

Relationships Between Fathers and Adult Children: The Cumulative Effects of Divorce and Repartnering

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Abstract

New data from a national Dutch survey are used to examine the effects of divorce and repartnering on the relationships that fathers have with their adult children. Compared with divorced fathers who live alone, repartnered fathers have less frequent contact with their children, they exchange less support with them, and the quality of the relationship is poorer. Divorce and repartnering thus have cumulative negative effects. These findings primarily apply when the divorce occurred when the child was young. Interpretations are given in terms of the reduced need for support that fathers have when they have a new spouse, the problems children may have with a stepmother, and the tendency of fathers to shift their investments to a new family after divorce (“swapping families”). Indirect evidence especially supports the “swapping families” hypothesis although the principle of need plays a role as well.

Keywords

remarriage, intergenerational, divorce/separation, father–child relationship, life course

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Introduction

Because of the rise in divorce in Western societies, an increasing number of older fathers have limited contact with their adult children. Many studies have shown that there are negative long-term consequences of divorce for fathers' relationships with their children. Compared with married fathers, divorced fathers have less frequent contact with their adult children, they exchange less support with their children, and the ties they have with them are generally perceived as poorer (Albertini & Garriga, 2011; Booth & Amato, 1994; Daatland, 2007; De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007; Furstenberg, Hoffman, & Shrestha, 1995; Kalmijn, 2008). Because children are an important source of social, emotional, and instrumental support in old age (Silverstein, Gans, & Yang, 2006), the negative effects of divorce on parent-child relations may put older divorced fathers at risk of social isolation.

Although there is much public and scholarly concern about the high rates of divorce, the rise in divorce has not meant that a large number of older fathers are living alone. Many divorced men remarry or repartner at some point in their life. In the United States, about 78% of divorced men are expected to remarry (Schoen & Standish, 2001). In the Netherlands, the country of this study, the number of men who remarry or repartner after 12 years is 70% (Kalmijn & Alessie, 2008). Moreover, there is no negative effect of having children from a prior marriage on men's remarriage chances, which means that divorced fathers also repartner in large numbers (Stewart, Manning, & Smock, 2003). Examining the long-term impact of parental divorce on father-child relationships thus needs to be complemented with an analysis of the effects of remarriage. Although through a new spouse, older fathers acquire an important source of social and emotional support, remarriage may have further negative effects on relationships with adult children. If this is true, remarriage could be a mixed blessing and the high rates of divorce remain a problem for older fathers.

Several studies have focused on short-term effects of remarriage by examining how remarriage affects the relationship that fathers have with their children when the children are young and still living with the mother. Most studies demonstrate negative effects of remarriage on the relationship between the child and the noncustodial father. Nonresident fathers who repartner see their children less often and they are less involved in the life of their children (Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Furstenberg, Winquist Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983; Juby, Billette, Laplante, & Le Bourdais, 2007; Seltzer, 1991; Stephens, 1996). Some studies suggest that this negative effect is especially strong when the father has (own) children in the new union (Manning & Smock, 1999; Manning, Stewart, & Smock, 2003), but other studies do not find such an effect (Juby et al., 2007).

Other studies have focused on father–child relationships when the children are adult and the father is older. Here, the evidence is less clear. Some studies find small and/or insignificant differences between repartnered and single divorced fathers with respect to contact frequency and support (Amato, Rezac, & Booth, 1995; Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990; De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007; Pezzin & Steinberg Schone, 1999; White, 1992). Other studies find that repartnered fathers exchange less support with their adult children than single divorced fathers (Clark & Kenney, 2010; Kalmijn, 2007). One study, which focused on children aged 18 to 24 years, even finds a positive effect of remarriage on father–child contact (Aquilino, 2006). Some of these discrepancies may result from the relatively small numbers of remarried fathers in the samples. Results are sometimes in the expected direction but not significant. Moreover, not all studies directly compare remarried fathers with divorced fathers; some studies instead compare remarried fathers with fathers who are in their first marriage (Orbuch, Thornton, & Cancio, 2000). Differences in the findings may also be affected by differences in the timing of divorce and remarriage (Aquilino, 2006; Juby et al., 2007).

Given that the evidence is not yet clear, new analyses of new data are called for. In this article, we reexamine the effects of remarriage on father’s relationships with adult children using a new large nationally representative survey from the Netherlands that has not been analyzed for this purpose before. The underlying question is whether remarriage and divorce have *cumulative* negative effects on the father–child relationship. The focus is on adult and independently living children aged 18 to 50 years who have a living father (the average age of the father is 65 years). Building on a long tradition of research on intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson, Silverstein, Gans, & Yang, 2006), our study focuses on several dimensions of the father–child relationship: the frequency of contact, the amount of instrumental and socioemotional support exchanged, and the perceived quality of the relationship. Both directions of support will be studied, from father to child and from child to father.

The Netherlands is a typical Western European country, with a relatively high divorce rate, egalitarian gender role attitudes, fathers who are increasingly involved in child rearing, and generally good relationships between adult children and their parents (Dykstra et al., 2006). Unmarried cohabitation is common, especially after divorce, and is also widely accepted as being equivalent to marriage (De Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003). Hence, the focus is on “repartnering” and no distinction will be made between remarriage and unmarried cohabitation after divorce. Previous analyses of divorce effects on father–child relationships in the Netherlands were done with different data sets (De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007; Kalmijn, 2007). Both these studies found

the expected negative long-term effects of divorce but only Kalmijn found a negative effect of remarriage.

Background and Hypotheses

Our general hypothesis is that divorce and repartnering have cumulative negative effects on father–child relationships. This means that divorced fathers are expected to have “poorer” or less intensive relationships with their adult children than married fathers *and* that divorced fathers who live with a new partner are expected to have “poorer” relationships with their children than divorced fathers who live alone. The mechanisms for the influence of divorce are well known but the mechanisms for a possible effect of repartnering are less often discussed. Below, we review three important mechanisms: the “swapping families” hypothesis, the stepmother hypothesis, and the need hypothesis.

A first mechanism is suggested by the notion of “serial fathering” or “swapping families” (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Furstenberg et al., 1983; Manning & Smock, 1999, 2000). According to this notion, fathers shift their investments to a new family and new children after divorce. Such a response could in part be explained biologically (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003), but it can also be the result of the restrictions that divorced fathers face when trying to maintain contact with the children from their first marriage. For some men, a divorce not only means the loss of a spouse but also the loss of a kinkeeper (Kalmijn, 2007). As a result, it is often difficult for men to maintain ties to children outside of marriage: Marriage and children are a “package deal” (Kalmijn, 2007; Stephens, 1996). A new partner may also pressure the father to invest more in her own children, possibly at the cost of the father’s children from his first marriage.

The tendency of fathers to withdraw from the children of their first marriage after repartnering is probably not limited to the case where fathers have children with a new partner. Even when the father is not involved in child rearing in his new union, there may be new ties with and new responsibilities toward the adult children of his new partner and toward other family members of the new partner. The father may be motivated to invest in such ties to show that he is a good spouse to his new partner. Moreover, the kinkeeping role of his new wife will pull the father into these new family roles and these new roles compete with the ties to his original family.

A second mechanism lies in the relationship of the children to the father’s new partner. Some children may find it difficult to accept the new partner of their father and some may not get along well with the stepmother. Although the children’s preferences for contact with the father may not be changed because of the father’s repartnering, if the relationship with the stepmother is not good, this may still affect the father. The well-known balance principle

plays a role here (Heider, 1958). Feeling distant toward the stepparent leads to imbalance in the parent–stepparent–child triad, assuming the relationship between parent and stepparent is good. In this case, the child can restore balance by distancing him or herself from the father. When the child is young, he or she may be less willing to have regular visits and when the child is older, he or she may be less willing to support the father. An additional factor lies in the behavior of the stepmother. It is plausible that the stepmother will not be motivated to play a kinkeeping role toward her adult stepchildren if she does not feel accepted by them. We call these effects the “stepmother hypothesis.” Few authors have examined this hypothesis because virtually all studies on stepparents and children focus on children who are living at home. These studies generally show positive associations between the child’s closeness to the biological parent and the child’s closeness to the stepparent (King, 2006, 2007). This is at least consistent with the stepmother hypothesis.

A third mechanism is suggested by notions of need and altruism. Parents and children are concerned for each other’s welfare and will therefore respond to the needs for support that others may have (Fingerman, Miller, Birditt, & Zarit, 2009; Silverstein et al., 2006). Because a partner is an essential source of support, divorced fathers who are alone have more need of support than divorced fathers who are repartnered (Dykstra & De Jong Gierveld, 2004). This applies not only to emotional support, but also to practical support. Especially in older cohorts—cohorts in which men did not learn to do household chores—the need for household help may be important for single fathers. The “need hypothesis” thus suggests that children would be less supportive of fathers when the father is repartnered than when the (divorced) father is still single.

Although we cannot directly test the explanatory hypotheses just discussed, we can obtain indirect evidence. The need hypothesis is most relevant for the degree to which children give support to their father. The “swapping families” hypothesis, in contrast, is more relevant for what children receive from their father. Obviously, because of the principle of reciprocity, giving and receiving support tend to become equalized. Hence, the need hypothesis is not inconsistent with an effect of repartnering on the support that the father gives. Similarly, the “swapping families” hypothesis is not inconsistent with an effect on the support that the father receives. However, it seems plausible that the principle of need will tip the balance toward the single divorced father receiving more than he gives.

A second indirect way to test the explanatory hypotheses is by looking at the age at which the child experienced the divorce of the parents. Previous studies have shown that the child’s age at the time of the parents’ divorce has a positive effect on father–child contact, with an especially important effect

occurring when comparing children who experienced the divorce when they were still living at home and children who experienced the divorce when they were adult and living on their own (Aquilino, 1994; Kalmijn, 2007). If the divorce occurs when the children were already adult, the long-term impact of divorce is less negative, although it is not absent either. One interpretation of this effect is that when the children were older at the time of divorce, fathers were better able to invest in their children.

The question here is whether the timing of divorce also changes the effect of repartnering. Repartnering after an early divorce is more likely to go hand in hand with new children and new families than repartnering after a late divorce. Moreover, repartnering after an early divorce also means that, on average, the father will have been with a new partner for a longer period of time. Hence, the relationship will have been exposed longer to the negative effects of repartnering and as a result, fathers and children may have grown apart more strongly. This would mean that the effect of repartnering on current relationships with adult children will be more negative when the divorce occurred at an earlier age. Note that there is no information in our data on new children of the father and on the age at which the father repartnered. Earlier studies do show, however, that when men repartner, they do so relatively quickly after divorce (Kalmijn & Alessie, 2008). Hence, an early divorce often means early repartnering. Moreover, when repartnering occurs at a younger age, the likelihood of new children will also be greater (Buber & Prskawetz, 2000). In sum, an interaction with the timing of divorce and repartnering may be evidence for the “swapping families” hypothesis. We note, however, that this interaction may also be understood in part in terms of the stepmother hypothesis to the extent that it is more difficult for the child to accept a stepmother at an early age than at a later age.

A final way to separate the “swapping families” hypothesis and the hypothesis of need is to examine divorced mothers. Although the main focus of the article is on fathers, a comparison with mothers may shed additional light on the underlying hypotheses. If only differentials in the need for contact and support play a role, we should find similar effects for mothers. Just as is the case for fathers, divorced mothers who are alone are more in need of support than divorced mothers who are repartnered. Similarly, contact frequency should be higher for single divorced mothers. If the “swapping families” hypothesis is valid, we should find effects of repartnering only for fathers and not for mothers. After all, mothers are generally not removed from their children after divorce and will also have less need for developing another family when they repartner. Surely, repartnered mothers may feel responsible toward multiple sets of children, but the idea that they shift their investments to new families does not apply.

Data and Method

Data

The data that we use come from the publicly available LISS survey (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences, see www.lissdata.nl). This survey is based on a representative probability sample of about 5,000 households in the Dutch population. The response rate at the household level was 48%, which is about average for response rates in the Netherlands (Scherpenzeel, 2009). All household members 16 years of age and older were asked to complete short Internet questionnaires. Respondents were paid when they completed a questionnaire. Households without Internet (or without broadband) received a broadband Internet connection and were loaned a computer if they did not have one. Older respondents without Internet and a computer received training in how to use the Internet facilities. Each month, a different questionnaire was presented, covering a specific topic (e.g., work, health, family). Each questionnaire was repeated after 12 months. We use data from the family questionnaire in the first year and if a person did not respond to that questionnaire, we used the family questionnaire from the second year (if available). Because of the young age of the panel, we abstain from analyzing changes. Data from other questionnaires were also used for constructing independent variables (e.g., health status). In these cases, we always chose a questionnaire that preceded the family questionnaire in time.

From the data, we selected respondents who are 18 to 49 years old who have a living father. The average respondent is 35.7 years and the average father is 64.6 years of age. We excluded respondents who are still living at home. Respondents were also excluded when the mother is no longer alive because this simplifies the theoretical and empirical analyses; for previous treatments of widowhood effects for men and women, see the work by Ha, Carr, Utz, and Nesse (2006). The number of respondents in the final analyses is 2,330.

Variables

The main independent variable is the marital status of the (biological) father, as reported by the respondent. A distinction is made between fathers who are still married to or living with the respondent's mother ($n = 2,012$), fathers who are divorced from the mother and are living alone ($n = 106$), and fathers who are divorced from the mother and are living with a partner ($n = 212$). We use cumulative coding so that in one model, single divorced fathers are compared with married fathers and repartnered fathers are compared with single divorced fathers. These adjacent coding schemes were chosen in light of the hypothesis of cumulative effects.¹

In later analyses, we make an additional distinction between fathers who divorced when the respondent was younger than 18 years and fathers who divorced when the respondent was 18 years or older. Note that some of the respondents may have lived with the father when growing up rather than with the mother. Unfortunately, the data do not have this information but other data from the Netherlands show that father custody is not common. For example, in data from the Netherlands Longitudinal Life Course Study, only 13% of the respondents who did not live with both their parents when growing up were living with their father and/or stepmother (De Graaf, Kalmijn, Kraaykamp, & Monden, 2010).

The first dependent variable is the frequency of face-to-face contact between father and child. This was coded into midpoint values assigned to the frequency categories (e.g., weekly is 52). To avoid the skewness of the resulting variable, the frequencies were logged.

To measure support exchange, four types of support were distinguished: help with household chores, help with other practical matters, giving advice, and informing about the other's well-being. These items were borrowed from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, an influential study on family solidarity in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2006). For each type of support, it was asked how often the support was given or received in the past 3 months (never, occasionally, and often). We construct two summary scales, one for giving support and one for receiving support. The scale is the sum of the four variables. The reliability of the scales is good ($\alpha = .70$ for receiving support from fathers and $\alpha = .71$ for giving support to fathers; for mothers, the values are .69 and .69, respectively).

We also look at the quality of the relationship between the father and the child, even though this indicator is not generally considered part of the concept of intergenerational solidarity. We think it is important to not only look at more objective, behavioral indicators of that relationship but also include a subjective component. We consider the quality of the respondent's relationship with the father, measured on a 4-point scale (very good, good, reasonable, poor). This last variable was transformed into a rank score so that it can be analyzed as an interval variable.

We use several control variables. First, we include the respondent's (the child's) marital status, age, sex, and education. In part, these variables reflect differences in the need for support among adult children. We also include more direct measures of need: poor health and financial problems. Poor health is a dichotomous item based on the well-known single self-rated health question (DeSalvo, Bloser, Reynolds, He, & Muntner, 2005). As common, this is dichotomized into poor health and good health. We use a scale of the degree to which the respondent has financial problems. The scale has six dichotomous items: having difficulties making ends meet, being unable to replace broken

things in the home, having to borrow money for necessary items, being late with monthly payments, having been supported financially by others, visits by bailiffs at home. Loevinger's $H = .572$ which indicates a strong scale. The age of the father is very highly correlated with that of the child ($r = .82$), and is therefore not included. Finally, we include the repartnering status of the mother. Several cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have shown that the mother's repartnering has negative effects on nonresident fathers' involvement and contact with the child (Juby et al., 2007; Seltzer, 1991; Skevik, 2006; Stephens, 1996). Less is known about the effects of the mother's partner status on father-child relationships at a later age. Missing values were not imputed as the numbers of missing values are generally low (Table 1). Correlations between variables are presented in the appendix.

Results

We start with some descriptive information (only partly presented in Table 1). Fourteen percent of the respondents have a divorced father. Of these fathers, 64% are repartnered at the time of the survey. Fathers are on average 65 years of age, and hence, they belong to an older generation in which divorce was not yet as common as it is now. Among children of divorced and repartnered fathers, 19% evaluate the relationship with the father as "poor" and 29% evaluate the relationship as "reasonable." Hence, only half of those children have a good or very good relationship with their father. When focusing on contact, 20% of the children of divorced parents never see their father. These are high numbers but to see how this compares with children of married parents, we turn to the regression models.

The regression models are presented in Table 2. The dependent variables are standardized ($m = 0$, $SD = 1$) so that effects of dichotomous independent variables such as divorce can be interpreted as an effect size, that is, Cohen's d (Cohen, 1988). The first model shows how divorce and repartnering affect how often the father and child see each other. Divorced fathers have less frequent contact with their children than married fathers. More important, we see that repartnered fathers have less frequent face-to-face contact with their children than single divorced fathers. For the quality of the relationship, we primarily see a negative effect of divorce and no additional effect of repartnering. We also see that children receive less support from their father when the father is divorced. In addition, children of divorced fathers receive less support if the father is repartnered than if the father is single. When we focus on giving support to the father, we see similar results: a negative effect of divorce and an additional negative effect of repartnering.

In sum, for three of the four indicators, the results are in line with the notion of cumulative effects. The effect sizes for divorce are large (varying

Table 1. Descriptive Information on Variables.

	M	SD	Min	Max	n
Contact frequency father (ln)	3.16	1.33	0.00	5.71	2,328
Quality of tie with father	0.00	1.00	-2.49	0.92	2,242
Index of support from father	1.93	0.49	1.00	3.00	2,328
Index of support to father	1.92	0.49	1.00	3.00	2,328
Contact frequency mother (ln)	3.32	1.26	0.00	5.71	2,328
Quality of tie with mother	0.00	1.00	-2.82	0.86	2,328
Index of support from mother	2.01	0.50	1.00	3.00	2,328
Index of support to mother	2.01	0.48	1.00	3.00	2,328
Father divorced	0.14	0.34	0.00	1.00	2,330
Father repartnered	0.09	0.29	0.00	1.00	2,330
Mother repartnered	0.05	0.23	0.00	1.00	2,328
Age of child at divorce < 18 years	0.34	0.47	0.00	1.00	318
Father's age	64.72	8.62	43.00	95.00	2,221
Child higher educated	0.39	0.52	0.00	9.00	2,302
Child is female	0.58	0.49	0.00	1.00	2,330
Child's age	35.68	7.26	18.00	49.00	2,330
Child is single and never married	0.14	0.35	0.00	1.00	2,310
Child is single and divorced	0.04	0.18	0.00	1.00	2,310
Child has children	0.61	0.49	0.00	1.00	2,330
Child has financial problems	0.38	0.72	0.00	5.00	2,330
Financial module missing	0.24	0.43	0.00	1.00	2,330
Child poor general health	0.09	0.28	0.00	1.00	2,330
Health module missing	0.18	0.38	0.00	1.00	2,330

Source. LISS 2007-2008.

from $-.67$ to $-.96$) whereas the effect sizes for repartnering are more modest (varying from $-.33$ to $-.53$). The cumulative effects of divorce and repartnering are quite substantial, however (all well greater than 1).

When comparing the effects on giving and receiving support, we notice that repartnering has a stronger effect on the support that children give ($-.53$) than on the support that children receive ($-.33$). A test of difference, using seemingly unrelated regression, shows that it is significant ($\chi^2 = 3.86$, $p = .049$). This may point to the role of need in understanding the effects.

We also see effects of whether or not the mother is repartnered on the relationship with the father. When mothers live with a new partner, there is more frequent contact and more support exchange with the father than when the mother lives alone after divorce. These "crossing effects" are somewhat in contrast to research on relationships between nonresident fathers and children who

Table 2. Regression of Respondent's Relationship With Father: Unstandardized Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors.

	Model 1: Contact frequency with father	Model 2: Perceived quality with father	Model 3: Support from father	Model 4: Support to father
Father divorced (vs. first married)	-0.961* (0.118)	-0.833* (0.113)	-0.804* (0.104)	-0.668* (0.115)
Father repartnered (vs. divorced)	-0.382* (0.125)	-0.155 (0.125)	-0.332* (0.119)	-0.534* (0.123)
Mother repartnered (vs. divorced)	0.265* (0.116)	0.135 (0.121)	0.308* (0.117)	0.343* (0.113)
Child higher educated	-0.231* (0.054)	0.017 (0.041)	0.122* (0.035)	0.068† (0.036)
Child is female	0.120* (0.037)	0.042 (0.040)	0.102* (0.037)	0.120* (0.040)
Child's age	-0.021* (0.003)	-0.019* (0.003)	-0.041* (0.003)	-0.009* (0.003)
Child single	0.173* (0.065)	0.109† (0.065)	0.390* (0.064)	0.342* (0.067)
Child single divorced	-0.093 (0.106)	0.035 (0.116)	0.145 (0.101)	-0.066 (0.118)
Child has children	0.200* (0.046)	0.011 (0.050)	0.168* (0.047)	0.004 (0.049)
Child money problems	-0.122* (0.029)	-0.093* (0.029)	-0.074* (0.029)	-0.071* (0.026)
Child poor health	-0.116 (0.074)	-0.237* (0.074)	-0.127† (0.071)	-0.038 (0.074)
Money module missing	-0.057 (0.045)	-0.052 (0.049)	0.018 (0.046)	0.006 (0.048)
Health module missing	-0.003 (0.054)	-0.051 (0.056)	0.005 (0.051)	0.039 (0.055)
Intercept	0.862*	0.807*	1.137*	0.326*
N	2,280	2,212	2,280	2,280
Adjusted R ²	.185	.113	.188	.119

Source. LISS 2007-2008.

Note. All dependent variables are standardized. Standard errors are shown in parentheses.
†p < .10. *p < .05.

live with the mother. These studies find that the mother's repartnering negatively affects relationships with nonresident fathers (Juby et al., 2007). A possible interpretation of our finding is that adult children have more time available for the father if the mother has her own source of support. It is also possible that some of the children of repartnered mothers lived with their father for some time after the divorce which may have strengthened the tie.

Several characteristics of the children also affect the father-child relationship. Education has mixed effects. Higher educated children have less frequent contact with their father than lower educated children but they also exchange somewhat more support. Daughters see their father more often than sons and they also exchange more support with fathers. Children who are single, children who have children themselves, and children who are younger exchange more support with their father and have more frequent contact.² These results are generally in line with the notion of need because children who are alone, have children, or are still young can be assumed to need more practical and emotional support than other children. We do not see expected effects of the two direct need variables, financial and health problems. Of the eight effects here, six are negative and significant. Perhaps this points to underlying personal problems associated with financial and health issues.

To shed more light on the validity of the "swapping families" hypothesis, we now briefly examine the relationship of the adult child with the mother, using the same four indicators that we used for the father (contact frequency, quality, support given, and support received). The results are presented in Table 3. When we compare the results with those in Table 2, it appears that the effects of the control variables are generally similar. We also see, however, that the effects of divorce are weaker for mothers than for fathers, which is as expected given what is known from the literature (Kalmijn, 2008). More important, however, is that the effects of repartnering are virtually absent for mothers. Compared with divorced mothers who are alone, repartnered mothers do not have less frequent contact or give less support to their children. One exception is that there is a negative effect of repartnering on the amount of support that mothers receive. This exception fits in well with the need hypothesis.

To test differences in the effects of mother's repartnering in Table 3 and father's repartnering in Table 2, we used seemingly unrelated regression. These tests, presented at the bottom of Table 3, show that the father's repartnering is clearly more consequential for his relationship with the child than the mother's repartnering is for her relationship with the child. If only considerations of need would play a role, we would have expected similar effects. That effects are different is indirect evidence for the "swapping families" hypothesis.

To what extent does the age of the child at the parent's divorce play a role? To examine this issue, we limit the sample to children with divorced parents and include the age at which the child experienced the divorce. We break this

Table 3. Regression of Respondent's Relationship With Mother: Unstandardized Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors.

	Model 1: Contact frequency with mother	Model 2: Perceived quality with mother	Model 3: Support from mother	Model 4: Support to mother
Mother divorced (vs. first married)	-0.365* (0.119)	-0.414* (0.112)	-0.217* (0.105)	-0.001 (0.112)
Mother repartnered (vs. divorced)	-0.027 (0.135)	-0.097 (0.132)	-0.071 (0.128)	-0.284* (0.128)
Father repartnered (vs. divorced)	-0.157 (0.134)	0.034 (0.132)	-0.168 (0.127)	-0.191 (0.128)
Child higher educated	-0.253* (0.058)	0.075* (0.037)	0.143* (0.037)	0.057 (0.036)
Child is female	0.206* (0.040)	0.074† (0.041)	0.207* (0.038)	0.270* (0.041)
Child's age	-0.023* (0.003)	-0.022* (0.003)	-0.043* (0.003)	-0.010* (0.003)
Child single	0.259* (0.069)	0.080 (0.065)	0.462* (0.063)	0.446* (0.068)
Child single divorced	-0.081 (0.116)	0.076 (0.118)	0.167 (0.116)	-0.126 (0.116)
Child has children	0.261* (0.048)	-0.008 (0.050)	0.228* (0.048)	0.013 (0.051)
Child money problems	-0.115* (0.032)	-0.082* (0.032)	-0.033 (0.031)	-0.044 (0.029)
Child poor health	0.022 (0.079)	-0.221* (0.078)	-0.049 (0.075)	-0.049 (0.076)
Money module missing	-0.006 (0.048)	-0.001 (0.049)	0.042 (0.048)	0.064 (0.049)
Health module missing	-0.005 (0.056)	-0.099† (0.056)	-0.026 (0.053)	-0.011 (0.056)
Intercept	0.691*	0.832*	1.207*	0.159
N	2,280	2,280	2,280	2,280
Adjusted R ²	.081	.053	.136	.057
χ ² test father vs. mother effect ^a	7.13*	0.83	4.41*	3.19†
N	2,300	2,302	2,302	2,302

Source. LISS 2007-2008.

Note. All dependent variables are standardized. Standard errors are shown in parentheses.

a. Tests effect of father's repartnering on father-child relationship (Table 2) to effect of mother's repartnering on mother-child relationship (this table) using seemingly unrelated regression.

†p < .10. *p < .05.

down in ages younger than 18 years and ages 18 years and older because earlier studies suggest that what matters most is whether the children were adult and living at home when they experienced the divorce (Aquilino, 1994). Residential histories are not available in the data but the age of 18 is a reasonable proxy for living at home. In a subsequent model, we include an interaction between repartnering and the age at divorce. We expect a positive main effect of the age at divorce and a positive interaction effect with repartnering (i.e., repartnering should have a *less negative* effect for “late” divorces).

The results, presented in Table 4 first show that when children experienced the divorce before they were adult, contact with the father is more limited than when children experienced the divorce when they were adult. For support given, support received, and the quality of the tie, no main effects of age at divorce are found. In the second set of models, we include interaction effects of the age at divorce and repartnering. The main effects of repartnering in these models refer to early divorces (the reference category). These repartnering effects are strongly negative and significant for all four indicators, in line with the cumulative effects hypothesis.

The interaction effects are positive for all indicators and significant for three of the four indicators, in line with the hypothesis. To evaluate the effect of repartnering when the child was older at the time of divorce, we look at the sum of the main effect and the interaction effect. These calculations show that the repartnering effect is considerably weaker when the child was older at the time of divorce. For example, for children of an early divorce, repartnering leads to -0.70 point decline in the support that the children give to the father, but for children of a late divorce, repartnering leads to $-0.701 + 0.524 = -0.18$ point decline in support given. In other words, the effect of repartnering is almost absent for late divorces. Similar patterns are observed for the other dependent variables. Interesting is that the implied effect of repartnering for late divorces on relationship quality is even slightly positive. To demonstrate this, we present predicted z scores for relationship quality in Figure 1. We see a negative repartnering effect for early divorces, as expected, but a positive repartnering effect for late divorces. Together, these produced the nonsignificant overall effect of repartnering on relationship quality in Table 2. For the effect of the mother’s repartnering we find no significant interactions with the age at divorce.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this article, we have shown that when fathers divorced when the children were still young and living at home, repartnering negatively affects the relationships they have with their adult children. Compared with the children of single divorced fathers, adult children of repartnered fathers have less frequent contact with their father, they exchange less support with him, and when the

Table 4. Regression Models for Respondents With Divorced or Repartnered Fathers: Unstandardized Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors.

	Model 1: Contact frequency with father		Model 2: Perceived quality with father		Model 3: Support from father		Model 4: Support to father	
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 3a	Model 3b	Model 4a	Model 4b
Age at divorce <18 years	0.326* (0.132)	0.073 (0.236)	-0.039 (0.132)	-0.480* (0.219)	0.119 (0.130)	-0.010 (0.211)	0.053 (0.122)	-0.200 (0.226)
Father repartnered (age at divorce <18 years)	-0.298* (0.131)	-0.501* (0.172)	-0.194 (0.132)	-0.482* (0.167)	-0.317* (0.123)	-0.449* (0.155)	-0.502* (0.126)	-0.701* (0.160)
Mother repartnered (age at divorce <18 years)	0.265* (0.120)	0.317* (0.142)	0.155 (0.126)	0.149 (0.152)	0.338* (0.123)	0.404* (0.144)	0.315* (0.118)	0.360* (0.136)
Age at divorce x Father repartnered		0.536* (0.265)		0.753* (0.260)		0.353 (0.255)		0.524* (0.261)
Age at divorce x Mother repartnered		-0.200 (0.232)		-0.045 (0.261)		-0.232 (0.261)		-0.179 (0.255)
N	307	307	297	297	307	307	307	307
Adjusted R ²	.132	.139	.060	.081	.168	.169	.153	.161

Source. LISS 2007-2008.

Note. Control variables included but not printed (see Table 2). Dependent variables are standardized. Standard errors are shown in parentheses.

*p < .10. **p < .05.

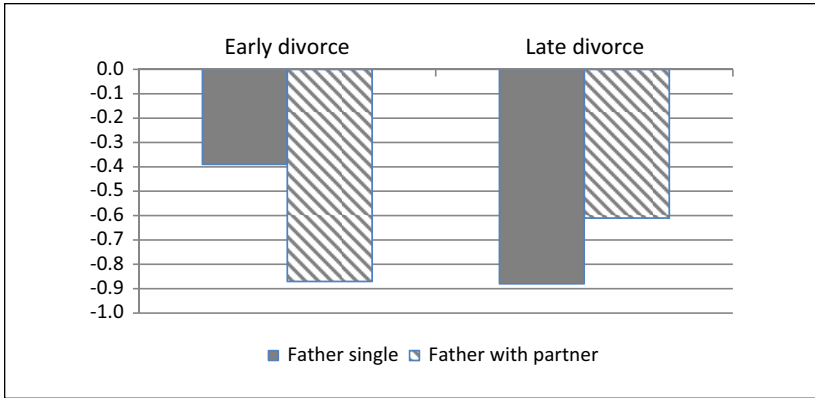


Figure 1. Predicted quality father-child relationship (z score).

divorce occurred at an early age, they also perceive the relationship with the father as poorer. The effects of repartnering are on top of the already negative effects of the father's divorce. Although there has been previous research on the question of how repartnering affects father's relationships with their children, few studies have focused on long-term effects and those that did, found inconsistent effects. The current article adds evidence supporting the notion of cumulative effects of divorce and repartnering for older fathers.

There are various mechanisms that may explain the accumulation of negative effects for fathers. One interpretation lies in the notion that single divorced fathers are more in need of support compared with repartnered fathers. This is a plausible interpretation since a spouse is one of the more important sources of support during old age (Knipscheer, De Jong Gierveld, Van Tilburg, & Dykstra, 1995). A second hypothesis is that some children may not get along with their stepmother and that this indirectly hurts the relationship with the father. A third hypothesis is that divorced fathers shift their investments to a new family after repartnering (Furstenberg et al., 1995). Fathers may become involved in the upbringing of new children when they repartner and if they do not live with other children after repartnering, they may still have new family responsibilities that are connected to the new partner.

Although the explanatory hypotheses could not be tested directly, we did present indirect evidence. If the need hypothesis and the stepmother hypothesis were true, we would expect similar effects of repartnering for divorced fathers and mothers. After all, it is plausible that single divorced mothers need more social, emotional, and practical support than repartnered mothers. Similarly, it is plausible that some children do not get along well with their stepfather, just as they may not get along well with their stepmother. For these reasons, we

would expect similar effects. In contrast to these expectations, our research shows that repartnering is more consequential for fathers than for mothers. This indirectly supports the “swapping families” hypothesis because it is primarily fathers who may shift their investments to new family ties after divorce.

A second way in which we tried to gain insight into the underlying explanations was to examine interactions with the age at divorce. For the need hypothesis, only the current partner status matters and not the age at which the divorce occurred. If the “swapping families” hypothesis is true, we would expect stronger effects for early divorces. Fathers are more likely to develop, or live in new families, when a divorce occurs early in the marriage. We found that for three of the four relationship indicators, there was a significant interaction of repartnering and the age at divorce. When the divorce occurred at a later age (18 years or older), repartnering had a weaker negative effect than when the divorce occurred at an earlier age (younger than 18 years). The resulting effect of repartnering for late divorces is virtually absent. These age interactions are in line with the “swapping families” hypothesis. Note that the age of the respondent and the age of the father are highly correlated ($r = .82$). Hence, if a divorce occurred when the child was young, this also means that on average, the father was relatively young at that time.

The need hypothesis receives some support as well. We found stronger negative effects of repartnering on the support that children give to their father than on the support that they receive from their father. In a sense, repartnered fathers are similar to married fathers when we look at the balance of support exchange between the generations. However, when we compare the *volume* of support exchange, we see that repartnered fathers exchange less support than both married fathers and single divorced fathers. This suggests that other mechanisms play a role as well.

Our results provide more clarity in a stream of literature that has not provided consistent results so far. Although some previous studies found similar effects as we do, other studies did not find significant negative effects of repartnering on father–child relations. In part, this may have to do with the relatively small numbers of repartnered fathers in previous studies (Amato, Rezac, & Booth, 1995; Pezzin & Steinberg Schone, 1999). For another part, it may have to do with the fact that previous studies not always estimated repartnering effects depending on the age of the child at divorce (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990; De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007). We think it is still important, however, that the present result be replicated with other data, not only for the Netherlands but also for other countries.

Do our findings also shed light on the claim that older divorced fathers are a vulnerable group in society (Lin, 2008)? An often heard criticism in the literature is that concerns about the negative consequences of divorce are overstated because many men and women remarry or cohabit again. Repartnering has

mixed effects however. On one hand, repartnering tends to increase well-being and mental health (Sweeney, 2010) and the new partner will often be a source of support during old age (Antonucci, 2001). On the other hand, repartnering puts the relationships with children at risk so that many divorced fathers will become increasingly isolated from the children they had with their former spouse when they become older. If we add to this the more fragile nature of second marriages (Teachman, 2008), it becomes clear that repartnering is not a solution for the negative social consequences of divorce for older men. At the same time, however, divorced fathers who remarry, especially when they divorce early, may also have new children in their second marriage. This may compensate for the weakened relationships that divorced fathers have with their prior children. From the perspective of these prior children, this weakening of ties may still be considered a loss but for remarried fathers, negative consequences can be compensated.

We now discuss some limitations of our approach and suggest new lines of inquiry. First, we do not have complete data on the father's marital and fertility history. The reason for this is that our respondents are the children and hence, reports on the father's history were only brief. Although this is a disadvantage, there are also advantages of using data from the perspective of (adult) children. For example, our study yields a view of very old and possibly isolated fathers. When fathers would have been the respondents, isolated fathers could have been underrepresented because of selective survey nonresponse (Groves & Couper, 1998). When full life history data on the fathers would be available, we could separate effects of new children and effects of new partners. Although we have argued that the "swapping families" hypothesis not only applies to cases where the father has new children, it would still be important to separate these influences. In addition, it is also possible that single divorced fathers repartnered in the past and we are unable to examine such effects. Nonetheless, the overall effect of repartnering, which combines cases with and without new children, is negative, and that by itself is also important to observe.

Future research could also examine long-term effects of repartnering on "old" and "new" children. Are ties with the "new" children as strong as they are for never-divorced fathers? Are relationships with new children during adulthood competing with the relationships with old children? Since many fathers will have multiple types of children, this will become an increasingly important question. Finally, we think that it is important to accumulate evidence from multiple data sets and multiple societal settings. Many studies on father-child relationships after divorce are American and many of these use the same data set, that is, the National Survey of Families and Households. This situation has recently been criticized in an overview of the field (Sweeney, 2010). Although the current data have some disadvantages compared with the National Survey of Families and Households, they do contribute to a broader and more representative body of evidence on the role of divorce and repartnering in father's lives.

Appendix

Correlations Between Variables Used in the Analysis.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
Contact with father	1.000														
Quality father-child	.436	1.000													
Support from father	.515	.546	1.000												
Support to father	.511	.479	.623	1.000											
Father divorced	-.361	-.294	-.275	-.293	1.000										
Father repartnered	-.322	-.251	-.250	-.283	.796	1.000									
Mother repartnered	-.189	-.167	-.133	-.149	.609	.562	1.000								
Child education	-.080	.049	.089	.070	-.080	-.071	-.074	1.000							
Child's age	-.090	-.106	-.256	-.066	-.120	-.082	-.119	.009	1.000						
Child is female	.075	.022	.056	.054	-.001	-.019	-.018	-.009	-.022	1.000					
Child single	.001	.023	.131	.090	.108	.104	.019	.040	-.261	-.085	1.000				
Child divorced	-.046	-.018	-.024	-.037	.021	.014	.026	-.021	.116	.035	-.078	1.000			
Child has children	.039	-.041	-.076	-.055	-.066	-.040	-.046	-.046	.413	.110	-.424	.060	1.000		
Child poor health	-.064	-.094	-.072	-.037	.060	.046	.067	-.072	.018	.022	.057	.000	-.055	1.000	
Child money problems	-.105	-.104	-.072	-.089	.110	.101	.072	-.111	-.020	.034	.064	.066	.049	.118	1.000

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Notes

1. There are three groups of fathers: (a) married fathers, (b) divorced and single fathers, (c) divorced and remarried fathers. The dummy's are coded as follows: D1 is 1 for Groups b and c (otherwise 0), and D2 is 1 for Group c (otherwise 0). The model is $Y = b_0 + b_1D1 + b_2D2 + e$. The expected value for the three groups are $E(Y|a) = b_0$, $E(Y|b) = b_0 + b_1$, $E(Y|c) = b_0 + b_1 + b_2$. The difference between $E(Y|b)$ and $E(Y|a) = b_1$ and the difference between $E(Y|c)$ and $E(Y|b) = b_2$. Hence, the first dummy represents the contrast between divorced and married, the second represents the contrast between remarried and divorced.
2. The age effect can also be an effect of the father's age. Since the two are highly correlated, this is difficult to decide. When we nonetheless include both, we find that the child's age effect remains significant and negative for all four outcomes, whereas the father's age effect is significant only for giving support to the father. This effect is positive ($b = .020$, $p < .01$), in line with the notion of need.

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