Family Dynamics after Separation
A Life Course Perspective on Post-Divorce Families
Sonderheft Zeitschrift für Familienforschung/
Journal of Family Research, 10 (2015)
Family Dynamics after Separation
Family Dynamics after Separation
A Life Course Perspective on Post-Divorce Families

Edited by Ulrike Zartler,
Valerie Heintz-Martin,
and Oliver Arránz Becker

Special Issue/Sonderheft 10 (2015)

Journal of Family Research/
Zeitschrift für Familienforschung

Barbara Budrich Publishers
Opladen • Berlin • Toronto 2015
Divorce and separation induce major changes in the life course of individuals, their children, their relatives and their social networks. From a life course perspective, union dissolutions, particularly when involving dependent children, can be regarded as critical events that represent transitions between two very distinct family phases. They bring about profound changes in family life, often leading to residential discontinuity (i.e. family members moving apart) and sometimes to a reduction or even to a disruption of parent-child contacts. These changes usually require a profound and sustained reorganisation of post-separation family living arrangements. As divorce rates have risen over the last few decades, an increasing number of families experience breakup leading to an increase in family diversity which has opened up a relatively new field of research on processes that take place in the aftermath of separation and divorce.

The present special issue aims to study the dynamics of these processes, introducing several extensions and elaborations to the current state of research based on life course theoretical tenets. First, rather than studying single events in a limited time interval (e.g. the first parental re-partnering after divorce), the contributions in this special issue shed light on family processes and sequences of events (e.g. partnership sequences). Second, several contributions examine consequences of union dissolution for different family members, taking into account both children and parents. Third, building on insights from previous, mostly national, studies, the present compilation introduces a broader comparative perspective on post-divorce families, comprising articles covering a wide variety of countries (Austria, Belgium, Canada, England, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation and Sweden). This approach has the potential to highlight the roles of normative and juridical regulations regarding divorce in different societal contexts. And fourth, an interdisciplinary approach is adopted that is intended to foster exchange between different scholarly traditions such as sociology, psychology, demography and law. For instance, while lawyers may benefit from sociological and psychological insights (e.g. numbers of families and children affected), sociologists need knowledge about juridical regulations and procedures in order to make full sense of their study participants’ reports.

This special issue was partly inspired by the workshop “Life-Course Transitions after Separation: Stepfamilies, Lone and Non-residential Parenthood” held in Berlin in 2013, in
cooperation between the Max-Planck Institute (Michaela Kreyenfeld), the German Youth Institute (Valerie Heintz-Martin) and the University of Rostock (Heike Trappe). The workshop was funded to a great extent by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. The editors would like to thank the sponsors of the workshop and all involved colleagues for their support. We also want to thank Kurt P. Bierschock, managing editor of the Zeitschrift für Familienforschung/Journal of Family Research, for his tireless support in preparing this special issue and for his oversight in accompanying every single step of the publication process. Furthermore, we owe our thanks especially to the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful and constructive comments and their valuable suggestions. Finally, we thank all the authors for their intellectual contributions to this special issue and for their impact in shedding light on family dynamics after separation.
Table of contents

*Ulrike Zartler, Valerie Heintz-Martin and Oliver Arránz Becker*
Foreword ................................................................................................................... 5

*Ulrike Zartler, Valerie Heintz-Martin and Oliver Arránz Becker*
Family dynamics after separation from a life course perspective: Conceptual foundations ............................................................................................. 9

**Children and parents in post-divorce families**

*Mattijs Kalmijn and Jaap Dronkers*
Lean on me? The influence of parental separation and divorce on children’s support networks in four European countries ........................................ 21

*Oliver Arránz Becker, Nadia Lois and Veronika Salzburger*
Intergenerational contact between parents and adult (step)children: The role of biological descent and co-residence patterns ........................................ 43

*Valerie Heintz-Martin, Christine Entleitner-Phleps and Alexandra N. Langmeyer*
“Doing (step)family”: Family life in (step)families in Germany ................................ 65

*Michael Feldhaus, Mandy Boehnke and Franziska Krohn*
Childhood family transitions and their impact on family living arrangements in later life ............................................................................................................. 83

*Annie Gagné, Sophie-Claire Valiquette-Tessier, Marie-Pier Vandette and Julie Gosselin*
Reflecting on the co-parenting experience of couples living in established stepfamilies: A phenomenological inquiry .......................................... 101
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Re)doing parent-child relationships in dual residence arrangements:</td>
<td>Rakel Berman</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish children’s narratives about changing relations post-separation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union trajectories after separation</td>
<td>Inge Pasteels and Dimitri Mortelmans</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyadic analysis of repartnering after divorce.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do children matter?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The second time around: Educational attainment and repartnering in</td>
<td>Katya Ivanova and Katia Begall</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Russian Federation and Estonia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational assortative mating after divorce:</td>
<td>Lindsay Theunis, Inge Pasteels and Jan Van Bavel</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence or divergence from first marriages?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal and methodological issues</td>
<td>Nina Dethloff</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From separation to stepfamily.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A legal perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efforts to cut the Gordian knot. A sociological analysis</td>
<td>Ulrike Zartler and Jana Hierzer</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regarding legal aspects of post-divorce parental responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined comparative research in the field of family relations:</td>
<td>Katharina Boele-Woelki</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some reflections from the legal perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is in, who is out of (step)families?</td>
<td>Céline Le Bourdais and Évelyne Lapierre-Adamcyk</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of respondents’ gender and residential status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographical sketches of the contributors</td>
<td></td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many Western societies have faced a tremendous increase in divorce, separation\(^1\) and resulting family diversity over the past few decades. The increased instability of marital and nonmarital unions entails new challenges for children, parents and families, including the rearrangement of everyday lives and family relationships, the adaptation to altered needs and requirements, the search for a new partner, the redefinition of existing ties to the ex-partner, to co-parents, to biological and social children, and to other relatives, family members and friends. Legal regulations of family life (e.g. custody arrangements) gain importance, and even the basic definitions of the boundaries of post-separation families may be blurred. Together with the decreasing stability of unions, a variety of living arrangements, as well as complex spatial and time-related structures evolve.

Although some scholarly journals published special issues with a focus on divorce\(^2\), compilations of comparative research from a life course perspective are still scarce. The aim of this special issue is to bundle research that analyses the evolution, dynamics and living circumstances of post-divorce families. Scholars from various disciplines examine different aspects of post-divorce family life from a life course perspective. The contributions illustrate that post-divorce families are complex social units and that the involved individuals actively create their life courses in a social process. This introduction aims at providing a basic concept to analyse divorce from a life course perspective (section 1) and at briefly outlining the topics covered in this special issue (section 2).

---

\(^1\) The terms divorce and separation are used interchangeably.

1. Divorce and the life course

Over the past decades, the rising numbers of divorce and separation have been one of the most pronounced trends in family behavior in many Western societies, resulting in profound changes and a considerable prevalence of family dynamics and diversity (for an overview see Amato/James 2010; Emery 2013; Härkönen 2014). In terms of theoretical conception, this rise corresponded with a shift from a disorganizational towards a reorganizational model, conceptualizing divorce no longer as an isolated event, but rather as a process that evolves over time by modifying and restructuring family relationships (Cowan/Hetherington 1991; Fthenakis 1995; Herzer 1998; Hill/Kopp 1999; Amato 2000). From such a perspective, the dissolution of partnerships is often preceded by a long process and can represent the prelude for a variety of further transitions in family life.

We rely on the life course as a sequence of socially defined events and transitions that individuals experience over time. Particular emphasis is put on the dynamics and interdependencies of family relationships and processes. Families can be thought of as social systems in which intergenerational and lateral family relationships are closely intertwined and mutually depend upon each other (Arránz Becker/Steinbach 2012). Moreover, families are regarded as being influenced by the lives of individuals around them and reciprocally having consequences for their environment (Elder 1994; 1995; Jackson Braboy/Berkowitz 2005; Macmillan/Copher 2005; Elder et al. 2006; Mayer 2009). Thus, biographical trajectories and the timing of events, like the birth of a child, marriage or divorce, are crucial elements. Research based on a life course perspective explores how individuals’ transitions and trajectories are linked across the life span, how their lives are embedded into social structures and institutions (e.g. educational system, legal system, labour market) and how related changes affect their lives. Furthermore, a life course perspective also emphasizes the significance attached by individuals to events that occur in their life paths (Mayer 2004; Levy et al. 2005; Diewald/Mayer 2008; Sassler 2010).

The life course is influenced by experiences and decisions of the past: human lives are characterized by links between earlier and later events, with the former influencing the meaning and implications of the latter (Elder 1985). Conceptually, transitions mark role trajectories: individuals move from one role to another in a discrete time span (Macmillan/Copher 2005). The life course, then, is characterized by the interlock of multiple role trajectories (Elder 1985), unfolding within a complex system that involves other life courses and relationships: individual life courses are interdependent with family life courses as decisions, events and developments in the life course of one person influence those of other family members. For example, children’s life courses change after a parental divorce, often without granting them much influence on the underlying developments and decisions. These complex interdependencies make the individual life course a highly non-linear process, with individual and family development being considerably shaped by experiences over the life course, and past transitions influencing future developments. Major biographical transitions and decisions therefore have a strong impact on opportunities and restrictions in future life courses for all involved persons, be their involvement voluntary and self-determined or not.

From a life course perspective, divorce is one of the most substantial and most often mentioned life events (Gähler 1998), and the rise in divorce rates has contributed to a loss
Family dynamics after separation from a life course perspective: Conceptual foundations

The notion of a ‘normative biography’, including life-long marriage and the formation of a nuclear family with shared biological children, has been challenged, and partnership and parenthood biographies have become much more complex (Sweeney 2010). Family transitions that were formerly clearly differentiated are now being fused (Brückner/Mayer 2005; Widmer/Ritschard 2009): individuals cohabit and marry subsequently, get divorced and remarry, have children, find new partners and separate again (Brüderl 2004).

Reasons for and consequences of divorce, patterns of repartnering and of leading post-divorce family lives vary widely across the life course and confront individuals with particular challenges in different stages of their lives. Accordingly, a life course perspective has been shown to be particularly fruitful for analysing post-divorce family dynamics and their connections with preceding events and subsequent transitions (Elder 1995; Roempke Graefe/Lichter 1999; Martin et al. 2005; Elder et al. 2006; Huinink/Feldhaus 2009; Feijten/Mulder 2010; Bastin 2012). Studies from a variety of countries conclude that divorce can have a major impact over the life course of all involved persons, especially for the children; and on their psychological, physical and socioeconomic well-being (Amato 2000; Uunk 2004; Amato/Cheadle 2005; Amato 2010; Sweeney 2010). Although effects are not necessarily long-lasting and results tend to be heterogeneous, divorce may be viewed as a source of chronic stress that persists well into adulthood (Cherlin et al. 1998; Fomby/Cherlin 2007; Osborne/McLanahan 2007; Amato et al. 2011).

Based on Elder (1994), Mayer (2004), Huinink (2005) and Huinink/Feldhaus (2009, 309f.), our basic theoretical assumptions for using the life course approach as a concept to analyse divorce and its aftermath are organized along the following characteristics: (1) multilevel structure, (2) multidimensionality, and (3) path dependencies.

1.1 Multilevel structure

Individual life courses are embedded in a multilevel structure of social dynamics and individual developments. On the levels of societies, social contexts and individuals, different connections can be drawn with regard to divorce.

On the societal level, cultural and institutional social structures, political, economic and legal conditions determine the constraints and opportunities of social action within post-divorce families. Post-divorce families, in particular mother-headed single-parent families, often struggle with economic hardships (Uunk 2004) and are also confronted with negative normative views (Weaver/Coleman 2010; Zartler 2014). Furthermore, post-divorce family life is considerably influenced by legal regulations and procedures which may last well after both spouses consider the union as ended. In the aftermath of divorce, the legal framework needs to adapt to changes in family and partnering behaviour, to a rising variety of post-divorce parental responsibility models and to legal rights and obligations of additional (social) parents (Verschraegen 2009; Troilo 2011; Halloran 2012, see also contributions by Dethloff and Zartler/Hierzer in this issue).

On the level of social contexts and networks, relationships with partners, family members, relatives and friends are of particular importance and can undergo meaningful changes over time. Repartnering markets change with age; postmarital partnership trajectories are strongly tied to the presence of children from previous unions (Goldscheider et
al. 2009; Thomson et al. 2012) and also to the amount of time spent with these children (Pasteels/Mortelmans in this issue). Educational aspects are highly relevant with regard to repartnering behaviour (Ivanova/Begall; Theunis/Pasteels/Van Bavel in this issue), and gender differences persist: divorced women face more difficulties to find a new partner than divorced men (Wu/Schimmele 2005; Waller/Peters 2008; Jaschinski 2011).

Family dynamics become more complex after divorce as the mere number of relationships rises due to repartnering, multiple parenthood and different sets of children that are to be included into the family (Carlson/Furstenberg 2006; Feldhaus/Huinink 2011). This poses challenges to the establishment of stable post-divorce relationships. Family structure has been shown to have a considerable impact on parent-child contact (Lansford et al. 2001; Kalmijn 2012a; Steinbach 2013) and on the emotional quality of intergenerational ties (Arránz Becker et al. 2013). Contact patterns vary over the life course, are highly gendered and depend on the (biological or social) nature of family bonds, with both stepmothers and separated biological fathers facing a ‘structural disadvantage’ in keeping in touch with their children or stepchildren over time (Kalmijn 2013; Arránz Becker/Lois/Salzburger in this issue). Parental divorce also has an impact on the nature of children’s contact and support networks (Kalmijn 2012b; Kalmijn/Dronkers in this issue). Furthermore, family structure has been shown to exert effects on families’ everyday lives with regard to diverse aspects like time and activities, family climate, interactions, parental dynamics or division of housework. Nevertheless, a thorough distinction between different sub-types of families (e.g. stepmother families versus stepfather families) seems to be crucial for a comprehensive understanding of stepfamilies (Heintz-Martin/Entleitner/Langmeyer in this issue). Societal and social contexts provide the framework for the organisation and arrangement of post-divorce family lives, under the premises of different residence arrangements and the manifold requirements of connected life courses (Ahrons 2007; Zartler 2011; Berman; Gagné/Valiquette-Tessier/Gosselin in this issue).

On the individual level, actors actively create their life courses by selecting concrete actions from a pool of biographic options (Birg 1987) based on available individual resources, psychosocial dispositions and internalised cultural values and attitudes. Ultimately, life course decisions may therefore contribute to the attainment of highly valued individual goals such as security and well-being (Huinink 2005). Usually, studies on post-divorce families routinely take such individual characteristics into account, as is the case for the studies in this special issue.

1.2 Multidimensionality

The life course is related to different and highly interrelated life domains. The resulting multidimensionality is of particular importance with regard to family dynamics after parental separation as intimate relationships have to be reorganized and situated in space and time (Settersten 2004; O’Brien 2005; Schier 2013). In order to analyse post-divorce families and relationships in their complexity, we need information from the interrelated life courses of (ex-)partners, parents, children or other family members, which entails demanding methodological approaches (Thompson/Walker 1982; Lyons/Sayer 2005; Matthews 2005; Zartler 2010). Even the definition and identification of two residential
units as families within data sets is not necessarily evident (Le Bourdais/Lapierre-Adamcyk in this issue). Furthermore, multidimensional research on divorce and post-divorce families raises questions of how to make concepts developed in different disciplines comparable and useable to the scholarly community (Boele-Woelki in this issue).

1.3 Path dependencies

Parental divorce has important consequences for children’s life courses and is connected with children’s partnering behaviour, union formation, their models of intimate relationships and marriage and an increased risk of marital dissolution (Wolfinger 2000; Martin et al. 2005; Dronkers/Härkönen 2008; Riggio/Weiser 2008; Wolfinger 2011). Moreover, children with divorced parents tend to show lower educational performance than their peers who grow up with continuously married parents, which is, in turn, associated with lower status jobs and less income in adulthood (Amato et al. 2011), and they have a higher probability to live in non-traditional family patterns in later adulthood (Feldhaus/Boehnke/Krohn in this issue). Although findings are mixed, having divorced parents has also been shown to have an influence on other life course transitions such as the likelihood to leave the parental home early and to enter a partnership and become a parent early in life (Bhrolcháin et al. 2000; Reneflot 2011). In particular, experiencing multiple transitions after parental separation is associated with negative influences on children’s life courses (Amato/Sobolewski 2001; Fomby/Cherlin 2007; Osborne/McLanahan 2007; Sun/Li 2008; Zartler/Berghammer 2013).

2. This special issue

There are still many blind spots in our understanding of post-divorce family dynamics and the related complex processes and their interplay over the life course. This special issue focuses on selected aspects of family dynamics and transitions after separation and on their consequences for family life that are less well understood, adopting a life course perspective. It aims at providing new insights into how the manifold consequences of union dissolution impact upon and shape individual life courses. The special issue relies on an interdisciplinary approach, including contributions from sociology, psychology, demography and law. Articles covering a wide variety of countries (Austria, Belgium, Canada, England, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation and Sweden) are collected. Furthermore, this volume comprises quantitative and qualitative research. It consists of thirteen contributions allocated to three main sections: (1) Children and parents in post-divorce families, (2) Union trajectories after separation, and (3) Legal and methodological issues.

The first section, consisting of six contributions, addresses challenges for children and parents in post-divorce families. Matthijs Kalmijn and Jaap Dronkers analyse the influence of parental divorce on children’s support networks in four European countries and find strong effects of parental divorce on the nature of these networks. Oliver Arranz Becker, Nadia Lois and Veronika Salzburger examine the frequency of parent-child con-
tact (both face-to-face and media-based) in biological and nonbiological (and blended) family settings. They find a strongly gendered contact pattern. Valerie Heintz-Martin, Christine Entleitner and Alexandra Langmeyer explore stepfamily lives in Germany by employing the theoretical framework of ‘doing family’ and highlighting the importance to distinguish between stepfather and stepmother families. The subsequent contribution in this section by Michael Feldhaus, Mandy Boehnke and Franziska Krohn investigates long-term effects of childhood family transitions and ensuing living arrangements during adulthood, indicating a positive effect on the probability of childlessness and living in non-traditional family patterns. Annie Gagné, Sophie-Claire Valiquette-Tessier, Marie Pier Vandette and Julie Gosselin present a study on co-parenting experiences of couples living in established stepfamilies and determine four distinct modes of involvement. Finally, Rakel Berman explores children’s experiences about growing up in dual residence arrangements and processes of redoing family relationships post-separation. She finds a novel reflexivity and creative ways of children in positioning themselves within their families.

Three contributions deal with partnership transitions after separation and their development over time, focusing particularly on higher order relationships. Inge Pasteels and Dimitri Mortelmans present a comprehensive account of repartnering after divorce by analysing entire partnership trajectories as well as associations between trajectories of exspouses over time, based on the ‘Divorce in Flanders’ survey. Two contributions consider the macro level of the educational system and put a focus on education and its influence on repartnering. First, Katya Ivanova and Katia Begall examine how educational attainment is related to repartnering behaviour in the Russian Federation and in Estonia and show that individuals reproduce their partnering matches from previous unions with regard to education. Second, Lindsay Theunis, Inge Pasteels and Jan Van Bavel contribute to the discussion by linking patterns of educational assortative mating after separation with partner choices in first marriages and provide a detailed analysis of education-specific mating opportunities after separation.

The last section is devoted to legal and methodological issues connected to divorce and family diversity – a topic which is rarely addressed in the sociological literature even though legal issues following a family disruption and the constitution of families after separation represent a tremendous challenge for all family members. The contribution by Nina Dethloff investigates juridical consequences for family changes during the transformation from parental separation to stepfamily formation. She outlines the legal concept of parental custody in German law, describes legal impacts of divorce and separation on parental rights and obligations and addresses legal changes resulting from newly established partnerships. Ulrike Zartler and Jana Hierzer analyse the legal organization of parental custody after divorce in Austria from a sociological perspective: under consideration of theories of recognition, they explore how concepts of post-divorce parental responsibility have been discussed in the light of recent substantial legal amendments. Katharina Boelle-Woelki reflects on requirements, challenges and benefits resulting from the combination of legal, sociological, psychological or economic research in the field of family relations. Finally, the contribution by Céline Le Bourdais and Évelyne Lapierre-Adamczyk addresses methodological issues and discusses difficulties in defining and identifying families in the context of high conjugal instability. As families split into two residential units, retrospec-
tive identification of stepfamily episodes becomes more difficult, and reports of stepfamily dynamics may become increasingly dependent on respondents’ gender, coresidence status and the type of parent-child relation (i.e. biological parent versus stepparent).

References

Amato, Paul R./Kane, Jennifer B./James, Spencer (2011): Reconsidering the “good divorce”. In: Family Relations, 60, 5, pp. 511-524.


Family dynamics after separation from a life course perspective: Conceptual foundations


Kalmijn, Matthijs (2012b): Longitudinal analyses of the effects of age, marriage, and parenthood on social contacts and support. In: Advances in Life Course Research, 17, 2, pp. 177-190.


Children and parents in post-divorce families
Lean on me? The influence of parental separation and divorce on children’s support networks in four European countries

Möchtest du mich stützen? – Der Einfluss der elterlichen Trennung und Scheidung auf die Unterstützungsnetzwerke der Kinder in vier europäischen Ländern

Abstract: Using data on 14-year old children in four European countries, this study compares the support networks of children in intact and separated families. It is found that a parental separation has significant effects on the nature of these networks. Children of separated parents are less likely to include the father in their networks and also less likely to include the mother, although this latter effect is smaller than the former. Conflict after separation is negatively associated with the presence of parents in the network, while co-parenting is positively associated with mentioning the father. Other persons in the network (kin, friends) are not mentioned more often when children have separated parents. Theoretically, our results confirm hypotheses about physical and emotional availability. Hypotheses about network compensation by others than the parents receive little support. Some cross-national variation in effects of separation is found, but a negative effect exists in all countries. The practical relevance of our findings is that the increased demand for support that children experience when their parents separate, often goes together with a reduction in the supply of support.

Introduction

Sociological research on the effects of parental divorce and separation has focused on several aspects of children’s well-being: educational performance (De Lange/Dronkers/Wolbers 2014; Jonsson/Gähler 1997; Kalmijn, 2010; McLanahan/Sandefur 1994), psychological well-being and health (Fomby/Cherlin 2007; Mandemakers/Kalmijn 2014; Sigle-Rushton/Hobcraft/Kiernan 2005), and the child’s later marital and relational behaviour (Dronkers/Härkönen 2008). While there is consensus that parental divorce has negative, albeit modest and heterogeneous, consequences for children, little is known about how children respond to the problems they experience when their parents separate. One important element here is the support network that children have. Many studies have demonstrated the so-called ‘buffer’ effects of social networks (Berkman et al. 2000). Hence, children’s networks could in principle buffer the shock that they experience when their parents decide to divorce. Children might also actively build a larger network after parental separation in order to be able to buffer this shock. Before we can analyse such hypotheses, however, we first need to know how the support network of children looks like.

One important concern here is what happens to the position of parents in children’s support network when parents get divorced. For many children, the parents are the dominant members of their support network (Belle/ Benenson 2014). As will be explained below, there are reasons to expect that both fathers and mothers become a less important source of support for children when they divorce. If parents become less available for support in the divorce process, children are more likely to face their problems alone. This, in turn, increases the risk of experiencing emotional problems, problem behaviour or problems at school. In other words, a divorce can lead to an increase in the ‘demand’ of support accompanied by a decline in ‘supply’. Whether this actually happens also depends on the position of other members in the support network and on the actions the children take to extend their support network. For instance, extended family members, friends, or perhaps other adults like teachers may become more important when parents disappear from the network. In doing so, they could ‘compensate’ for the decline in the supply after divorce.

As far as we know, there is hardly any systematic evidence on children’s support networks during or after divorce. Research that comes closest to our present topic stems from a line of studies on the relationship between divorce on the one hand and parental supervision and socialization on the other hand. Classic papers in this line of study suggest that there is less parental control and supervision after divorce (Astone/McLanahan 1991; Thomson/Hanson/McLanahan 1994). Our study is also related to sociological studies on support networks (Fischer 1982), but that line of research has typically examined adults and especially older adults (Broese van Groenou/Van Tilburg 1996). Network changes
have been studied in relation to divorce as well, but those studies focus on the divorced individuals and not on their children (Terhell/Broese van Groenou/Van Tilburg 2004). As an exception, research exists on African Americans that has pointed to the important role of members of the extended family as sources of support for children in poor single-parent families (Sarkisian/Gerstel 2004; Stack 1974).

In this contribution, we use data on secondary school students in four European countries to examine the effects of separation and post-separation conditions on the support networks of children (Kalter et al. 2012, 2013). We will test relatively straightforward hypotheses about the possible relations between support networks and separation and we examine if the effects that we find are similar or different in the four countries (England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden). Support networks are assessed by asking students to whom they would turn when they have personal problems or concerns. Students were presented a list of types of persons (‘your father’, ‘your mother’, ‘a friend’, ‘a teacher’, and so forth) and were asked to indicate if they would turn to that type of person. This method resembles the role method in network research (Hlebec 2013) although a difference is that in our case, no specific names were asked for each role relationship, there was only a question if someone in that role would be used or not.

**Background and hypotheses**

To develop hypotheses about how a parental divorce (or separation) might change the support networks that children have, we first need to make a distinction between the ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ of social contacts (Marsden 1990; Mollenhorst/Völker/Flap 2008). First, after divorce, the demand for support can change. The problems that parents experience and the subsequent separation create all sorts of emotional and practical problems for a child: uncertainty about the future, divided feelings of loyalty to the quarrelling parents, a new house and perhaps a new school and different friends as well. These problems increase the child’s need for support to face these problems and a child may rely on his or her social network to meet this demand. Although this is an important dimension of the problem, for the present study, supply is more relevant than demand. We are considering the network members that children rely on if they would have a problem. In other words, we are looking at potential support networks and not at actual support networks (Broese van Groenou/Van Tilburg 1996).

**Physical availability**

To understand changes in supply, we first rely on the notion of availability. Most sociological studies of the composition of networks and relationships have focused on characteristics of the context, such as the size and composition of social groups, regional units, and meeting contexts like schools, work places and voluntary associations (Blau/Schwartz 1984; Kalmijn/Flap 2001). This so-called structural approach to networks suggests that characteristics of the context affect opportunities for contact. When opportunities for contact with certain persons are greater, there is a greater chance that these persons will be-
come friends, confidants or marriage partners. The structural theory relies on opportunity for contact, and hence, on the physical availability of persons.

Following the notion of physical availability, one would expect that children of separated parents less often mention the father in the network than children of married parents (hypothesis 1). The father typically becomes the non-resident parent and will therefore be less available. Physical availability not only depends on where parents live but is also related to work hours and life styles of parents. For example, parents who work for pay and engage in a highly outgoing life style may be less available for their child. Although single mothers work more often (Van Damme 2010), we take work status into account. Little is known about the life styles of divorced parents, but the few studies that exist do not suggest that divorced parents spend more leisure time outdoors than married parents (Kalmijn/Broese van Groenou 2005). Using the notion of physical availability (and controlling for work status), we predict that there is no effect of separation on the presence of mothers in the network (hypothesis 2). Obviously, not all divorced fathers are non-resident and an increasing number of divorced fathers have a co-parenting arrangement (Spruijt/Duindam 2009). In co-parenting arrangements, fathers have a more substantial place in the everyday life of their children because the child lives part-time with the father. Although we recognize that there will be variation in co-parenting arrangements, also cross-nationally, we expect that children of separated parents with a co-parenting arrangement on average mention the father more often in the network than children of separated parents without such an arrangement (hypothesis 3).

The notion of physical availability also has implications for the joint role of parents. Children can rely on both parents, on the father only, on the mother only, or on neither parent. In the case of separation, parents, depending on their co-parenting arrangements, will less often operate together. This may result in a reduced tendency to seek support from parents simultaneously (hypothesis 4). Children may choose to ‘specialize,’ for instance, by talking about problems with one parent, and doing practical or fun things with the other parent. When parents are married, they may operate more often as a ‘team’ and provide joint support with less specialization in the kind of support.

**Emotional availability**

Even though opportunity for contact is important, in the present context, we need to broaden the concept of availability by looking at emotional availability, a concept that is used in attachment theory in developmental psychology (Bowlby 1988). Emotional availability is defined as the degree of sensitivity of the parent figure to the emotions of the child and the degree to which the parent expresses emotions to the child (Biringen 2000). One of the hypotheses in attachment theory is that emotional unavailability of parents undermines the (secure) attachment that children have with parents (Bowlby 1988). Attachment insecurity, in turn, is an important source of stress, anxiety and depression in adolescent children (Duchesne/Ratelle 2014). Attachment theory has also been used to explain why children of divorce develop more emotional problems during adolescence and why there are long-term implications for how children of divorce function in relationships later in their life (Amato/Cheadle 2005).
What hypotheses can we develop when considering the notion of emotional availability? Parents who go through a divorce often experience personal problems. For example, studies show that both men and women have more depressive symptoms after divorce and are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviour like heavy drinking (Simon 2002; Williams/Umberson 2004). These effects are stronger when divorced couples have children living at home (Williams/Dunne-Bryant 2006). Of course, these are averages and there will be considerable heterogeneity in the effects of separation on parents’ mental health. Nonetheless, the mental health problems that parents experience may make them less available to the child. Some separated parents may be preoccupied with their problems and pay less attention to the problems of the child. The child may also feel that he or she should not burden a parent who already has problems. Finally, feelings of guilt may make it difficult for parents to communicate with the child about something that they themselves were partly responsible for. Based on the notion of emotional availability, we expect that children less often mention the father and the mother in the network when the parents are separated than when the parents are married (hypothesis 5). Moreover, we expect that even fathers who engage in co-parenting will less often be mentioned in the network (hypothesis 6). In other words, if we only find negative effects for fathers and only for fathers who do not engage in co-parenting, the notion of physical availability is confirmed; if, on the other hand, we also find effects for mothers and for co-parenting fathers, emotional availability plays a role as well.

Availability and post-separation conflict

In the reasoning so far, we compared married and separated parents but there is also differentiation within the group of separated parents. One important condition that differentiates separated couples lies in post-separation conflict. Although most parents have some degree of conflict before they decide to dissolve their union, parents differ in the amount of conflict they have after the separation (Fischer/De Graaf/Kalmijn 2005). Many studies have shown that interparental conflict – both during marriage and after separation – has negative effects on the well-being of children (Buehler et al. 1997; Buehler/Gerard 2002; Cummings/Davies 2002; Dronkers 1999; Hanson 1999). The main reason for this effect lies in the fact that when parents fight, parenting becomes less warm and less involved, so that the attachment of the child to the parent becomes more insecure (Flouri 2006; Owen/Cox 1997; Schoppe-Sullivan/Schermerhorn/Cummings 2007). Insecurity in a child’s attachment, in turn, has a negative effect on the well-being of the child.

How post-separation conflict affects the support networks of children has not been studied, as far as we were able to observe. Following the notion of attachment and emotional availability, it can be expected that among separated parents, interparental conflict will reduce the emotional and physical availability of the parent. Post-separation conflict will therefore have a negative effect on the presence of separated parents in the support network (hypothesis 7). In addition, one would suspect that interparental conflict leads to conflicting loyalties. A child who is caught in the middle of the parents’ fighting, may feel pressured to take sides or may want to avoid the parents altogether (Amato/Afifi 2006; Kalmijn 2013). Relying on both parents may therefore be especially difficult when there is much conflict. Finally, we suspect that when there is much conflict, and when one
parent is chosen, it will more often be the resident parent because that lowers the risk of additional conflicts between the child and the resident parent about meeting the other parent and thus is simply more practical. In sum, we expect that post-separation conflict will reduce the chances that both parents will be included (hypothesis 8) and will reduce the chances in particular that the father will be included (hypothesis 9).

Compensation

Another important notion to consider in the study of support networks lies in compensation. On the one hand, there tends to be specialization in networks: different strokes from different folks (Wellman/Wortley 1990). On the other hand, different types of network members may serve similar needs, especially when we look at the stronger ties in the network. Children can discuss their emotional problems with their parents, but they can also talk to grandparents, siblings, friends, and even teachers. When the parents become less available, children lose what usually is an essential source of support. Children may therefore have an incentive to look elsewhere and the question is if these alternative persons are able and willing to respond. Past research on networks has shown that negative life course events can have both positive and negative effects on support networks. Some people may actively help a person who has experienced a negative life event and, hence, augment the support network. At the same time, existing network members may withdraw from the network because the emotional problems that someone experiences become burdensome or begin to dominate the relationship (Perry/Pescosolido 2012; Schaefer/Kornienko/Fox 2011). The net result of these tendencies is uncertain and probably depends on a range of other characteristics.

In public debates about divorce, it is often argued – without much evidence – that the positive scenario is stronger than the more negative scenario. Following this assumption, we would expect that the network is supportive when a child experiences the separation of his or her parents, especially when the parents themselves are less available as a result of the separation. Other family members such as siblings or grandparents may make themselves more available to help the child. Similarly, good friends and even teachers can be aware of the separation and may inquire about the child’s experiences. Over time, the network can shrink again but we unfortunately have no data on the exact timing of the parents’ separation. We expect changes only when the parents become less available after separation. In other words, we expect that the absence of parents in the network increases the chance that the child leans on other people in the network, especially when the parents are separated (hypothesis 10). This implies an interaction effect of parental separation and the availability of parents on the presence of others in the network.

In considering the other network members, it is important to make a distinction between the kin and non-kin segments of the network (Fischer 2011). In the case of separation, kin members of the network will in part be emotionally involved in and affected by the conflicts in the separation process. Kin may therefore play a different role than, for instance, friends who are less deeply involved in and affected by the separation. In particular, we expect that some family members – especially those connected to the father – are more affected by the separation than other family members. Studies have shown, for example, that paternal grandparents less often have contact with the grandchild after separa-
tion than maternal grandparents (King 2003). On average, we would thus expect that the
effect of separation on the level of support from family members (maternal or paternal) is
weaker than the divorce effect on support from friends, teachers, and other non-kin per-
sons (hypothesis 11).

Another implication of compensation lies in the role of repartnering. If the mother re-
partners, the child gains a stepfather. Some stepfathers may function like fathers and pro-
vide social and emotional support to the child. Studies generally show that stepfathers are
quite close to their stepchildren but evidence is mixed about the extent to which stepfa-
thers ‘compete’ with nonresident biological fathers (Coleman/Gagong/Fine 2000; Ga-
nong/Coleman 1994). When looking at indicators of the strength of the ties with the bio-
logical father, some studies find negative effects of the mother’s repartnering, whereas
others find no effect (King 2009). When we look at the support network of the child, op-
posing arguments can be given. On the one hand, the physical availability of a stepfather
might reduce the need to include the nonresident father in the support network. On the
other hand, there might be no ‘cost’ involved in mentioning both fathers and the biologi-
cal father himself may not feel ‘replaced’ by the stepfather. As a result, we have no clear
prediction about the effect of the stepfather on the support network. To get a fuller view
of this matter, we also analyze dating as an outcome variable. Earlier studies have shown
that a parental divorce speeds up the transition to dating (Ivanova/Mills/Veenstra 2011).
Dating may be another way by which children try to find social and emotional support
from the people around them.

Contextual variations

Although the decision to separate is ultimately made by individual husbands and wives,
sociologists have long recognized that the societal context plays an important role in vari-
ation in divorce risks (Goode 1962). Research on these contextual variations in causes and
consequences of divorce has increased as good cross-nationally comparable data have be-
come available and as divorce rates have increased in the Western world (Dronkers/Kal-
mijn/Wagner 2006). Cross-national comparisons of the effects of divorce on children re-
main scarce, however. Before 2000, there were two comparisons between the US and the
UK (Cherlin et al. 1991, and Joshi et al. 1999). The first multi-nation comparison was
done by Pong, Dronkers and Hampden-Thompson (2003), who showed – using data from
PISA – that single parenthood is less detrimental for children’s schooling in countries
where family policies equalize resources between single-parent and two-parent families.
In addition, the achievement gap between single-parent and two-parent families appeared
to be greater in countries where single-parent families are more prevalent. As far as we
know, no cross-national research exists on the relation between parental separation and
children’s support networks.

The four countries included in our analysis may reveal different relations between pa-
rental separation and children’s support, because the role of the welfare state is different
in these societies (Daatland/Herlofsen 2003; Esping-Andersen 1993). Generosity of welfare
benefits and services (and the way they are provided) may allow women to support them-
selves and their children, independently of the divorced father, which may reduce their
economic strain (Oppenheimer 1997; Jalovaara 2003). Less economic strain can increase
the emotional availability of separated mothers and perhaps also of separated fathers because relationships between ex-partners are less problematic. Less economic strain may also increase the physical availability of separated mothers in so far as they have to work for pay less often. Germany and the Netherlands belong to the conservative welfare states, which seek to maintain the social position of the family after a decline in the economic and social position of the family (unemployment and separation). Sweden belongs to the social-democratic welfare states, which provide services to individual fathers and mothers in order to avoid social and economic inequality. The British liberal welfare state does provide services to individual fathers and mothers, but only to very poor members of that society. Based on these differences, one would expect weakest effects of separation on the presence of parents in the network in Sweden, strongest effects in England, with Germany and the Netherlands somewhere in between (hypothesis 12). Note that these countries differ in many other respects as well, hence, we have no strong design to test hypotheses about welfare states.

Data and variables

The data come from the project Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries (CILS4EU) on the integration of children of immigrants in four selected European countries: England¹, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden (Kalter et al. 2012). CILS4EU is the first comprehensive and fully-standardized panel study on this topic in Europe.² Children of immigrants and their ethnic majority peers have been interviewed in the school year of 2010-2011. CILS4EU first took a stratified sample of about 100 schools in each country, where schools with larger proportions of immigrants were oversampled. Within each school, two classes were randomly chosen. All the students enrolled in these classes filled out questionnaires during class. Specific grades were chosen: third grades of secondary schools in the Netherlands, the eighth grades in Sweden, the ninth grades in Germany, and the tenth grades in England. As a result, most students are about 14 years of age. In the present paper, we only consider native pupils, defined as pupils whose parents were born in the target country. We do not include children of immigrants because parental separation might have different consequences for immigrant children and the term ‘members of extended family’ might have different meanings for various ethnic groups (Sarkisian/Gerstel 2004). Descriptive statistics are weighted to correct for the oversampling of schools with larger proportions of immigrants. The regression analyses are not weighted but we do correct for the clustering of pupils within schools, as is common in school-based research.

¹ I.e., England as a country that is part of the United Kingdom.
² The CILS4EU research project was funded by the NORFACE ERA NET Plus Migration in Europe programme. NORFACE stands for New Opportunities for Research Funding Agency Co-operation in Europe (www.norface.org) It is a partnership between fifteen research councils to increase cooperation in research and research policy in Europe. We only use the first wave as there were too few occurrences of divorce during the panel.
Information about the separation of the parents is collected by two questions: do you live with both your natural parents and if not, what is the reason for that? We selected (a) children living with both biological parents and (b) children who lived with their mother (as their primary household) and whose parents were divorced or separated. All other households were removed and we also did not consider other reasons for not living with two parents (widowhood, parents who never lived together, unknown reasons, parent living abroad).

The information about children’s support networks is collected by one question: to whom would you go to when you are worried or when you have a problem? The following persons were listed: (1) your father, (2) your mother, (3) your sibling, (4) other family members, (5) a friend, (6) a classmate, (7) your boyfriend or girlfriend, (8) a teacher, (9) someone else. Children could tick multiple boxes and there was also an option of ticking ‘no one.’ This method resembles the role method in network research (Hlebec 2013) although a difference is that, in our questionnaire no specific names were asked for each role relationship, there was only a question if someone in that role was present. The average child ticked three sources of support. About 5 to 10% ticked no box at all. An advantage of this question is that it refers to potential support and not to actual support. If questions would have been asked about actual support, we would have found higher levels of support for individuals who experience problems. For that reason, questions about potential support are to be preferred (Broese van Groenou/Van Tilburg 1996; Fischer 1982).

We make a distinction between kin and non-kin with our measurement of the non-parental members of the support network. To measure the kin network, we consider whether or not the child mentions a sibling and/or another (extended) family member. The variable is a count from 0 to 2. To measure the non-kin network, we consider whether the following types of persons were mentioned: a friend, a classmate, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a teacher, someone else. The dependent variable is a count ranging from 0 to 5.

In a separate analysis, we add three post-separation circumstances. First, we consider whether or not the mother is living with a new partner (married or not). The coding is cumulative: the separation variable is coded 1 for separated mothers and repartnered mothers (0 otherwise), while the repartnering variable is coded 1 for repartnered mothers only (0 otherwise). In this coding scheme, the effect of repartnering captures the difference between repartnered mothers on the one hand and separated and single mothers on the other hand. To compare repartnered parents and married parents – a less useful contrast – we need to add the effects of separation and repartnering. Second, we consider co-parenting, which is defined as living half of the time in another household where the biological father is also living. Note that this operationalization of co-parenting is not a legal one, but based on living arrangements. Coding is again cumulative, the co-parenting effect compares co-parenting separated fathers on the one hand to separated fathers who do not have a co-parenting arrangement on the other hand. Third, we measure current conflicts between the biological parents (which is not per se immediately after the separation). The questions about current conflicts were only asked in the Netherlands. The following items

---
3 In the questionnaire, the first questions on the father stated that the questions should be answered for the biological father.
4 No questions were asked about how long ago the parents got divorced or separated.
were presented, all referring to the biological parents: (a) fierce discussions between parents, (b) parents strongly blamed each other, (c) parents refused to talk to each other, (d) quarrels between parents escalated. Answering categories were: never (1), sometimes (2), often (3), and always (4). The scale is constructed by taking the mean of the standardized items. The reliability of the scale is excellent (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$). We include one dummy variable in the model which is coded 1 for separated parents who have above-average levels of conflict (0 for all other cases). This implies that we again have a cumulative scheme that allows us to compare married parents, separated parents with little conflict, and separated parents with much conflict. An advantage of building categories of this continuous variable is that we can easily retain children of married parents in the model.

We used a limited set of control variables since many other characteristics of the parental home will play a mediating role and the aim is not to explain the causal chains between separation, conflict and the support network. We controlled for mother’s education, whether the mother worked, age and sex of the child, and the number of siblings (in three categories). For descriptive statistics see Table 1.

Table 1: Means of independent variables used in the analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>England</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents separated</td>
<td>0.309</td>
<td>0.279</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>0.267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother new partner</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-parenting</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>0.493</td>
<td>0.495</td>
<td>0.510</td>
<td>0.514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (mean)</td>
<td>14.357</td>
<td>14.700</td>
<td>14.502</td>
<td>14.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (s.d.)</td>
<td>0.488</td>
<td>0.716</td>
<td>0.614</td>
<td>0.187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother works</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>0.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s schooling primary</td>
<td>0.349</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s schooling secondary</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td>0.830</td>
<td>0.836</td>
<td>0.455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s schooling tertiary</td>
<td>0.220</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s schooling missing</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family size 1 (vs. 2-3)</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>0.223</td>
<td>0.195</td>
<td>0.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family size 4+ (vs. 2-3)</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>0.239</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>0.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No parent in the network</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>0.268</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>0.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High post-divorce conflict</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>2175</td>
<td>2208</td>
<td>3022</td>
<td>2472</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in 4 European Countries (only natives), first wave.

We present four tables of regression models. Table 3 looks at the effect of separation on the presence of parents in the network. Table 4 looks at effects of separation but adds post-separation circumstances to the models (while keeping the children of married parents in the model). Table 5 looks at other members of the network as dependent variables.

---

5 When a child had a missing value on one item, he/she got his/her average score on the remaining items (items were first standardized).