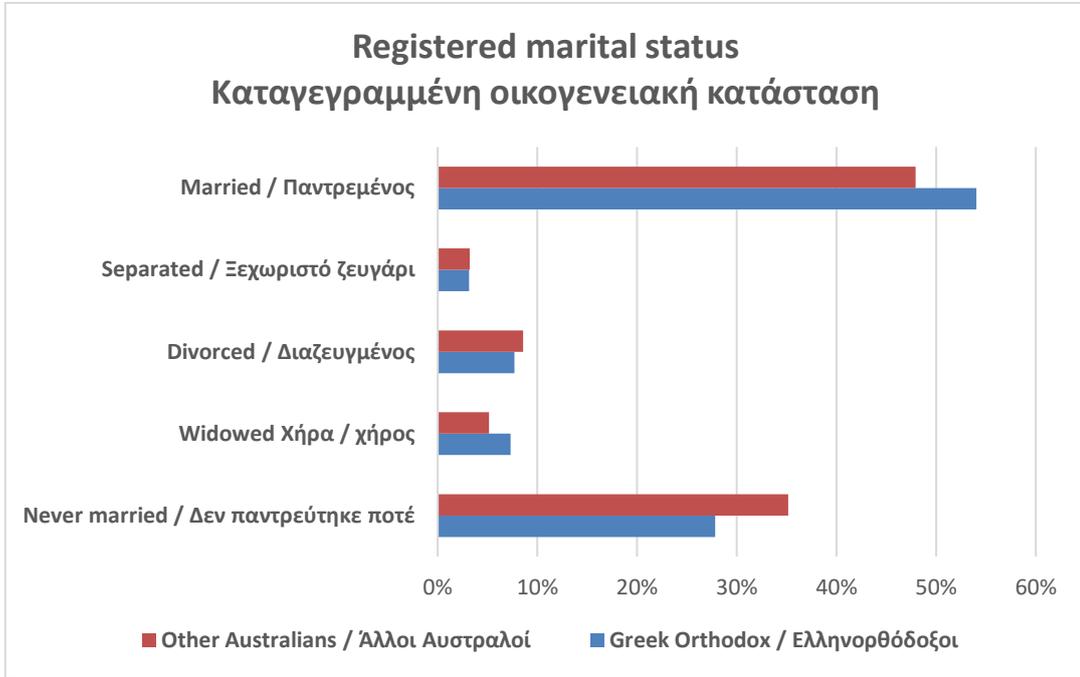


Figure 10. Registered marital status - comparison of Greek Orthodox and other Australians.

A substantially greater proportion of Greek Orthodox are married compared to other Australians and fewer are non-married. De facto marriages now make up 8% of social marital status among Greek Orthodox compared to 22% in the remaining population.



Figure 11. Social marital status of Greek Orthodox.

The overwhelming family status and relationship to the home was that of a parent, child or relative (Figure 12).

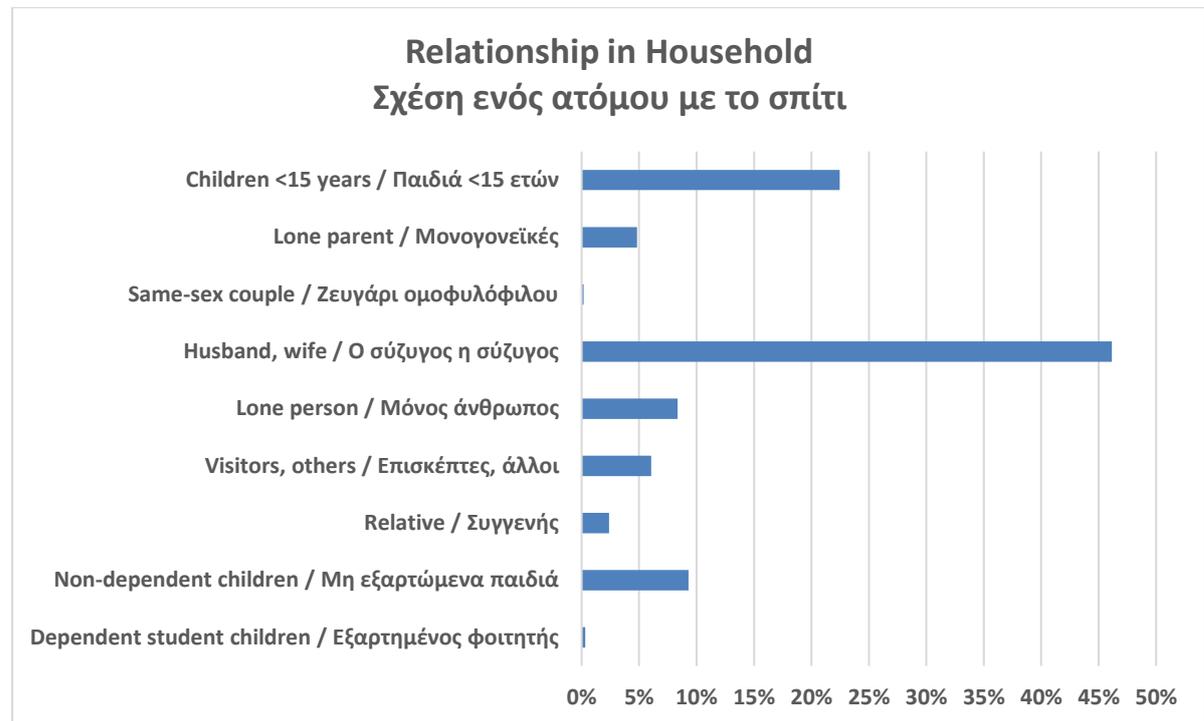


Figure 12. Household relationship – Greek Orthodox.

Conclusions

There are many potential variations in the profile of any individual Greek Orthodox member in Australia. There is no uniform stereotype or characterisation that fits most people.

There is however a modal type or for want of a better word the most common characterisation and in this section a summary is attempted.

The most typical Greek Orthodox is a minority member of the Australian population. He or she has parents who in all likelihood were born overseas but one in three now have at least one parent who is Australian born. Quite a few Greek Orthodox say that Greek is spoken at home but the quality or standard of the Greek language is not determined. Just on one-third speak only English. There are still some 40,000 who do not speak English at all but over time this number will decline.

The occupational status of Greek Orthodox is remarkably similar to that of the wider Australian population. There are not more professionals among Greek Orthodox than one might expect. Overly high achievement of the second or subsequent generations is a myth.

The educational achievement of Greek Orthodox is well below that of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, no religion or Islam. Furthermore Greek Orthodox have the highest proportion of those with the lowest level of education amongst these religions

In terms of income, Greek Orthodox are not particularly well-off. The median level of income is close to other religious groups but nowhere near as high as that of Judaism or Hinduism. At the

other extreme, Greek Orthodox are much less likely than those in Buddhism, Islam or Hinduism to report nil or negative income.

Around 8% of Greek Orthodox are divorced and de facto marriages make up 8% of social marital status but this is still far less than the remaining population (22%).

What does one make of all these figures? Firstly, they do not characterise any one person. They depict the modal person or the most typical Greek Orthodox.

The statistics describe the social and community landscape for most people. They depict the boundaries within which a Church must operate in its dealings with people. For instance, one in 12 are in de facto social marital status; one in 10 cannot speak English; same-sex couples hardly register on the radar; traditional marriage dominates for the most part; and Greek Orthodox are not highly educated nor particularly wealthy. Any stereotype is open to challenge but it is useful to have this social profile at our disposal for planning religious services and instruction let alone health, education or welfare services. In conclusion, it seems reasonable to conclude that Greek Orthodox in Australia is indeed a broad church.

Occasional papers

- 1 A comment on “From Opportunity to Outcomes...” with reference to the implications for Special Religious Education, April 2012
- 2 A rationale for general religious education and special Orthodox religious education in the Australian Curriculum, May 2012
- 3 The place of religions in the Australian Curriculum, June 2012
- 4 Do students in a Greek Orthodox college agree that the school’s mission has been achieved?, July 2012
- 5 What is the level of general religious knowledge of Greek Orthodox students?, July 2012
- 6 Thirteen curriculum concerns with the Australian Curriculum “Civics and Citizenship Draft Paper”, July 2012
- 7 Special Religious Education and its role in State Schools in New South Wales with reference to the Education Act (1990), July 2012
- 8 Implications of the 2011 census for Orthodox religiosity with special reference to ancestry and language, July 2012
- 9 A critical comment on “‘Jeesis is alive! He is the king of Australia’: Segregated religious instruction, child identity and exclusion”, December 2013 (**embargoed**)
- 10 A Greek Orthodox special religious education curriculum K to 7, January 2014
- 11 A note on the forthcoming review of special religious education in New South Wales, January 2014
- 12 An analysis of Greek Orthodox Colleges from the MySchool and NAPLAN data, August 2013
- 13 Appraising the importance of bullying for the National Safe Schools Framework, May 2016
- 14 Greek Orthodox in Australia – the big picture, April 2019
- 15 Social profile of Greek Orthodox in Australia, May 2019