

Bridging Gaps in Psychosocial Care for People with Palliative Care Needs: Priorities and Collaboration Needs in Attica, Greece

A Nominal Group Technique study

Ioanna Prasini¹, Iro Raimondou¹, Maria Eleni Chatzimitakou¹, Vasiliki Mpiskemi¹, Eleni Karafylli¹, Maria Dionysi¹, Aliko Tserkezoglou¹
¹ Galilee Palliative Care Centre, Athens, Greece

Background

Social workers and psychologists play a central role in addressing the psychosocial dimensions of care for people with palliative care needs, contributing to patient and family support and continuity of care across services. Most professionals involved in psychosocial care, work within the broader healthcare system where collaboration challenges, fragmentation, and unmet needs remain insufficiently explored in the Greek context. This study seeks to better understand their perspectives, with particular attention to system-level barriers and priorities in psychosocial care delivery. To capture a broad range of perspectives, invitations were disseminated to professionals involved in psychosocial care across primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare services in Attica, with voluntary participation ensuring representation from diverse service levels and organisational contexts.

Aim

The aim of this study was to identify and prioritise key needs, barriers, and collaboration challenges among social workers, psychologists, and a sociologist involved in the care of people with palliative care needs across the Attica region in Greece.

Methods

- Regional face-to-face meeting conducted on June 2, 2025
- Held at Galilee Palliative Care Centre, Athens, Greece
- Participants from primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare services
- Invitations disseminated via email and telephone
- Nominal Group Technique (NGT) used for prioritisation
- Quantitative data analysed descriptively
- Qualitative data analysed using thematic analysis

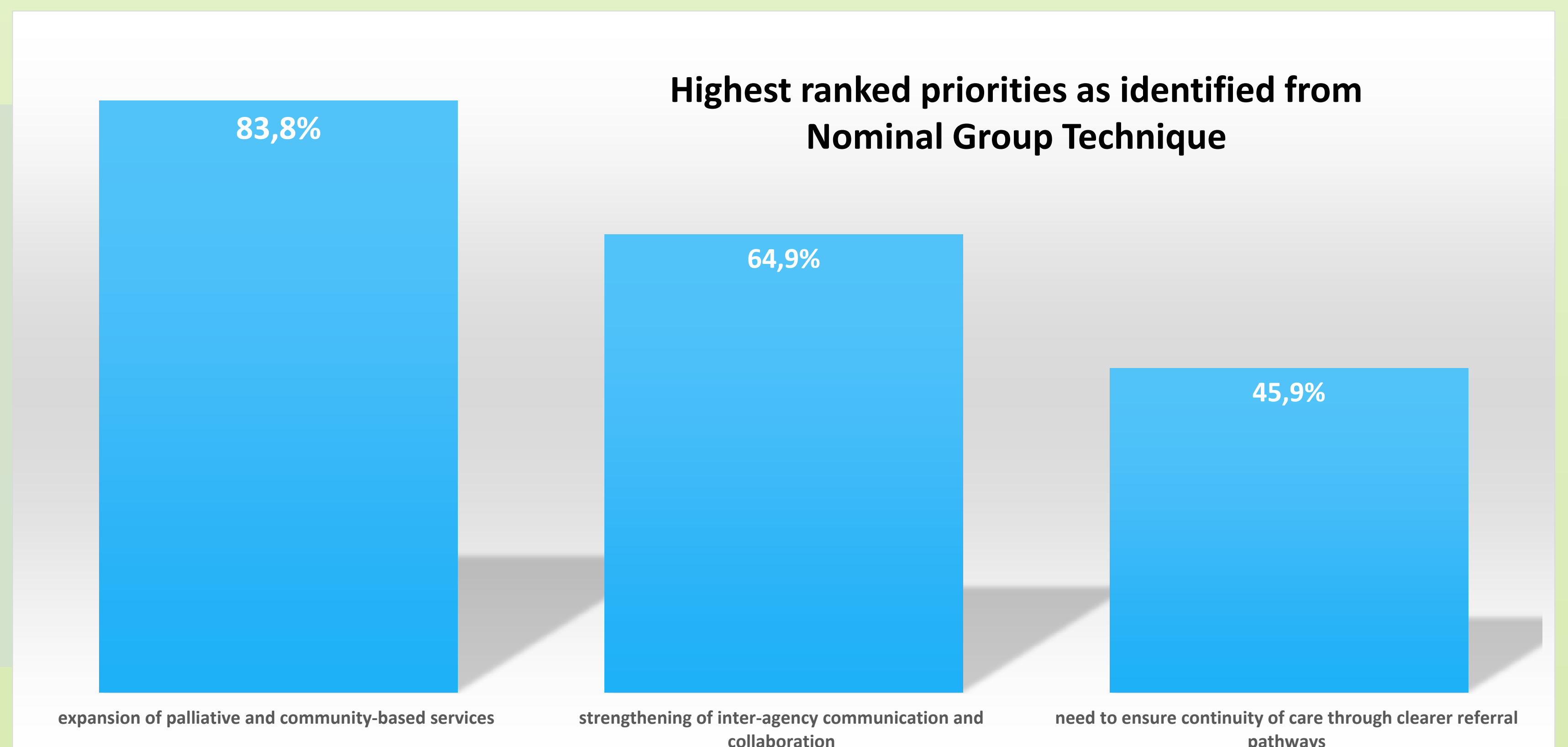
Participants

- Total sample: 37 professionals
- Social workers (n=32)
- Psychologists (n=4)
- Sociologist (n=1)
- Participants represented primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare services across Attica, including community and municipal settings.

Results:

Invitations were disseminated to 36 organisations; 37 professionals attended, representing 27 organisations and one independent practitioner. Representation was highest among community services (63%), followed by hospitals (26%) and NGOs (11%), indicating strong but uneven engagement.

The highest-ranked priorities identified through the NGT process were the expansion of palliative and community-based services (31 votes; **83.8% of participants**), strengthening inter-agency communication and collaboration (24 votes; **64.9%**), and ensuring continuity of care through clearer referral pathways (17 votes; **45.9%**).



Thematic analysis further revealed four key areas of concern:

fragmented care systems

limited interprofessional communication

emotional fatigue coupled with insufficient opportunities for supervision

a strong expressed need for networking and ongoing professional development.

Participants described their professional role as situated between often disconnected systems, emphasising the ongoing challenge of maintaining continuity of care and coordination across services.

“We often feel alone between systems — patients fall through the cracks while we try to build invisible bridges.”

Discussion

The findings highlight significant structural challenges in psychosocial care for people with palliative care needs, including expansion of palliative and community-based services, service fragmentation, limited communication pathways, and emotional fatigue among professionals, all of which hinder coordination and continuity of care. The prominence of these priorities across participants underscores the need for structured communication, integrated referral pathways, and targeted professional support and education.

Conclusion

The meeting formed part of an ongoing effort to **develop a coordinated psychosocial care network across Attica**, with the aim of aligning services based on identified needs and strengthening collaboration between sectors.

The findings of this process will inform the next steps in the organisation and development of this network.

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