

Children's Divorce and Parent-Child Contact: A Within-Family Analysis of Older European Parents

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Objectives. Studies have shown that a parental divorce has a negative effect on parent-child relations. This study examines how adult children's divorce affects the amount of contact children have with older parents, making a distinction between the effects of being single on the one hand and the effects of divorce on the other hand.

Method. Using data on older adults in 11 European countries, I estimate within-family regression models to compare multiple adult children per parent (19,454 children aged 30-49; 10,476 parents aged 50-96). I analyze contact frequency while taking into account coresidence and distance.

Results. When comparing single divorced children and married children, no difference in contact is observed, but divorced children are more likely to live with their parents. When comparing among children who are single, divorced children have less frequent contact with parents than never-married children. This negative divorce effect exists for sons and daughters and is found in 9 of the 11 countries.

Discussion. The divorce of a child has a double meaning: it leads to being single, which is associated with stronger intergenerational ties, but it is also a non-normative and stressful life event, which is associated with weaker intergenerational ties.

Key Words: Divorce—Intergenerational relations—Life course.

FOR the well-being of older adults, it is important to have high-quality relationships with their adult children (Merz, Schuengel, & Schulze, 2009). Although relationships with adult children have become increasingly important as a result of increased life expectancy, there is also growing uncertainty in the ties between parents and adult children. One of the sources of uncertainty lies in the increase in divorce rates. Many studies have shown that divorced parents, especially fathers, have less frequent contact with their adult children than married parents (Albertini & Garriga, 2011; Daatland, 2007; De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007; Shapiro & Cooney, 2007). Divorced fathers also receive less support from their children than married parents and perceive the quality of the ties to their children to be weaker (Davey, Eggebeen, & Savla, 2007; Kalmijn, 2013a). The relationship between adult children and mothers is negatively affected by a divorce as well, but to a lesser extent (Daatland, 2007; De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007).

Although much has been written about the effects of parental divorce, there is another and less often noted side to this problem. With the rapid increase in divorce, not only have more and more children experienced the divorce of their parents but also more and more parents experience the divorce of their children. How a child's divorce affects intergenerational relationships is not well known. On the one hand, a child's divorce can be a stressful life event, which goes hand in hand with social disapproval and which can put parent-child relationships under strain (Kaufman &

Uhlenberg, 1998). On the other hand, a child's divorce can create a need for social and emotional support from parents, thereby leading to a strengthening of family ties (Spitze, Logan, Deane, & Zerger, 1994). Only few studies have been done on this question and most studies that exist are based on American data from the 1980s (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Spitze et al., 1994). Moreover, studies so far provided a rather mixed set of findings (Dykstra, 1997; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008). As a result, it is yet unclear if there are effects of children's divorce on parent-child relationships.

When examining the effects of children's divorce on intergenerational relations, we need to consider the effects of marriage as well. From previous studies, it is well known that the transition to marriage tends to have a negative effect on parent-child relationships. After children enter a union, parents see their children less often and the amount of support exchanged declines (Bucx, van Wel, Knijn, & Hagendoorn, 2008; Nazio & Saraceno, 2013; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008; Ward, Deane, & Spitze, 2013). These effects have been explained in terms of the substitution of the roles of parents and partners for providing social, emotional, and practical support (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008). The question now arises whether a possible effect of divorce can be attributed to the effect of not being married—the effect of being single—or to the divorce experience itself. Many studies in the past have compared divorced children with married children, but this comparison confounds the effects of (non) marriage and divorce. Comparisons between divorced and

never-married children may provide clearer evidence on the effects of children's divorce.

In this study, I examine the effects of adult children's divorce on intergenerational relationships using recent large-scale survey data from 11 European countries, that is, the *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement* (Börsch-Supan et al., 2005). To better understand how a child's divorce affects relationships, I compare divorced children to married children on the one hand and to never-married children on the other. Repartnering is considered as well. An important advantage of the data is that each respondent was asked to report about multiple children. This makes it possible to compare divorced, married, and never-married children within the same family. Within-family comparisons are stronger than cross-sectional comparisons because underlying and possibly confounding differences between families can be taken into account (Leopold & Raab, 2011). Finally, I explore whether the effects of divorce vary across national contexts or whether there is some more or less universal pattern to detect.

The main focus is on one aspect of the relationship, that is, the amount of contact between parents and children (face-to-face contact and phone or mail contact). Coresidence will also be analyzed, albeit in a more limited fashion. Intergenerational contact has frequently been studied and is an important dimension of intergenerational solidarity (Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991). Contact is first of all important in its own right, as a form of social support to parents. Second, contact can be seen as a condition for practical and emotional support exchange. Many forms of support require contact and by having contact, people become more aware of each other's needs and are more likely to express needs if they have them (Ward et al., 2013). In sum, for older parents, frequent contact is a basic and important element of the parent-child relationship.

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Previous Studies

Many studies have addressed the question of how life course transitions of children affect intergenerational relationships. Most of these studies focus on the most common transitions, such as getting married, entering cohabitation, and becoming a parent. Virtually, all studies find that the transition to marriage has a negative effect on parent-child contact while having children in marriage leads to an upsurge in contact again (Bucx et al., 2008; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008; Ward et al., 2013). (When I use the term "marriage," I mean to include cohabitation, unless an explicit distinction between the two terms is made.) Recent longitudinal studies yield similar results as older cross-sectional studies (Ward et al., 2013). Within-family comparisons have been done as well and these also find that parents give more support to a child who is single than to a

married child, after taking into account the effects of children's age and health (Kalmijn, 2013b; Sutor, Pillemer, & Sechrist, 2006).

Few studies have examined the effect of children's divorce on children's relationships with parents. Below, I discuss studies that examined at least one indicator of the strength of adult intergenerational relations, which can be contact, support exchange, or perceptions of the quality of the relationship. In an early and pioneering study of the problem, Spitze and coworkers (1994) analyzed data on parents in New York in the 1980s and found that a child's divorce had a *positive* effect on contact and support exchange with parents. This was only observed for daughters who had children, however. An analysis of the *National Survey of Families and Households* of 1987–1988 found that previously married children had poorer relations with their parents than children who were in a well-functioning marriage (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). A recent analysis of the same data found that there was more support exchange between divorced children and their parents than between married children and their parents (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008). Analyses of Dutch parents found negative effects of children's divorce on emotional and instrumental support but only when parents were divorced themselves (Dykstra, 1997). A recent qualitative study from Ireland found that parents provide more support to a child after his or her divorce (Timonen, Doyle, & O'Dwyer, 2011). Most of the studies mentioned compare children who are single to married children. As a result, it is not yet clear if the effect of divorce is an effect of being single.

Theoretical Background

Before I formulate hypotheses about the "effect" of children's divorce, we need to recognize that when a married child experiences a divorce, two changes occur: (a) the child goes through a stressful and non-normative life course transition and (b) the child becomes single again. The former change can lead to what I call a divorce effect, and the second is a partner status effect.

Let us first look at the partner status effect. Single children often receive more support from parents than married children, even after controlling for age and a range of other social and economic characteristics. The main explanation for this effect lies in the notion of needs. Adult children are faced with social, emotional, practical, and sometimes financial needs. As long as they are single, parents feel obliged to support their adult children in meeting these needs. Research suggests that such feelings on the part of parents remain present even at very high ages of the child (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). When the child marries, however, the partner can in principle provide the needed support and parents feel that they are no longer primarily responsible for the child's well-being. That parents and partners are substitutes is a principle that is typical of the western

nuclear family system (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008). Based on this principle, we would expect that divorced children have more frequent contact with parents than married children and have a similar amount of contact compared with never-married children of the same age. This is the partner status effect.

The partner status effect is accompanied by what I call a divorce effect. In the so-called stress-process perspective, it is emphasized that a life course transition like divorce is stressful not only because of the breakdown of the marital relationship itself but also because of the many other “secondary stressors” that accompany this transition (Pearlin, 2009). A divorce goes hand in hand with adjustment to a new situation, with complex practical problems, with financial difficulties, and typically with emotional problems as well. Financial difficulties are generally more severe for women who divorce (Uunk, 2004), but many of the other, more emotional problems occur for both men and women, although of course not for all individuals to the same extent (Simon, 2002).

Authors who have applied the stress-process perspective to the life course have argued that these secondary stressors can play an important role in understanding how lives of related persons are linked over time (Milkie, Bierman, & Schieman, 2008). First, the stress that a divorce entails reduces the time and energy that children have available to interact with parents. Second, a child may become mentally preoccupied with his or her own life after divorce, which may reduce the interests the child has in the well-being of his or her parents. As an illustration of this, Kaufman and Uhlenberg (1998) found that children with strained marriages had poorer relationships with their parents than happily married children. In other words, a crisis in one relationship (with the partner) can have negative effects on the quality of another relationship (with the parents). The crisis effect is probably more relevant in the first years after the divorce, but there is no information in the data on the length of time the child was divorced. Hence, no duration interactions can be estimated.

A second reason why there can be a negative divorce effect lies in norms. Although attitudes toward divorce vary considerably across countries (Gelissen, 2003), a divorce is not a generally accepted decision, especially not among older generations of Europeans. Hence, when a child decides to divorce, parents and other family members may disapprove. Overt sanctions from parents are probably uncommon, but research does confirm that parents find it difficult if a child experiences a divorce, especially when they have traditional norms about marriage and the family (Kalmijn & De Graaf, 2012; Pillemer & Suito, 1991). It is not likely that parents directly sanction their children by not visiting them anymore, but it is possible that disapproval is associated with ambivalent feelings that in turn develop into a strain in the relationship (Birditt, Fingerman, & Zarit, 2010). Reducing the amount of contact can be a way to deal with this strain.

Norms may also play a role in the behavior of children. For example, children who divorce may feel guilty and—with or without actually being sanctioned—withdraw from contact with relatives in order to avoid the expected sanctions (Kalmijn & Uunk, 2007). Note that there will be considerable heterogeneity in the sanctions that people receive. This may depend on who instigated the divorce, on the reasons for the divorce, and on the societal context and social group in which the divorce takes place. Examining such moderators is beyond the scope of this study, but I do examine how the effects vary across countries (see later).

In sum, we expect a positive effect of partner status (being single) on intergenerational contact and a negative effect of the divorce transition. When comparing divorced children to married children, both effects are in play: a positive partner status effect and a negative divorce effect. The sum of these effects depends on the magnitude of the two effects. If the effects are equal, there will be no difference between divorced and married children. When comparing divorced children with never-married children, the partner status effect does not play a role so that only the divorce effect will make a difference. Based on the divorce effect, we would expect that divorced children have less frequent contact with parents than never-married children. An additional implication of the divorce effect can be obtained by comparing married children and divorced children who repartnered. Both these types of children are living with a partner and, hence, experience similar needs of support from parents (the partner status effect is similar). Based on the logic of the divorce effect, one would expect repartnered children to have less frequent contact with their parents than first-married children.

When examining contact, it is important to consider coresidence as well. The focus in this article is on children between the ages of 30–49. Some of the never-married children in this age group are still living at home. This is especially the case in Southern European countries where prolonged coresidence is not atypical (Saraceno, 2007). Married children rarely live at home, however. When a married child experiences a divorce, he or she can decide to move back to the parental home. A return to the parental home can be a way to solve temporary financial problems or problems in finding a new place to live (Ward, Logan, & Spitze, 1992). For divorced children, coresidence always requires a *return* to the parental home. Because this is often difficult, we would expect that divorced children are less likely to live with parents than never-married children, even though they will be more likely to live at home compared with married children. Note that living with parents does not always mean living in the parental home; parents may also live in the child's home (Smits, van Gaalen, & Mulder, 2010). In the present article, coresidence will be examined as well, both as a dependent variable and as a control variable in the models for intergenerational contact.

Gender differences will be examined as well. Few systematic gender differences in the effects of marriage and divorce have been observed in the literature. The stress perspective does not necessarily imply gender differences because both men and women are psychologically affected by a divorce (Simon, 2002). The normative theory does not play a role here either as there is no clear gender-differentiated blame pattern. Probably more relevant is the question of custody (Spitze et al., 1994). Daughters who divorce will have custody more often than sons who divorce. As a result, divorced mothers have a greater need than divorced fathers to obtain support for taking care of their children, for example, when they work or have evening duties (Timonen et al., 2011). This could lead to a weaker partner status effect for daughters than for sons when there are children involved.

So far, I have discussed reasons why a divorce will have a causal effect on contact. We do need to consider the possibility that there are underlying factors that both increase the risk of children's divorce and that affect family contact. Such characteristics can play a role at the level of individuals and at the level of families. At the individual level, it is possible that children who divorce have personality traits that are associated with more general problems in relationships. For example, research has shown that neuroticism is related to relationship functioning in intimate personal relationships (Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). At the level of families, we can think of norms and values. Some families are more strongly oriented toward family solidarity than others and this is partly related to differences in filial norms (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). For example, religious persons are more likely to maintain contact with family members (Gans, Silverstein, & Lowenstein, 2009), while at the same time, church attendance reduces the risk of divorce (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). In this article, such (unmeasured) confounding family factors are taken into account by making comparisons within families through a fixed-effect regression model. Unobserved individual characteristics that are unrelated to the family of origin cannot be controlled for in this approach.

Finally, the question arises if effects are "universal" or whether they depend on the national context. To answer this question, it is important to realize that there are considerable differences between countries in the rate of divorce. For example, net divorce rates are higher in Northern European countries than in Southern European countries (Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008). When divorce is less common, the threshold to separate is higher and the couples who do decide to divorce will probably have more serious problems than in settings where the threshold is low. This would lead to a more stressful transition in settings where divorce is uncommon. Moreover, when divorce is uncommon, it is more strongly disapproved of (Gelissen, 2003). In so far as disapproval of divorce plays a role in the effect of divorce on intergenerational contact, we would expect that

in low-divorce contexts, contact with family members will be affected more negatively by a child's divorce.

DATA, MEASURES, AND DESIGN

Data come from the first wave of the *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe* (SHARE). SHARE was based on nationally representative random samples of the population of 50 and older (Börsch-Supan et al., 2005). The countries represent a considerable range: two Northern European countries (Denmark and Sweden), three Southern European countries (Greece, Spain, and Italy), and six Western European countries (Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, and The Netherlands). All 50+ members of a household were interviewed at home with structured questionnaires. If there was a partner in the household, some of the modules were divided among the partners. The partner who was interviewed first was given the role of "family respondent" and was asked to answer questions on children. For the present purpose, only "family respondents" were selected.

Detailed information is available for (at most) four children. When there were more than four children, questions were asked about the four children who lived nearest to the parent. The unit of analysis is the parent-child dyad ($n = 38,962$). From this set of dyads, I selected children who had valid age information, who were 30–49 years old, and who were the biological children of the respondent. I further excluded children with unknown or unusable marital status categories and with missing information on contact. (This includes missing marital status, child widowed, married children not living with their partner, and divorced children who were cohabiting [see later]. Because there may be a variety of reasons for being married while not living with the partner, "married and not living with the partner" was not treated as divorced or separated.) This leaves me with 19,454 children belonging to 10,476 families. The age selection was made in light of the fact that children under 30 are unlikely to have experienced a divorce and, hence, would be an unrealistic reference category (only 3.3% of divorced children are younger than 30). The upper age limit was chosen in order to make the sample of children not too heterogeneous in age. In the current setup, the oldest child is younger than the youngest parent. In total, 910 children were divorced. The average age of the parents was 67.0, and the average age of the children was 38.5.

For each child, a series of questions was asked. Contact frequency refers to face-to-face, telephone, or (e-)mail contact in the past 12 months. The question specifically asked about contact of the child "with the respondent and/or the partner." Hence, the measure includes contact with the spouse. Contact was measured with categories that were recoded into approximate counts in the following way: daily (365), several times a week (104), about once a week (52), about every 2 weeks (26), about once a month (12), less than once a month (6), and never (1). (Never was coded 1 to

allow for the log conversion. Slight alterations in the coding scheme do not affect the coefficients.) Counts were logged to reduce the skewness of the variable and to obtain a better interpretation of the regression coefficients. More specifically, $100 \times (e^\beta - 1)$ gives us the percentage difference in the number of contacts for the two groups that are compared with a dichotomous independent variable (Berndt, 1991; Halvorsen & Palmquist, 1980). In the age group chosen, 7% of the children were still living at home. Before analyzing contact, I present a logistic regression model for coresidence. To incorporate coresidence in the models for contact, I analyze contact frequency in two ways. In the first model, children living at home are assigned to the category of daily contact. In the second model, children who were living at home are removed from the analysis. By comparing effects across the two models, I can assess how much of the effects of marriage and divorce are due to differentials in coresidence.

The central independent variable is the marital status of the child. The SHARE asked about current marital status and partner status. This allows me to construct three categories: (a) never-married children who live alone, (b) married children who live with a partner, and (c) divorced children who live alone. I include cohabiting children in the married category if they report their marital status as "never married." Previous analyses in three European countries have shown that there are no differences between married and cohabiting children in contact with parents once background characteristics have been controlled for (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009; Nazio & Saraceno, 2013). In a separate, additional analysis, I analyze repartnering, but this analysis only focuses on divorced persons who were cohabiting with a (new) partner. Divorced persons who remarried cannot be identified because no questions were asked about children's marital history. (The remarried are now included in the married category but because they represent a small minority of this category, they will hardly bias my estimates of the marriage effects. Using the *European Social Survey* [Wave 5], I calculate that for eight of the SHARE countries combined, 6.7% of the married population [30–49] had experienced a divorce.)

The following characteristics of children were used as control variables: age, sex, years of schooling, unemployment, whether the child has children, the number of siblings, and the geographic distance from the parent (in logged form). Models are estimated with and without distance. The following parental characteristics are included: parental divorce, parent widowed, parent's gender, the interaction between parent's gender and divorce and widowhood, and parent's years of education. The country of residence is included with a set of dummy variables. Table 1 contains descriptive information on all the variables.

I use random- and fixed-effects regression models where parent-child dyads are nested in families. The random-effects models are similar to multilevel models with

Table 1. Descriptive Information on Variables Used in the Analysis

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	N
Living at home	0.07		0	1	19,454
Contact (ln)	4.63	1.24	0	5.90	19,454
Distance (ln)	2.44	1.97	0	6.21	17,430
Mother	0.57		0	1	19,454
Parent divorced	0.07		0	1	19,454
Parent widowed	0.23		0	1	19,454
Parent's years of schooling ^a	9.02	4.53	0	21	19,454
Child years of schooling ^a	12.46	3.44	0	21	19,454
Child unemployed	0.05		0	1	19,454
Number of siblings	1.92	1.42	0	13	19,454
Child is daughter	0.49		0	1	19,454
Child's age	38.57	5.50	30	49	19,454
Child never married	0.17		0	1	19,454
Child married	0.78		0	1	19,454
Child divorced	0.05		0	1	19,454
Child has children	0.69		0	1	19,428

Notes. Parent-child dyads nested in parents.

^aMissing values imputed at country-specific means.

Source. *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement*, first wave.

random intercepts. In the fixed-effects models, the effect of an independent variable reflects the difference between siblings in contact that is related to the difference in the scores on the independent variable of the two siblings. For example, an effect of parenthood reflects the difference in contact between two siblings, one of whom is a parent and the other is not. Because I am interested in the effects of parent's characteristics as well and because I want to assess what is gained by using within-family models, I also present random-effects models. These models consider differences within and between families simultaneously. For coresidence, I use random- and fixed-effects logistic regression models.

To test the partner status effect and the divorce effect, I define three variables: $D1_i$ (1 if never married, 0 otherwise), $D2_i$ (1 if married, 0 otherwise), and $D3_i$ (1 if divorced, 0 otherwise). X_{ij} is a vector of j control variables. The first model is defined as $Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D2_i + \beta_2 D3_i + \sum \varphi_j X_{ij} + e_i$. In this model, never-married children are the reference. The partner status effect is β_1 because this compares married to never-married children. Divorced children are also single but are not used as a reference because this would add a divorce effect to the comparison. The divorce effect is β_2 because this compares divorced children to never-married children. Both these groups are single, and hence, the divorce effect is not confounded by the partner status effect. I also estimate a second model: $Y_i = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 D1_i + \gamma_2 D3_i + \sum \varphi_j X_{ij} + e_i$. In this model, married children are the reference. The statistical effect of divorce in this model, that is, the coefficient γ_2 , compares divorced and married persons. Although this is an interesting additional comparison, we need to keep in mind that it is the combination of having experienced a divorce transition and being single (the reversed marriage effect). More formally, $\gamma_2 = \beta_2 - \beta_1$. If γ_2 is positive, the partner status effect (β_1) is stronger (more

negative) than the divorce effect (β_2 ; note that it is assumed that $\beta_2 < 0$ and $\beta_1 < 0$).

RESULTS

Table 2 presents random- and fixed-effects logistic regression models for living at home. The table shows that divorced children are less likely to live at home than their never-married siblings ($\beta_2 < 0$). This will largely be due to the fact that divorced children would have to return home after divorce. How do divorced children compare with their married siblings? This is presented in the second contrast in Table 2. We see that divorced children are more likely to live at home than their married siblings ($\gamma_2 > 0$). The effects are similar in the random-effects model and the fixed-effects model. In other words, the partner status effect is stronger than the divorce effect. These results suggest that returning home can be a way in which children obtain support from parents after divorce. Note that this will be more relevant for Southern European countries where prolonged coresidence is common to begin with (Saraceno, 2007).

Table 3 presents the models for contact. We first see that the more stringent fixed-effects models yield more or less the same results as the random-effects models. This shows that selection bias at the family level does not lead to spurious effects of divorce if analyzed with normal cross-sectional data. I continue with discussing the fixed-effects results.

Model 2 shows that a child's divorce has a significant negative effect on contact with parents. More specifically,

children who are divorced have less frequent contact with their parents than their siblings who are never married. The ratio of contact is $e^{-0.362} = 0.69$, which amounts to 31% less frequent contact for divorced children. As expected, the effects of marriage are negative. When comparing within the family, married children have 38% less frequent contact with parents than their never-married siblings. Children who have children themselves have more frequent contact with parents than their siblings without children. This is in line with expectations as well. However, the positive effect of parenthood is smaller than the negative effect of marriage so that there is no "return" to the level of contact of single children when married children become parents.

In the second contrast, also presented in Model 2, I compare single divorced children with married children. The difference in contact between these groups is quite small, showing that a negative overall divorce effect is suppressed by the positive effect of being single. Nonetheless, the remaining effect is positive and significant ($b = 0.120$). This shows that the partner status effect is somewhat stronger than the divorce effect, at least when coresident children are included in the analysis.

In the first two models, children who were living at home were assigned to daily contact. When I exclude children who are living at home, in Models 3 and 4, the effects of divorce and marriage are reduced. This shows that part of the reason why divorced children have less frequent contact with their parents than never-married children is that never-married children more often live at home. In Models 5 and 6, it can be seen that geographic distance has a very strong association with contact. Because both contact and distance are logged, the effect can be interpreted in percentages (Berndt, 1991): for each percentage decrease in distance, contact increases by 0.24%. When I control for geographic distance, the effect of divorce becomes somewhat larger again. In the last model (Model 6), divorced children have 24% less frequent contact with parents than their never-married siblings, given that they both live independently and equally close to their parents. This points to a modest but significant negative divorce effect. Moreover, in this final model, the divorce effect and the partner status effect are equally strong (γ_2 is not significant).

The results so far suggest that there is a negative divorce transition effect if comparisons are made among children who are living alone. An additional hypothesis was developed about the comparison of married children and divorced children who repartnered. To test this hypothesis, I estimated Models 2 and 4 again, this time adding divorced children who were cohabiting with a (new) partner to the sample ($n = 402$). Married children are the reference category. The estimates of the fixed-effects models (not presented in the table) show negative and significant effects of repartnering ($b = -0.177$ in Model 2, and $b = -0.173$ in Model 4). In other words, among siblings who live with a partner, previously divorced children have less frequent

Table 2. Random and Fixed-Effects Logistic Regression Models for Living at Home: Regression Coefficients and p Values

	(1) Random effects		(2) Fixed effects	
	b	p	b	p
Mother	0.075	.48		
Parent divorced	-1.450**	.01		
Parent divorced \times mother	1.096	.07		
Parent widowed	0.356	.12		
Parent widowed \times mother	0.532*	.03		
Parent's years of schooling	-0.042**	.00		
Number of siblings	-0.070*	.03		
Daughter	-0.285**	.00	-0.341*	.05
Child's age	-0.046**	.00	-0.089**	.00
Child years of schooling	-0.088**	.00	-0.072	.05
Child unemployed	0.885**	.00	1.124**	.00
Child married (Contrast 1, β_1)	-3.900**	.00	-3.922**	.00
Child divorced (Contrast 1, β_2)	-1.250**	.00	-1.200**	.01
Child divorced (Contrast 2, γ_2)	2.650**	.00	2.723**	.00
Child has children	-0.859**	.00	-0.685**	.01
Constant	2.073**	.00		
N	19,428		2,018	
Chi square	725.0		986.1	

Notes. Contrast 1 compares with never-married children; Contrast 2 compares with married children. Parent-child dyads nested in parents. Country effects are included but not shown.

$^{\dagger}p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Source. Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement, first wave.

Table 3. Random and Fixed-Effects Regression Models for Parent-Child Contact: Regression Coefficients and *p* Values

	(1) Random effects (including coresidence)		(2) Fixed effects (including coresidence)		(3) Random effects (excluding coresidence)		(4) Fixed effects (excluding coresidence)		(5) Random effects (with distance)		(6) Fixed effects (with distance)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>
Mother	0.047*	.04	—	—	0.047*	.05	—	—	0.043~	.05	—	—
Parent divorced	-1.209**	.00	—	—	-1.191**	.00	—	—	-1.114**	.00	—	—
Parent divorced × mother	0.767**	.00	—	—	0.751**	.00	—	—	0.681**	.00	—	—
Parent widowed	-0.184**	.00	—	—	-0.217**	.00	—	—	-0.249**	.00	—	—
Parent widowed × mother	0.213**	.00	—	—	0.209**	.00	—	—	0.225**	.00	—	—
Parent's years of schooling	-0.009**	.00	—	—	-0.008**	.00	—	—	0.001	.62	—	—
Number of siblings	-0.096**	.00	—	—	-0.102**	.00	—	—	-0.101**	.00	—	—
Daughter	0.243**	.00	0.253**	.00	0.283**	.00	0.295**	.00	0.285**	.00	0.301**	.00
Child's age	-0.019**	.00	-0.030**	.00	-0.018**	.00	-0.029**	.00	-0.016**	.00	-0.023**	.00
Child years of schooling	-0.002	.52	-0.009*	.05	0.003	.35	-0.008	.11	0.022**	.00	0.012**	.01
Child unemployed	0.167**	.00	0.241**	.00	0.079~	.05	0.151**	.01	0.034	.36	0.096~	.06
Child married (Contrast 1, β ₁)	-0.446**	.00	-0.482**	.00	-0.176**	.00	-0.250**	.00	-0.159**	.00	-0.206**	.00
Child divorced (Contrast 1, β ₂)	-0.380**	.00	-0.362**	.00	-0.205**	.00	-0.240**	.00	-0.222**	.00	-0.281**	.00
Child divorced (Contrast 2, γ ₂)	0.066~	.08	0.120*	.01	-0.029	.46	0.010	.84	-0.062~	.08	-0.075	.11
Child has children	0.104**	.00	0.119**	.00	0.143**	.00	0.152**	.00	0.059**	.00	0.085**	.00
Geographic distance (ln)									-0.241**	.00	-0.251**	.00
Constant	5.639**	.00	6.086**	.00	5.215**	.00	5.708**	.00	5.433**	.00	5.904**	.00
<i>N</i>	19,428		19,428		17,978		17,978		17,404		17,404	
<i>R</i> ²	0.157		0.031		0.131		0.016		0.276		0.179	
<i>SD</i> between	0.611		1.080		0.643		1.092		0.594		0.987	
<i>SD</i> within	0.943		0.943		0.938		0.938		0.838		0.838	

Notes. Contrast 1 compares with never-married children; Contrast 2 compares with married children. Parent-child dyads nested in parents. Country effects are included but not shown.

~*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

Source. Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement, first wave.

contact with parents than their never-divorced siblings. This confirms the hypothesis and shows again that a divorce transition can have negative implications for parent-child contact.

Interactions with gender suggest some differential effects. The effect of marriage is smaller for daughters than for sons ($b = 0.141$, $p = .01$), but the divorce effect ($b = 0.116$, $p = .21$) and the parenthood effect ($b = 0.056$, $p = .19$) are similar for sons and daughters. (These estimates are obtained from the random-effects model [Model 3, Table 3] because the statistical power is more limited when making comparisons in families with two or more same-sex children.) To explore gender differences further, I construct more detailed categories where parenthood and partner status are combined. More specifically, I compare never-married children without children, married children with and without children, and divorced children with and without children. The effects are estimated separately for sons and daughters and the results are presented in Table 4. The results first confirm that sons are significantly affected by marriage, whereas marriage has no effect on daughters' relationships with parents, regardless of the presence of children. Interesting is that a divorce has a less negative effect if there are children, especially for daughters. The difference is sizeable but due to the small number of cases in these more detailed groups, it is not statistically significant ($p = .25$). I come back to this finding in the conclusion.

Table 4. Random-Effects Models of Contact With Specific Life Course Combinations: Coefficients and *p* Values

	(1) Sons		(2) Daughters	
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>
Mother vs father	0.031	.30	0.050~	.08
Parent divorced	-1.020**	.00	-1.206**	.00
Parent divorced × gender parent	0.473**	.00	0.877**	.00
Parent widowed	-0.105	.11	-0.355**	.00
Parent widowed × gender parent	0.085	.25	0.315**	.00
Parent's schooling	-0.001	.75	0.002	.55
Number of siblings	-0.100**	.00	-0.100**	.00
Child's age	-0.019**	.00	-0.012**	.00
Child's years of schooling	0.024**	.00	0.024**	.00
Child unemployed	-0.024	.68	0.041	.42
Child's life course situation				
Never married, no children ^a	—		—	
Married, no children	-0.237**	.00	-0.072	.12
Married, children	-0.168**	.00	-0.002	.96
Divorced, no children	-0.252*	.03	-0.250*	.03
Divorced, children	-0.175*	.01	-0.108~	.08
Geographic distance (ln)	-0.254**	.00	-0.221**	.00
Constant	5.643**	.00	5.422**	.00
<i>N</i>	8,523		8,574	
<i>R</i> ²	0.281		0.255	
<i>SD</i> between	0.625		0.664	
<i>SD</i> within	0.841		0.764	

Notes. Parent-child dyads nested in parents. Country effects are included but not shown.

^aReference category.

~*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

Source. Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement, first wave.

There are various control variables in the models that warrant our attention. First, we see significant age effects in all models. Younger siblings have more frequent contact with parents than older siblings. Because married children are older on average, this is an important control variable for estimating the divorce effect. Children’s education does not affect contact frequency. Unemployed children have more frequent contact with their parents than their siblings who are active (employed, in school, caring). The effect is probably a result of greater need for support and more available time among unemployed children.

In the random-effects models (Models 1, 3, and 5), we see that children have less frequent contact with parents when they have more siblings. Note that this negative effect applies to the dyadic level; at the level of the family, effects of family size tend to be positive (Grundy & Read, 2012). We also see effects of the parent’s marital status and the corresponding gender interactions. Because gender interactions are included, the main effects of divorce and widowhood apply to fathers. Divorced fathers and widowed fathers (although to a lesser extent) have less frequent contact with children than married fathers. Both these effects are significantly weaker for mothers (Model 5). The implied effects for mothers are negative for divorce ($b = -1.114 + 0.681 = -0.43$) and virtually zero for widowhood ($b = -0.249 + 0.225 = -0.024$). Hence, there is no difference between widowed and married mothers, but divorced mothers have less frequent contact with children than married mothers.

To what extent do the effects just found differ among countries? To examine this, I added interaction effects of marriage and divorce by country (using Contrast 1). Random-effects models were used because of the small numbers of cases per country. In Figure 1, I present the effects for each country as implied by the interaction model. The countries are ranked based on the net divorce rates (from 2003 or close that year if a 2003 number is

unavailable). In Figure 1, it can first be seen that the negative effect of children’s divorce on parent–child contact is present in 9 of the 11 countries. The effect is absent in Spain and Greece, two low-divorce countries, but it is strong in Italy, which also has a low divorce rate. There is also variation in the effect sizes. The effect is relatively strong in Belgium, France, and Switzerland, whereas it is more modest in Denmark and Sweden, two high-divorce countries. Samples with larger numbers of countries are needed to examine these issues more conclusively, but it does not look as if there is a linear relationship between the divorce rate and the divorce effect. A formal test of this notion using this (limited) set of countries confirms this. The interaction effect of the net divorce rate in a country and the divorce effect is not significant ($b = 0.004, p = .74$). The interaction effect of the net divorce rate and the marriage effect is significant ($b = 0.014, p < .01$), but no specific hypothesis was developed for this interaction. Apparently, in high-divorce countries, getting married has a less negative effect on parent–child relationships.

CONCLUSION

Previous findings from older, mostly American studies were not entirely consistent about the influence of adult children’s divorce on parent–child relationships. The present analysis of recent data from 11 European countries has provided more clarity about this influence. A child’s divorce involves a partner status effect and a divorce transition effect. The partner status effect—which is observed when comparing never-married and married siblings—would lead to more frequent contact when a child divorces and becomes single again. The partner status effect works against the divorce effect when comparing divorced and married children, resulting in an apparent similarity between divorced and married children in terms of intergenerational contact. When comparing divorced and never-married children, the

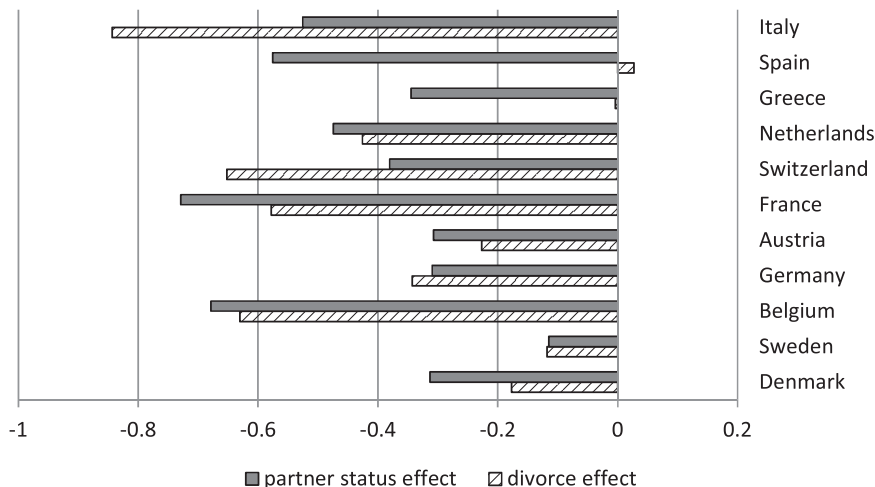


Figure 1. Effects of divorce and partner status by country.

partner status effect is controlled and the divorce effect can be assessed. In this comparison, I find a clear negative effect of divorce: divorced children have *less* frequent contact with parents than their never-married siblings.

In part, the negative divorce effect is due to differentials in coresidence. Some children return home after divorce, especially in countries like Spain, Italy, and Greece, where never-married children often stay at home for prolonged periods of time. However, the level of coresidence for divorced children will never reach the level of coresidence for never-married children because returning home is more difficult than not leaving home. Although coresidence plays a role, I also observe that part of the negative divorce effect persists when focusing on children who live independently. This remaining effect is not very strong, but it is significant and observed in 9 of the 11 countries that I analyze. Moreover, the negative divorce effect is confirmed by a within-family comparison of married children and divorced children who repartnered.

Several theoretical explanations were suggested to explain the negative divorce transition effect. The first line of reasoning is based on the stress-process perspective, which has previously been used to understand how life courses of related individuals can influence each other (Milkie et al., 2008). The experience of a divorce is associated with stress and this may result in less time and energy for parents. Moreover, the psychological problems that a divorce brings about may also make people more focused on themselves and therefore less attentive to the needs of parents and other family members. A second perspective is based on the normative aspects of life course transitions (Kalmijn & De Graaf, 2012; Liefbroer & Billari, 2010). A divorce is often disapproved of and this may have consequences for the parent-child relationship. Parents may feel ambivalent toward a child who decides to divorce and children, in turn, may feel less strongly accepted by their family when they divorce. These normative strains in the parent-child relationship may lead to a reduction in contact.

The effects of divorce were examined for sons and daughters separately, and these analyses revealed less negative effects of divorce for daughters with children. This is in line with one of the first American studies on the topic (Spitze et al., 1994). The most likely interpretation lies in the role of custody. Because women most often have custody of the children after divorce, the otherwise negative divorce effect on relationships with parents—which operates for both sons and daughters—is counteracted by the presence of grandchildren. These grandchildren create a continued link to the child and work against the possible influences of stress and normative disapproval. For sons, this is not the case because the grandchildren will often be living with the former daughter-in-law.

Some limitations of the present analysis must be discussed. The SHARE data provide an important,

cross-nationally comparable set of representative data on older adults. Information on (virtually) all the children was gathered, but the amount of information on the relationship was limited. Contact frequency was the main outcome in this article and even though support exchange was also ascertained in SHARE, the way this was done does not yield enough occurrences of support for each child. (The questions about support were first asked in general and subsequently, it was asked by [to] whom the support was given. An approach where all support exchanges are assessed for each child separately would probably have yielded higher levels of support exchange.) More importantly, data on the perceived quality of the tie or on issues such as equity, ambivalence, and strain are lacking. To know if these other aspects of the relationship are also affected is important theoretically but would probably require using country-specific surveys.

There is also limited information on the cultural characteristics of respondents. With data on personal norms, values, and religiosity, we could probably say more about the extent to which normative theories play a role in the effects that I found. In addition, the multination aspect of the survey enabled me to examine how robust the effect is across national contexts, but the small number of countries did not allow me to systematically test competing hypotheses about differences in the strength of the effects across contexts. Nonetheless, the differences between countries do not seem to support a normative interpretation of the divorce effect because effects are not systematically stronger in countries where divorce is uncommon. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the design does not allow me to make strong claims about causal effects, although the within-family models rule out confounding factors in so far as they are related to the family of origin.

Future analyses could focus on testing the underlying mechanisms for the effects of the divorce transition. One way to do that is to focus on important moderator variables. The normative perspective would suggest that the effect of a child's divorce on contact is more negative when parents have more traditional norms (Kalmijn & De Graaf, 2012). The stress perspective would suggest that the effect of a child's divorce declines with the time since the divorce occurred. Finally, economic theories can be tested more conclusively by looking at how women's (and men's) employment conditions modify the effects of divorce, not only on contact with parents but also on coresidence. Such a more in-depth analysis is important but requires detailed longitudinal data. For that end, analyses of specific countries are probably more useful than analyses of multination surveys like SHARE.

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