

# *Family Structure and the Well-Being of Immigrant Children in Four European Countries*

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Data on secondary school children in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden show that large differences exist in family structure within the minority population: In some groups, father absence is more common than among natives; in others, it is less common. These patterns reflect the differences in family structure in the origin countries, but the migration process also plays a role. Next, it is found that father absence has negative effects on immigrant children's well-being, but these effects appear weaker in minority groups where father absence is more common. Heterogeneous effects are interpreted in terms of different degrees of institutionalization of father absence in different minority groups.

## *INTRODUCTION*

In response to the dramatic rise in divorce rates in most Western societies, a large and still growing research tradition has examined the influence of family structure on children's well-being. Most studies in this area have shown that there are consistent negative effects of living in a single-parent family on children. These effects have been documented for a range of outcomes, including school achievement, problem behavior, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms (Jonsson and Gähler 1997; Pong, Dronkers, and Hampden-Thompson 2003; Sigle-Rushton, Hobcraft, and Kiernan 2005; Fomby and Cherlin 2007; Amato and Cheadle 2008). The magnitude of these effects, while significant, is modest, however, and there is also considerable heterogeneity in the effects (Cherlin 1999; Amato 2000). In other words, some children may suffer as a consequence of their parents' divorce or their father's absence, but other children may not be affected so much.

In another, but smaller research literature, authors have shown that there are large differences in family structure across ethnic and racial groups. In some groups such as African Americans, and to a lesser extent, Hispanic Americans, single parenthood is more common than among whites, whereas in other groups, such as Asian Americans, single parenthood is less common (McLoyd et al. 2000; Brandon 2002; Casper and Bianchi 2002). In Europe, differences are observed as well. In the UK, there is more single parenthood among people of Jamaican descent than among those of native descent (Mokhtar and Platt 2010). In the Netherlands, people of Surinamese and Antillean origins are more likely to grow up in a single-parent family than the native Dutch (Kalmijn 2010a). In France, children from African origins are two times more likely to live in a single-parent family compared to children of Asian or European origins (Kirszbaum, Brinbaum, and Simon 2009). Some authors attribute these differences to cultural factors, such as a more matrifocal orientation among African origin groups (Stack 1974; Morgan et al. 1993; Takyi and Gyimah 2007). Other authors have emphasized structural explanations such as unemployment, and migration-specific factors which may disrupt minority families (Lichter et al. 1992; Brandon 2002; Landale, Thomas, and Van Hook 2011).

High levels of father absence in certain minority groups are sometimes believed to exacerbate ethnic inequality in society. In this reasoning, children from minority backgrounds face a double handicap: they not only have fewer socioeconomic and cultural resources in the parental home, they are also disadvantaged in terms of family structure more often (Zhou 1997; Levels, Dronkers, and Kraaykamp 2008). A potential problem in this reasoning is that ethnic inequality is attributed to the family behavior of minority groups, whereas differences in family behavior in turn may have structural causes (Wilson 1987). Another and more important problem lies in the implicit assumption that the effects of family structure are similar across groups. As will be discussed below, there are theoretical reasons to believe that the effect of family structure on children could be less negative in groups where father absence is more common. If this hypothesis is true, there is no accumulation of disadvantage and the problem of father absence in minority groups would be less alarming.

Although an increasing number of studies examine the determinants of well-being and life satisfaction in minority groups (Chow 2007; Verkuyten 2008; Safi 2010; Beier and Kroneberg 2013; De Vroome and Hooghe 2014), few studies have examined how family structure affects

well-being in minority groups. When taking a broader view on child outcomes, there are a number of studies that have looked at such interaction effects. One example is the classic American study by McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) who found smaller effects of single parenthood on young adult's risk of high school dropout for blacks than for whites (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Similar interactions were later found for grade point averages in school (Heard 2007) and for delinquency of adolescents (Thomas, Farrell, and Barnes 1996). A contrasting finding is presented by Sun and Li (2007) who analyze longitudinal data and find no systematic differences across four major ethnic groups in the effects of parental divorce on children's behavioral problems and their school achievement (Sun and Li 2007). In the European context, evidence is even more scarce. A study in the Netherlands found weaker effects of parental divorce on children's own divorce risk for Caribbeans than for the native Dutch but no difference in the effect of parental divorce on children's educational attainment (Kalmijn 2010a).

The goal of the present contribution is to describe differences in family structure between minority children and majority children and to compare the effects of family structure on children's well-being among minority groups. To address these goals, unique new data are analyzed on fifteen thousand pupils in 400 secondary schools in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, that is, the *Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study* (Kalter et al. 2012). Although the design chosen is cross-sectional, the data have a number of advantages which make them highly suitable for examining whether and how the effects of family structure depend on the group context: The data cover a large number of minority groups, they have been gathered in the exact same format in four European countries, they contain a systematic oversample of minority children, and they are characterized by very low levels of non-response at the individual level.

Empirically, the focus of this paper is on the children of immigrants, that is, native- or foreign-born children of foreign-born parents. Immigrant children are a vital group in Europe: they constitute the vast majority of the ethnic minority population and their behaviors and experiences will provide important clues about how ethnic boundaries will develop in the future (Kalter et al. 2012). We not only compare immigrant children to natives, but also compare various minority groups to each other and to natives. Minority groups are defined as people of different regional foreign origins (e.g., Asian origins, Caribbean origins, Middle Eastern origins).

This conceptualization overlaps in part with the concept of ethnic groups as it is used in American research, but there are three important differences. First, we focus on the country of birth of the parents which implies that the third generation is not included in a minority group as defined here. Fortunately, the third generation is relatively small in Europe. Second, national or regional aggregates are often heterogeneous. There are religious and other more fine-grained ethnic and geographical distinctions within world regions. While these are important, they would require much larger datasets and more elaborate measurements than are available in most school surveys. Third, the minority population in Europe is considerably “closer” to the migration experience than most of the ethnic and racial groups in the United States. For example, children of African origins in Europe almost all have foreign-born parents and in this sense, these cannot be compared directly to African Americans in the United States, most of whom have been in the United States for generations. This implies that the patterns that we examine will not only be due to ethnic differences, but also to the migration experiences of the parents (Brandon 2002). We will explore some of these issues in detail below.

When we examine family structure, the main focus is on the presence or absence of the biological father (called “father absence” in the remainder of this paper). Research has shown the negative effect of parental divorce (and separation) on child well-being is not compensated by the mother’s repartnering; Children’s well-being in stepfamilies is generally similar to children’s well-being in single-parent families (Sweeney 2010; Sun and Li 2014). We also take into account the reasons for living without a father. More specifically, we examine separation/divorce, non-marriage, widowhood, and a father who lives abroad. There can be migration-specific reasons why it is important to distinguish routes into single parenthood. For example, single parenthood may occur because the child lives in a transnational family or because the father passed away prior to migration as a result of (civil) war in the origin country (Brandon 2002; Landale, Thomas, and Van Hook 2011). Similarly, distinguishing routes into single parenthood is relevant for understanding ethnic differences. Among African Americans in the United States, a substantial part of mothers never lived with or married the father of their children (Casper and Bianchi 2002). This may also be the case for certain minority groups in Europe such as Caribbeans, but not much is known about this yet. Our data allow us to look at the family structure of immigrant children in more detail than was possible before. Note that (breakups of)

cohabiting unions and marriages are combined for practical reasons; children were not asked to make that distinction.

### *BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES*

Most studies have demonstrated that there are negative effects of parental divorce and father absence on child outcomes. These effects are found in the United States and in Europe and they are found for a range of outcomes (Cherlin et al. 1991; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Jonsson and Gähler 1997; Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale, and McRae 1998; Diekmann and Engelhardt 1999; Dronkers 1999; Fischer 2004; Sigle-Rushton, Hobcraft, and Kiernan 2005; Strohschein 2005; Kim 2011). In the more stringent longitudinal designs, the effects remain significant, suggesting that selection bias does not play a dominant role (Kim 2011; McLanahan, Tach, and Schneider 2013; Amato and Anthony 2014). The effects are not always very large, however, and there is also considerable heterogeneity in the effects (Cherlin 1999; Amato 2000).

The effects are typically explained in terms of changes in economic resources of the family on the one hand and changes in parenting practices on the other hand (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Thomson, Hanson, and McLanahan 1994). Single-parent families have fewer economic resources than two-parent families and this deficit may translate into a lower well-being of the children in these families. For parenting practices, the main argument is that the role of the father is reduced after divorce, although mothers may also find it more difficult to raise the children on their own. This can lead to a lower degree of support on the one hand and less control of the child's behavior on the other hand. Since the combination of support and authoritative control is an important condition for a healthy development of the child, changes in parenting practices may lead to changes in the child's well-being. In all explanations, father absence — either via his economic resources or his social resources — is a key element (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

In the present paper, the question is whether the effect of father absence is different for minority groups and natives and how this difference in turn depends on the minority group we look at. Our leading hypothesis is that in groups where parental divorce and father absence are more common, the effects of such family forms on children's well-being are weaker (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Sun and Li 2007;

Kalmijn 2010a). There are two main reasons behind this so-called institutionalization hypothesis.

A first explanation lies in the notion of stigmatization. A divorce is often followed by normative disapproval from friends, family, and the larger social network (Gerstel 1987; Walterschapman, Price, and Serovich 1995). Normative disapproval also applies to single parenthood itself, especially when this is caused by a mother who never lived with the father. In the *European Values Studies* of 2008 — based on nationally representative surveys of the population — people were asked whether they approve or disapprove of a woman having a child as a single parent. About a third of the respondents disapproved of this living arrangement (Germany 36%, the Netherlands 34%, Great Britain 36%, 1999 figure). Disapproval is not only targeted at the husband or the wife, especially when norms against divorce and single parenthood are strong, the children may also be faced with disapproval (Kung, Hung, and Chan 2004). Normative responses from the environment may in turn play an important role in understanding changes in well-being after divorce. There is evidence that disapproval and stigmatization have direct negative effects on mental health, including self-esteem (Mak et al. 2007). Moreover, disapproval makes it more difficult to share emotional experiences with others and increases the risk of social isolation, thereby contributing to a decline in well-being (Kung, Hung, and Chan 2004).

Normative disapproval will depend on the context in which children are embedded. Important contexts are the country, the neighborhood, and the school (Dronkers, Kalmijn, and Wagner 2006). In this paper, we argue that the ethnic group to which people belong is also a relevant context. Much of the social interaction of children and adults is ethnically segregated (Moody 2001; Van Tubergen 2015) which means that children are often exposed to the norms of their co-ethnics. Moreover, differences in family structure among ethnic groups may point to different cultural orientations toward marriage and single parenthood (Stack 1974; Morgan et al. 1993; Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004). The norms and values that are part of this orientation are transmitted by parents to children (Cunningham 2001) and as a result, children will internalize to some extent the norms and values that are typical of their ethnic group (Spierings 2015). As a result, we would expect that in groups where father absence is more common, father absence will be more accepted. This influence is probably symmetric: In groups where father absence on child well-being is more common than among natives, the effect of father absence on child

well-being should be weaker, but in groups where father absence is less common than among natives, the effect should be stronger.

A second explanation emphasizes the role of support networks. Some authors have argued that in groups where father absence is common such as African Americans and Caribbeans, extended family networks are stronger (Stack 1974). In times of crisis, it is believed that the kinship network and especially the women in this network offer considerable support to each other. This not only applies to situations of economic deprivation, but also to situations like divorce and father absence, both of which create a need for social, financial, and instrumental support. It is plausible, although not known empirically, that support is mobilized regardless of the reason for why fathers are absent. Because the extended family in these groups is believed to be more important than the nuclear family, the breakup of the nuclear family will be felt less strongly (Gerstel 2011). This suggests that the consequences of father absence on children's well-being will also be weaker in these groups: The departure of the father implies a smaller loss of resources and the mother's network is more supportive. We would also expect that this effect is not necessarily symmetric. The effect of father absence on children will probably not be stronger in groups where father absence is *less* common than it is among natives. In these latter groups, kinship networks are probably not weaker than they are among native families.

The assumption behind the social support hypothesis is that minority groups with high levels of divorce and father absence, in particular groups with Caribbean and African origins, tend to be more matrifocal in their orientation. The term "matrifocal" applies to the relative role that mothers and fathers play in families and not to rules about residence, inheritance rules, or the distribution of power in the household. Research shows that countries in the Caribbean have a more matrifocal orientation; in sub-Saharan Africa, some countries also have a matrifocal orientation, but others do not and there is heterogeneity even within some African countries (Goode 1963; Meekers 1992; Quinlan 2006; Takyi and Gyimah 2007; Navara and Lollis 2009; Godelier 2011). There is also evidence on matrifocality in minority groups in the West. In African-American families in the United States and Caribbean families in the Netherlands, women and especially female kin exchange more support with each other than in white families (Hogan, Hao, and Parish 1990; Hunter 1997; Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004; Haxton and Harknett 2009; Ypeij 2009; Schans and Komter 2010). Grandmothers also play a stronger role in

African-American families in the United States and in Caribbean families in Britain than in native families, something which may be particularly relevant for single-parent families (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1992; Chamberlain 2003).

When examining differences in the effect of family structure on children's well-being across minority groups, we also need to consider the potential loss of economic resources. Although many minority families on average have fewer economic resources than the native majority (Heath 2008), the question is whether the association between single parenthood and economic resources is different for minority groups. There is no clear answer to this. In the United States, Page and Stevens have shown that economic resources decline more strongly after divorce for blacks than for whites (Page and Stevens 2005). In the Netherlands, in contrast, the relative risk of living in poverty for single-parent families versus two-parent families is lower among Caribbeans than among whites (Kalmijn 2010a). Even though the evidence is not yet consistent, the findings do make clear that it is important to take into account economic resources when comparing effects of family structure on children's well-being. Since these economic considerations play a role at the individual level, we can adjust the group comparisons for this factor in a multivariate regression framework. More specifically, we look at the mother's employment and at the occupational status of the mother and father. Income data are not present, but we include several proxy indicators for family income.

Although minority groups can be a relevant context for how children experience father absence, it is important to consider other social contexts as well. One such context is the school. There are strong effects of the school context on the type of networks that children have (Hallinan and Williams 1989; Moody 2001). As a result, the school can also be a context that moderates the effect of father absence. Several studies found that in schools with a high proportion of students from single-parent families, students have lower academic achievement than in other schools, even when controlling for the family structure of the individual student (Pong 1998; Cavanagh and Fomby 2012; De Lange, Dronkers, and Wolbers 2014). Following the logic of normative approval and social support networks, one would further expect that the effect of father absence on well-being is less negative when this experience is more common in a school. Previous studies did not find this interaction, but we will examine it again in the present paper.



A second relevant context is the country. The four destination countries have different rates of divorce. Sweden has the highest divorce rate, followed by England, while Germany and the Netherlands have lower divorce rates (Kalmijn 2007). According to the notion of institutionalization, we could expect that living in a single-parent family or with a stepfather has less negative effects on children's well-being in England and Sweden than in Germany and the Netherlands. Tolerance toward single parenthood and divorce will be greater in high-divorce countries and support strategies will be more institutionalized (Pong, Dronkers, and Hampden-Thompson 2003; Dronkers and Härkönen 2008; Kalmijn 2010b).

### *DATA AND METHOD*

The CILS4EU data were collected in four countries. About 100 secondary schools were randomly chosen per country and two (randomly chosen) classes in each school were used (Kalter et al. 2012). The focus was on tenth graders in England, ninth graders in Germany, third graders of secondary schools in the Netherlands, and eighth graders in Sweden. The children were about 14 years old in each country. Schools with high proportions of immigrant children were systematically oversampled via a stratified sampling scheme so as to ensure a large enough sample of immigrant children. Based on the share of immigrants in a school, four strata were constructed and random samples of schools were drawn within these strata. To solve the problem that schools may not be willing to participate, a replacement strategy was used where each school was matched to a replacement school that was to be approached when the initial school did not respond. This is similar to the procedures used by other international school research such as PISA and TIMMS. After replacement, response at the school level was 65.6 percent in England, 98.6 percent in Germany, 91.7 percent in the Netherlands, and 76.8 percent in Sweden (where no replacement procedure was used).

We first make a distinction between immigrant children and natives. Immigrant children are native-born children with (at least one) foreign-born parent(s) and foreign-born children with foreign-born parents. Natives are defined as native-born children with two native-born parents. The third generation can also be defined, but only 5.7 percent of the natives have foreign-born maternal or paternal grandparents. We include these in the native sample since we have no details on the country of birth of grandparents. We include a generational variable in our tables and

models. We distinguish between immigrant children (first generation), native-born children of two foreign-born parents (second generation), and native-born children of one foreign and one native-born parent (mixed second generation). Note that first-generation children are enrolled in school in the destination country and hence arrived at an early age. For this reason, it is probably more appropriate to denote them with the term “1½ generation” (Perlmann and Waldinger 1997).

As is common in European research, minority groups are defined on the basis of the country of birth of parents. In the case of mixed parentage, the country of birth of the mother was preferred given the focus on father-absent families. The data contain many groups, some of whom are too small to analyze. One solution is to focus on the most important detailed groups in these countries (e.g., Turks, Serbians, Jamaicans, Pakistani, Somalis) but that would yield a partial view of the minority population. The 10 largest groups in the data make up only 45 percent of the immigrant children in the four countries. The alternative, which is used here, is to collapse groups into regions that are relatively homogeneous and that contain sufficient numbers of cases for analysis. We use a typology developed by the United Nations to construct regions. The following regions are distinguished (in parentheses, we list examples of detailed groups that are numerically dominant if applicable): (1) sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Somalia, Ghana), (2) Latin America, (3) the larger Middle East (e.g., Turkey, Morocco, Iraq, Syria), (4) the Caribbean (e.g., Antilles, Jamaica, Suriname), (5) Southeast Asia (e.g., China, Thailand), (6) south-central Asia (e.g., Pakistan, India), (7) eastern Europe (e.g., Poland, Russia), (8) southeast Europe (e.g., Bosnia, Serbia), (9) southern Europe (e.g., Italy, Spain), (10) Western (e.g., Western Europe, the United States, and Australia; Table 1).

### *Measures of Well-Being*

Following earlier studies on the effects of father absence, we consider multiple aspects of subjective well-being, namely self-esteem, depressive feelings, and problem behavior. Researchers typically find effects for all outcomes, thereby strengthening the evidence for a negative effect of divorce and father absence (Amato and Anthony 2014). There are also theoretical reasons to look at different aspects of well-being. The measures that we examine reflect in part the distinction between internalizing and externalizing problems. Self-esteem and depression are indicators of inter-

TABLE 1  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND MEASUREMENT DETAILS OF VARIABLES USED IN THE ANALYSES

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	<i>n</i>
Problem behavior	0	1	-1.02	6.40	15,415
Self-esteem	0	1	-4.71	1.52	17,115
Depressive feelings	0	1	-1.76	3.24	17,097
Woman	0.493		0	1	17,330
Age	14.4	0.65	12	18	17,330
1/2 generation	0.109		0	1	17,330
2nd generation	0.188		0	1	17,330
Mixed second	0.105		0	1	17,330
Parents' SES	4.36	1.77	1.10	8.88	16,329
Mother employed	0.762		0	1	16,785
Number of siblings <sup>a</sup>	1.51	1.28	0	10	17,330
Number of rooms <sup>a</sup>	5.45	1.81	1	10	17,330
Consumer durables <sup>a</sup>	2.46	1.29	0	4	17,330
School-level SES	0	1	-3.93	2.28	17,330
School % immigrants	0.397	0.276	0	1	17,330

Imputed at the country-specific mean if missing.  
Source: CILS4EU Wave 1, version 1.1 (own analyses).

nalizing problems and problem behavior is part of the concept of externalizing problems. Both are expressions of underlying emotional problems. Internalizing problems tend to be more common among girls and externalizing problems more common among boys (Leadbeater et al. 1999). Externalizing problems are related to the degree to which parents monitor and sanction a child, something that is less true for internalizing problems (Browning, Leventhal, and Brooks-Gunn 2005; Fomby and Cherlin 2007). This could make externalizing problems especially sensitive to the absence of a father in the family.

The first scale measures depressive feelings and consists of four items: feeling worried, feeling anxious, feeling depressed, and feeling worthless. The reliability is good ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ) and similar for immigrant children and natives (0.77 and 0.78). The second scale measures self-esteem and consists of four items: being proud of oneself, self-acceptance, believing to have good qualities, and optimism about one's personal life ( $\alpha = 0.82$  for both immigrant children and natives). The third scale measures problem behavior and has eight items: skipping lessons, coming late to school, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, using drugs, having damaged property, stealing things, and having been drunk. The reliability is good ( $\alpha = 0.89$ , for immigrant children  $\alpha = 0.89$ , for natives  $\alpha = 0.88$ ). All scales are constructed by summing the items. The resulting scale is standardized in the regression model so that effects of dummy variables can be interpreted as an effect size (Cohen's  $d$ ), which is the standardized difference in children's well-being between groups (Cohen 1988).

### *Independent Variables*

Family structure is the main independent variable. Detailed information is available on who lives in the household and what the relationship is with the child. For descriptive purposes, we use an extensive typology of family structure (Table 2) and a detailed typology of the reasons for not living with both parents (Table 3). We also use a simpler variable which contrasts children without a (biological) father to children living with both parents.

At the individual level, controls are used for sex, age, and a range of socioeconomic variables: (1) whether or not the mother works, (2) the number of siblings, (3) parental occupational status, (4) the number of rooms, and (5) the number of consumer durables. To construct parental occupational status, the detailed occupations that children wrote down

**TABLE 2**  
**FAMILY STRUCTURE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS FOR NATIVES AND MINORITY GROUPS**

	Two parents	Mother only	Father only	Mother & step	Father & step	Other	Total	% with other family	n
All children	67.8	16.0	1.9	10.3	1.5	2.5	100.0	5.2	10,450
Native origins									
By minority group									
Africa	54.9	28.2	2.0	5.6	1.8	7.4	100.0	9.6	659
Caribbean	40.9	33.3	4.3	12.2	1.1	8.1	100.0	7.6	369
Latin America	47.6	26.9	2.4	14.4	2.4	6.3	100.0	7.2	208
Middle East+	80.6	13.1	1.1	2.5	0.9	1.8	100.0	5.0	2,161
South-East Asia	52.3	18.5	2.3	16.2	2.0	8.7	100.0	7.8	346
Southeastern Asia	83.3	10.6	1.3	1.4	0.4	2.9	100.0	13.2	899
Eastern Europe	63.6	18.8	2.5	9.9	1.0	4.3	100.0	9.4	607
Southeastern Europe	77.9	12.6	2.0	4.8	0.9	1.8	100.0	6.2	562
Southern Europe	64.0	18.4	2.0	10.6	0.8	4.2	100.0	12.3	358
West	57.9	19.1	3.1	14.2	2.7	3.0	100.0	3.9	711
By generation									
First generation	62.8	18.1	2.2	9.6	1.2	6.1	100.0	7.3	1,884
Second generation	77.3	14.7	1.4	3.4	0.8	2.5	100.0	7.8	3,254
Mixed percentage	60.6	21.6	2.6	9.7	2.0	3.5	100.0	7.5	1,819

Source: CILS4EU Wave 1, version 1.1 (own analyses).

**TABLE 3**  
**REASONS FOR NOT LIVING WITH BOTH PARENTS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS FOR NATIVES AND MINORITY GROUPS**

Children not living with two parents	Separation and divorce	Never together	Widowed	Abroad	Other	Total	<i>n</i>
Native origin	82.8	4.3	7.1	0.3	5.5	100.0	3,396
By minority group							
Africa	58.2	5.8	13.4	11.9	10.6	100.0	304
Caribbean	64.1	8.5	10.3	6.8	10.3	100.0	222
Latin America	68.8	8.0	2.6	10.8	9.9	100.0	112
Middle East+	76.6	1.5	12.4	4.0	5.5	100.0	434
South-East Asia	65.2	4.1	10.1	7.2	13.3	100.0	167
Southcentral Asia	64.9	0.6	15.8	10.5	8.2	100.0	154
Eastern Europe	72.0	4.3	13.3	4.1	6.3	100.0	224
Southeastern Europe	76.0	3.1	12.4	2.2	6.2	100.0	127
Southern Europe	78.7	3.8	7.7	6.0	3.8	100.0	131
West	76.7	4.2	7.5	7.5	4.2	100.0	306
By generation							
First generation	56.2	4.5	15.1	13.3	10.9	100.0	710
Second generation	74.7	3.9	11.2	4.3	6.0	100.0	758
Mixed parentage	80.0	4.7	6.7	3.2	5.4	100.0	739

Source: CILS4EU Wave 1, version 1.1 (own analyses).

were coded to ISCO codes which in turn were converted to an international status scale, that is, ISEI (Ganzeboom and Treiman 1996). We took the average ISEI of the parents or the status of one parent if only one parent was non-missing. Parental education contained more missings than occupation and was therefore not used. Two variables are included at the school level: (1) the share of immigrant children in a school and (2) the average occupational status and the level of unemployment in a school (combined in one index). Table 1 presents means and standard deviations for all the variables as well as details on measurement. All continuous dependent and independent variables are standardized before the models were estimated.

### *Method*

Since the data come from a two-stage random sample where first schools were sampled and subsequently, children within schools, we estimate multilevel regression models where children are the level-1 units and schools are the level-2 units. For the first set of regression models, we focus on all immigrant children (Table 4). In these models, we use the extended typologies of family structure. In the second set of regression models, we add natives and we test interaction effects to see how effects of family structure differ between natives and minority groups as well as among

**TABLE 4**  
**MULTILEVEL REGRESSION OF CHILD WELL-BEING AMONG IMMIGRANT CHILDREN: UNSTANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS AND *p*-VALUES**

	Problem behavior		Depressive feelings		Self-esteem	
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>
Model 1						
Woman	-0.071*	(0.010)	0.488*	(0.000)	-0.256*	(0.000)
Age	0.087*	(0.000)	0.041*	(0.003)	0.007	(0.604)
Second generation (versus 1½)	-0.043	(0.213)	-0.070*	(0.029)	0.004	(0.905)
Mixed second (versus 1½)	0.145*	(0.000)	0.051	(0.163)	-0.180*	(0.000)
Parents' SES	0.002	(0.871)	-0.001	(0.947)	0.042*	(0.001)
Mother works	0.104*	(0.000)	0.004	(0.889)	-0.007	(0.807)
# siblings	0.017	(0.171)	-0.043*	(0.000)	0.045*	(0.000)
# rooms	0.005	(0.727)	-0.009	(0.522)	0.011	(0.430)
Consumer durables	0.048*	(0.000)	-0.048*	(0.000)	0.060*	(0.000)
Germany (versus England)	-0.147*	(0.029)	-0.079 <sup>†</sup>	(0.078)	0.236*	(0.000)
the Netherlands (versus England)	-0.077	(0.256)	-0.451*	(0.000)	0.112*	(0.035)
Sweden (versus England)	-0.111 <sup>†</sup>	(0.078)	-0.571*	(0.000)	0.475*	(0.000)
With both parents	0		0		0	
Father absent & alone	0.170*	(0.000)	0.141*	(0.000)	-0.144*	(0.000)
Father absent & new partner	0.269*	(0.000)	0.295*	(0.000)	-0.161*	(0.001)
Living with father	0.389*	(0.000)	0.354*	(0.000)	-0.301*	(0.000)
Not with either parent	0.307*	(0.000)	0.099	(0.179)	-0.067	(0.355)
School-level variables						
School-level SES	-0.043	(0.123)	0.039*	(0.040)	-0.029	(0.162)
School-level immigrants	-0.058*	(0.043)	-0.048*	(0.013)	0.117*	(0.000)
Constant	-0.190*	(0.004)	0.078	(0.125)	-0.051	(0.338)
<i>N</i>	5,115		5,920		5,944	
Model $\chi^2$	232.7		912.4		513.2	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> individuals	0.035		0.089		0.045	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> schools	0.170		0.321		0.306	
Model 2 <sup>a</sup>						
Parents together	0		0		0	
Separated	0.245*	(0.000)	0.190*	(0.000)	-0.165*	(0.000)
Never together	0.355*	(0.002)	0.231*	(0.030)	-0.251*	(0.019)
Widowed	0.188*	(0.012)	0.226*	(0.002)	-0.213*	(0.002)
Other	0.307*	(0.002)	0.156	(0.103)	0.006	(0.950)
Foreign	-0.038	(0.682)	0.142	(0.108)	-0.039	(0.655)
<i>N</i>	5,115		5,920		5,944	
Model $\chi^2$	237.0		918.3		516.9	

Notes: Children are nested in schools. Minority groups are not considered as an additional (crossed) level. All continuous *X* and *Y* variables are standardized.

<sup>a</sup>Contains same controls as baseline model.

<sup>†</sup>*p* < 0.10, \**p* < 0.05.

Source: CILS4EU Wave 1, version 1.1 (own analyses).

TABLE 5  
 MULTILEVEL REGRESSION OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING WITH INTERACTIONS: SELECTED UNSTANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS

	Problem behavior		Depressive feelings		Self-esteem	
	Model A1	Model A2	Model B1	Model B2	Model C1	Model C2
Father absent (versus two parent)	0.250*	0.233*	0.130*	0.151*	-0.160*	-0.154*
Main effect group (for two parent)						
Africa (versus native)	-0.044	-0.093 <sup>†</sup>	-0.270*	-0.275*	0.344*	0.391*
Caribbean (versus native)	0.154 <sup>†</sup>	0.070	-0.128	-0.147*	0.146 <sup>†</sup>	0.172*
Latin America (versus native)	0.153	0.198*	-0.038	0.003	0.042	0.050
Middle East+ (versus native)	-0.173*	-0.189*	-0.132*	-0.114*	0.257*	0.267*
South-East Asia (versus native)	0.076	0.045	-0.055	-0.004	-0.094	-0.116*
Southeast Asia (versus native)	-0.164*	-0.197*	-0.102*	-0.087*	0.211*	0.217*
East Europe (versus native)	0.040	0.031	-0.049	-0.021	0.045	0.047
Southeast Europe (versus native)	-0.012	-0.033	-0.195*	-0.198*	0.342*	0.344*
South Europe (versus native)	-0.010	-0.038	0.062	0.030	0.005	0.054
West (versus native)	0.105*	0.106*	-0.116*	-0.055	-0.000	-0.032
Interaction father absent						
× Africa	-0.195*		0.003		0.198*	
× Caribbean	-0.339*		0.007		0.231*	
× Latin America	-0.034		0.125		0.149	
× Middle East+	0.010		0.066		-0.044	
× South-East Asia	-0.164		0.152		0.029	
× Southeastern Asia	-0.090		0.056		-0.091	
× East Europe	-0.049		0.096		0.027	
× Southeast Europe	-0.028		-0.049		-0.068	
× South Europe	-0.107		-0.097		0.179	
× West	-0.058		0.193*		-0.027	
× % of father absence in group		-0.050*		0.012		0.054*
Main effect destination (two parent)						
England (versus Germany)	0.173*	0.177*	0.088*	0.090*	-0.266*	-0.266*
the Netherlands (versus Germany)	0.102*	0.102*	-0.292*	-0.290*	-0.173*	-0.170*



TABLE 5 (CONTINUED)  
 MULTILEVEL REGRESSION OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING WITH INTERACTIONS: SELECTED UNSTANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS

	Problem behavior		Depressive feelings		Self-esteem	
	Model A1	Model A2	Model B1	Model B2	Model C1	Model C2
Sweden (versus Germany)	-0.012	-0.013	-0.466*	-0.467*	0.242*	0.245*
Interaction father absent						
× England	0.100 <sup>†</sup>	0.094 <sup>†</sup>	-0.080	-0.092 <sup>†</sup>	-0.029	-0.030
× the Netherlands	0.028	0.022	0.071	0.067	0.017	0.014
× Sweden	0.019	0.020	0.038	0.046	-0.064	-0.073
School-level variables						
School-level father absence	0.043*	0.043*	0.000	0.001	-0.002	-0.002
Interaction with father absent	-0.014	-0.016	-0.011	-0.011	-0.005	-0.004
R <sup>2</sup> individuals	0.040	0.039	0.093	0.092	0.062	0.062
R <sup>2</sup> schools	0.226	0.224	0.548	0.547	0.576	0.575
N	13,508	13,508	14,944	14,944	14,956	14,956
Model $\chi^2$	695.0	681.0	2,094.2	2,076.9	1,631.5	1,617.4

Notes: Children are nested in schools. Minority groups are not considered as an additional (crossed) level. Minority group share absent fathers and school-level absent fathers are standardized variables. Control variables are the same as in Table 4. Selection of children who live with their mother or with their mother and father. Native students are included. Main effect of minority group level father absence is captured by the dummy variables for minority group.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < 0.10$ . \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: CILS4EU Wave 1, version 1.1 (own analyses).

minority groups themselves (Table 5). In this set of models, we simplify the family structure variable by contrasting children without a (biological) father vis-à-vis children living with both parents. The reason for doing this lies in the small size of the other family structures. Interacting these small categories with the minority group variables is not possible.

To test the hypotheses, two models are estimated. Model A is defined for each student  $i$  in each school  $j$ :

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1k}D_{ik} + \beta_2F_i + \beta_{3k}(D_{ik} \times F_i) + e_{ij} \text{ (Model A).}$$

This is a random intercept model where each school  $j$  has its own intercept  $\beta_{0j}$ , hence its own level of well-being, and the error term  $e_{ij}$  has a part that can be attributed to differences among schools and a part that can be attributed to differences among individuals within schools. The main focus in this paper is on minority groups, but these are not represented by another (crossed) level in the model. Although it is possible to estimate such cross-classified multilevel models, this is not very useful since the number of minority groups is rather small for a multilevel model (Maas and Hox 2005). For this reason, the minority groups are represented by a set of  $D_{ik}$  dummy variables for the  $k$  minority groups (leaving natives as the reference).  $F_i$  is the variable for father absence at the individual level and this variable is interacted with each minority group dummy. The main effect of father absence ( $\beta_2$ ) refers to natives and the interactions  $\beta_{3k}$  tell us whether the effects of father absence are different for minority group  $k$  than for natives. The implied effect of father absence in minority group  $k$  is  $\beta_2 + \beta_{3k}$ . Of course, we are speaking of effects in the statistical sense; since the data are cross-sectional, this will not be the same as the causal effect of divorce. Model B is defined as follows:

$$Y_{ij} = \gamma_{0j} + \gamma_{1k}D_{ik} + \gamma_2F_i + \gamma_3(G_i \times F_i) + e_{ij} \text{ (Model B),}$$

where  $G_i = \sum_k F_{ik}/n_k$ , which is the percentage of absent-father families in a minority group (as calculated from the CILS4EU data). We interact this group variable with the individual-level father absence variable. This interaction  $\gamma_3$  replaces the 10 group-specific interactions and results in a more parsimonious way to test our central hypothesis. The main effect of the share of absent fathers in a group (the effect of  $G_i$  itself) is not included since this is already incorporated in the ten dichotomous minority group variables ( $D_{ik}$ ).

Two additional (sets of) interactions are included as controls. First, we control for the percentage of absent-father families in a school as well as for the interaction between the effect of father absence at the individual level and the share of absent-father families in a school. The first effect is estimated at the school level, and the second effect is a cross-level interaction. The share of absent fathers in a school is standardized which means that the main effect of father absence at the individual level is unaffected by the inclusion of this interaction term (Snijders and Bosker 1999). Second, we control for the destination countries via dummy variables and we allow the effect of father absence to differ for each destination country using interaction effects. Germany is the reference group.

## RESULTS

### *Group Differences in Family Structure*

We begin by describing differences between natives and immigrant children with respect to family structure. In Table 2, we present differences by generation and by minority group. We see that two-parent families are least common among children of Caribbean, Latin American, and African origins. The differences are considerable. For example, 41 percent of Caribbean children and 55 percent of African children are living with both biological parents; among natives, this is 68 percent. Interesting to observe is that differences with natives exist in both directions. For example, among children originating from Middle Eastern countries, 81 percent is living with both biological parents. Among children from south-central Asian countries, this is 83 percent. Both these numbers are *higher* than they are for natives. Generational differences are observed as well: Two-parent families are somewhat more common in the second generation than in the first, in contrast to what American studies have shown (Brandon 2002). Differences among minority groups appear larger than differences among generations.

Interesting to observe is that stepfather families are *relatively* less common among the groups where non-standard families are common. For example, among children of African origins, the ratio of single-mother families to stepfather families is 5.0 and among children of Caribbean origins, the ratio is 2.7. Among natives, this ratio is 1.6. Other types of families (e.g., with adoptive parents, with other relatives) are somewhat more common among immigrant children. This points to migration-specific

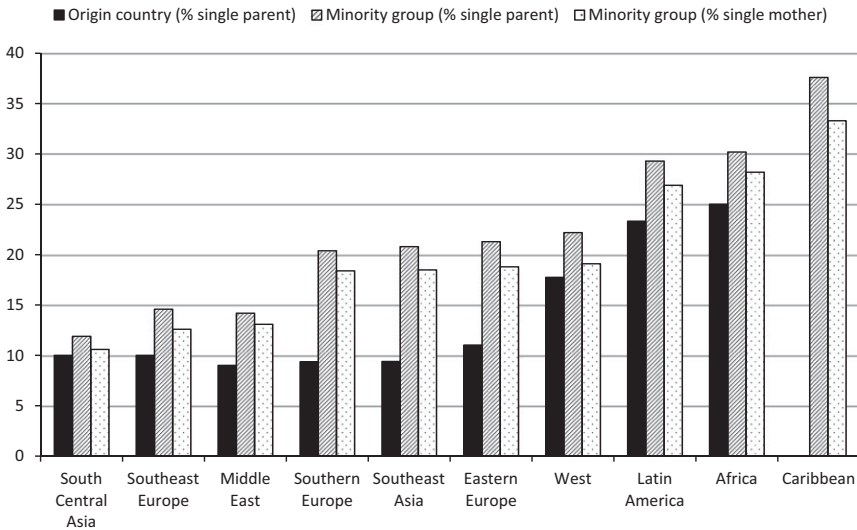
causes of non-standard family structures (Landale, Thomas, and Van Hook 2011). Finally, we see that among minority groups, it is more common that extended family members (e.g., grandparents) live in the household as well. Percentages are highest for immigrant children from south-central Asia, southern Europe, and Africa (in the range of 10–13%).

In Table 3, we present information on the reasons for father absence for students who do not live with both their parents. For natives and for all minority groups, separation is the dominant reason why children do not live with both parents. In several minority groups, and especially for the first generation, other reasons also exist. In the first generation, 15 percent have a parent who died and 13 percent have a parent who lives abroad. The former number may point to refugee immigration, and the latter number points to transnational families (Mazzucato et al. 2015). While these categories are larger than they are for natives, they are still small. We also see that there are mothers who never lived with the father, especially among Caribbeans (9%) and Latin Americans (8%). Still, these numbers are relatively low; separation and divorce are more common in these groups as well. Finally, we see that separation and divorce are a more common cause of disruption among children of mixed origins than among first- and second-generation children.

To what extent do the numbers in Table 2 reflect family patterns in the countries of origin? In other words, are these differences a result of “origin effects” (Van Tubergen 2006)? To examine this, we compare the percentage of children living with a single parent (mother or father) in the CILS4EU with data collected in the countries of origin. These external data are obtained from two sources: (1) a paper by Iacovou and Skew (2011) who analyzed data from the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), and (2) a report by Child Trends which is based on data from the IPUMS, the Demographic Health Surveys, and national censuses (Lippman and Wilcox 2014). These reports do not provide data on each group in the CILS4EU, but they have data on a number of countries in each region (except the Caribbean). The indicator used from these reports is the percentage of children living with a single parent (with or without extended family).

In Figure I, we make the comparison between the minority groups as observed in the school data and the figures that are observed in the origin regions themselves. Three things are striking. First, the percentages of children living with a single parent are always somewhat higher for minority groups than they are in the origin regions. This may have to do with

**Figure I. Family Structure in Minority Group in Four European Countries and in Origin Country**



the migration process which can be selective or it can point to transnational families. It is also possible that there is “assimilation” to divorce levels in the West. Second, the relative order of the groups is roughly the same for the two data sources. In other words, single parenthood in a minority group largely reflects the family system in the sending countries. Third, a few groups stand out with a clear discrepancy. In particular, Southeast Asians and southern Europeans in the CILS4EU have higher levels of single parenthood than what one would expect based on what is observed in the origin region. Perhaps this is related to the role of ethnically mixed marriages. Among Southeast Asian mothers, 30 percent is or was married to a native-born man and among southern European mothers, this was 24 percent. Among all minority mothers, this was considerably lower (14%). Since ethnically mixed marriages are more likely to dissolve (Smith, Maas, and van Tubergen 2012), this can in part explain the high levels of single parenthood in these minority groups.

### *Effects of Family Structure among Immigrant Children*

What are the main effects of father absence on the well-being of immigrant children? And does it matter what the reason is for father absence?

To answer these questions, we initially focus on the entire minority population and ignore internal group differences (Table 4).

In Table 4, we see that children who live without their father and in a single-parent family experience more problem behavior, have more depressive feelings, and have lower self-esteem compared to children who are living with both parents. Because the dependent variables are standardized, the effects of father absence can be interpreted as effect sizes similar to Cohen's  $d$  (i.e., the standardized difference in well-being between groups). The effect is strongest for behavioral problems, followed by depression and weakest for self-esteem. The magnitude of the effects is modest.

The model further shows that children whose mother repartnered also have lower well-being than children who live with both their biological parents. When looking at depressive feelings, the effect is significantly stronger for children of repartnered mothers than for children of single mothers ( $p = 0.01$ ). For problem behavior, the effect is also stronger for children of repartnered mothers but only marginally ( $p = 0.09$ ). For self-esteem, repartnering and single motherhood do not have different effects. Finally, we notice that children who live with their father also have lower well-being, but this is a small and probably select group. Children who do not live with either parent do not have lower well-being, but they do report more problem behavior.

In the second model in Table 4, we make a distinction between divorce/separation, never lived together, widowhood, living abroad, and other reasons for father absence. As discussed above, divorce is not the only reason why immigrant children live without their father, and hence, it is important to examine whether these reasons make a difference for their well-being. We see that children living without a father have more problem behavior regardless of the reason for this. An exception occurs when the father is living abroad, these children do not have lower well-being. Striking is that children whose parents never lived together also have lower well-being. In fact, the effects of "separation" and "parents never lived together" are not significantly different from each other ( $p = 0.34$  for problem behavior,  $p = 0.71$  for depression,  $p = 0.42$  for self-esteem).

We briefly discuss the effects of the control variables in Table 3. Well-being is lower, on average, for boys, for older children, and for children in schools with a smaller percentage of immigrants. Mother's employment has only weak and inconsistent effects on well-being. Our

main indicator of status — parents' occupational status — only has a significant (and positive) effect on self-esteem. Children who have more consumer durables have more self-esteem and fewer depressive feelings, as expected, but they also report more problem behavior.

### *Group Differences and Family Structure Effects*

To what extent does the effect of family structure vary across groups? To answer this question, we estimate models for the combined sample of natives and immigrant children in Table 5. To simplify the models, the effect of father absence is now represented by a single variable where single mothers and repartnered mothers are combined. The results for problem behavior are presented in the first two columns in Table 5. In Model A1, we see that children from the Caribbean are less strongly affected by father absence than native children. The main effect of father absence is 0.250 and this applies to natives. The interaction with Caribbeans is  $-0.339$ , which implies an effect for Caribbeans that is virtually absent:  $0.250 - 0.339 = -0.089$ . We see a similar interaction for Africans. The effect of father absence on problem behavior is weaker for children of African origins than for native children. The other interactions are not significant and there is no minority group in which children are *more strongly* affected by father absence than natives are. In Model A2, we formally test whether the (standardized) share of absent fathers in a group moderates the individual effect of father absence. This interaction is negative and significant, in line with expectations ( $b = -0.058$ ).

For depressive feelings, the models are presented in Model B1 and Model B2. In Model B1, we see that for most minority groups, the effect of father absence on depressive feelings is the same as it is for natives. One exception occurs. The effect of father absence on depressive feelings is stronger for immigrant children of Western origins. Since father absence in this group is not less common than it is for natives, this is inconsistent with the hypothesis. We come back to this point when we discuss the country-specific results. Model B2 shows that there is no interaction between the share of absent-father families in a minority group and the effect of father absence on depressive feelings.

Finally, we look at the results for self-esteem. Model C1 shows significant interactions. The main effect of father absence is negative. The interactions show that the effect of father absence is significantly *less negative* for children from the Caribbean and for children from Africa.

The implied effects of father absence on self-esteem are more or less absent in these two groups:  $-0.160 + 0.198 = 0.038$  for Africans and  $-0.160 + 0.231 = 0.071$  for Caribbeans. Both these interactions are consistent with expectations. In Model C2, we test this idea more formally by interacting father absence at the individual level and the group level. The interaction effect is positive and significant ( $b = 0.054$ ), which means that the effect of father absence on self-esteem is less negative when the (standardized) share of absent fathers in a group is larger.

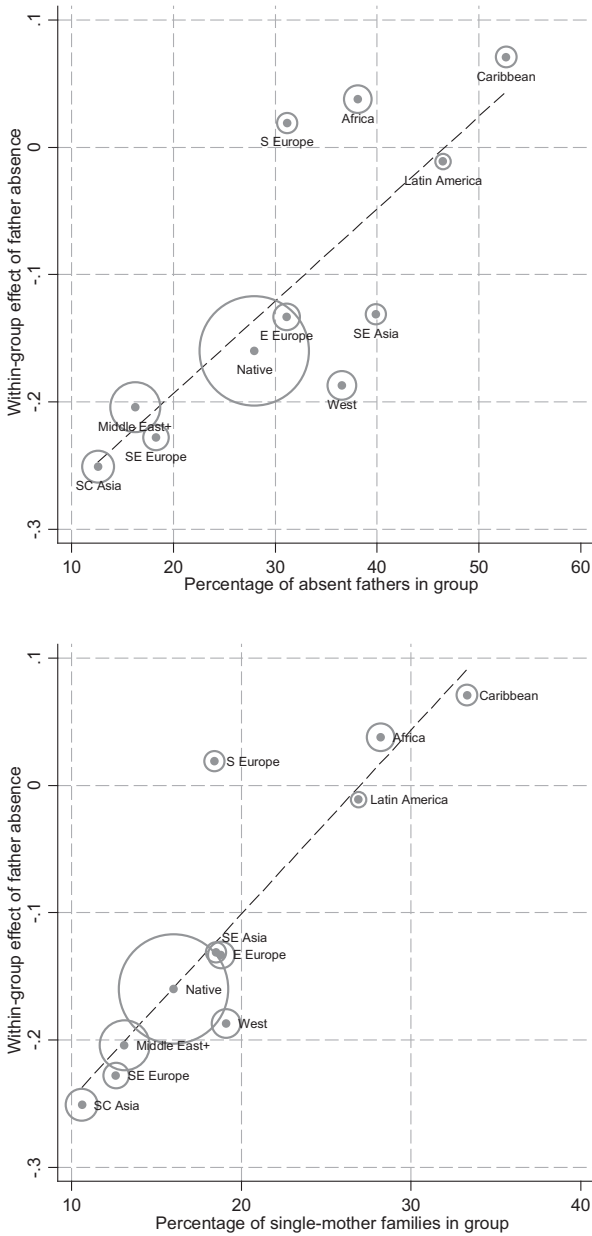
The model controls for possible differences in the effect of father absence across schools and countries. At the school level, we find no significant interactions, in line with earlier studies (Cavanagh and Fomby 2012). We do find a significant main effect but only on problem behavior. The more common father absence is in a school, the more problem behavior children report. This may point to the role of reduced social control in such schools (Pong 1998). Differences in the effects of father absence across countries are small and only marginally significant. In Sweden and England, where divorce is common, the effects of father absence are not weaker than they are in Germany and the Netherlands.

In Figures II and III, we present the interactions graphically to get a more intuitive grasp of the validity of our hypothesis. On the horizontal axis, we present the share absent-father families (top graphs) and the share of single-mother families (bottom graphs). These are slightly different measures. The former includes stepfather families, whereas the latter does not. We regard these as parallel ways of looking at the problem. On the vertical axis, we present the effect of father absence for each group as implied by the main and interaction effects combined (Table 5, Models A1 and C1). The results are presented for self-esteem in Figure II and for problem behavior in Figure III. The lines are based on a simple linear fit at the aggregate level. The magnitude of the circles is proportional to the size of the group in the data. The larger the group, the more precise the estimate of the within-group effect of father absence.

For both outcomes, we see a pattern that is clearly in line with our hypothesis. Of course, the number of groups is small, but the correlations between the effect and the share (of absent-father families) are telling:  $r = -0.63$  for problem behavior and  $r = +0.79$  for self-esteem. When we use the share of single-mother families from Table 2, the correlations are even stronger ( $r = -0.72$  and  $r = +0.89$ ). The pattern appears symmetric for self-esteem. Groups where father absence is more common than among natives display weaker effects, whereas groups where father absence

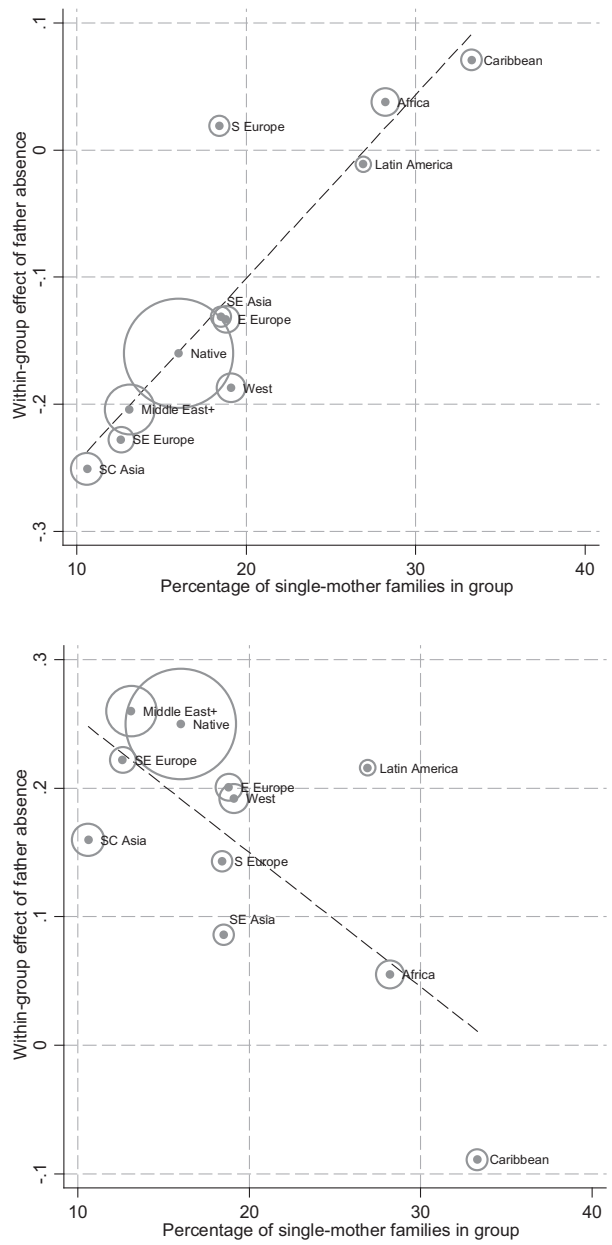


**Figure II. Effect of Father Absence on Self-Esteem by Minority Group and Family Structure**



Note: Effects of father absence for each minority group are obtained from the interaction models in Table 5. Circles are proportional to size.

Figure III. Effect of Father Absence on Problem Behavior by Minority Group and Family Structure



Note: Effects of father absence for each minority group are obtained from the interaction models in Table 5. Circles are proportional to size.

is less common display stronger effects. For problem behavior, the pattern is not symmetric. There are several minority groups where father absence is less common than among natives, while the effects of father absence in these groups are not stronger.

So far, the four countries were pooled in order to obtain sufficient statistical power to test effects for each minority group and to test the interaction of father absence and the share of absent fathers across all groups. It is important to explore whether the *interactions* that we found are stable across destination countries. To examine this, we estimate the interaction model (Model A) separately for each country. We limit the sample in each country to groups in which there are at least 50 children who live without their father. Some of the groups are present in multiple countries (e.g., Middle East, Africans, Caribbeans), but other groups are primarily large in only one setting (e.g., Western minority groups in Sweden and south-central Asians in England). The results are presented in Table 6 in condensed format.

Our results appear reasonably robust when we look at specific destination countries, although we should keep in mind that the statistical power is more limited and, hence, significance levels are lower. In the countries where Caribbeans and Africans are present, both groups display weaker effects of father absence on problem behavior and on self-esteem. One exception is that we do not see weaker effects of father absence on self-esteem for Africans in Sweden. In Sweden, we find a particularly strong interaction for depressive feelings among Western immigrants. Detailed analyses show that this is due to the Finns, who are quite negatively affected by the absence of a father. Problems with this minority group in relation to single parenthood have been observed in Sweden before (Brekke 2002). Latin Americans in Sweden are also more negatively affected when depression is the outcome measure. Another new finding is a stronger effect of father absence on depression among children of Middle Eastern origins in Germany. This is an important result because children from the larger Middle East (e.g., Turkey) constitute one of the largest minority groups in Germany.

## *DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION*

In this paper, data from a large number of immigrant children in four European countries show that children in some minority groups — especially immigrant children from African, Caribbean, and Latin Ameri-

**TABLE 6**  
**MULTILEVEL REGRESSION OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING BY COUNTRY OF DESTINATION: INTERACTIONS OF FATHER ABSENCE AND MINORITY GROUP**

	Problem behavior				Depressive feelings				Self-esteem					
	England	Germany	the Netherlands	Sweden	Germany	the Netherlands	England	Sweden	Germany	the Netherlands	England	Germany	the Netherlands	Sweden
Father absent	0.380*	0.211*	0.281*	0.266*	0.111*	0.212*	0.053	0.142*	-0.172*	-0.138*	-0.204*	-0.172*	-0.138*	-0.158*
Interaction with														
Africa	-0.351*			-0.308 <sup>†</sup>			-0.016	0.106			0.417*			-0.022
Caribbean	-0.696*		-0.280*			0.075	-0.429 <sup>†</sup>			0.335		0.190		
Latin America				-0.089				0.462*						0.073
Middle East+		0.066	-0.099	0.013	0.203*	-0.116	0.123					0.016	-0.050	-0.128
South-East Asia				-0.109				0.169						-0.100
Southcentral Asia	-0.212						-0.095			0.047				
East Europe		-0.037			0.220*							-0.077		
Southeast Europe		-0.068		0.092	-0.116			0.065				0.267 <sup>†</sup>		-0.091
South Europe		-0.115		-0.009	0.185			0.331*				-0.152		-0.079
West			3.410	3.589	3.613	3.445	2.734	3.832	3.612	2.732	3.437	3.854		
N	2,588	2,775												

Notes: Only groups with more than 50 students included. Main effects of minority group are included in the model but not printed. Other variables are also included (Table 5).  
<sup>†</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: CILS4EU Wave 1, version 1.1 (own analyses).

can origins — are less likely to live with both their biological parents. Children with Middle Eastern, south-central Asian, and southeastern European origins, in contrast, are more likely than natives to live with their biological parents. For most groups, these tendencies reflect family patterns in the country of origin. The migration process also plays a role, as suggested by the prevalence of widowhood and transnational families. Nonetheless, separation is still the most common route into single parenthood, also for immigrant families. Mothers who never lived with the father form a small group, even in minority groups where this is often believed to be common (e.g., Caribbeans). Differences among minority groups appear larger than differences between generations.

In terms of consequences, we find significant effects of living without a father on children's well-being. Immigrant children who do not live with their own father have more problem behavior, more depressive feelings, and lower self-esteem. Differences between types of non-standard families are modest. Living with a stepfather is not associated with greater well-being. Moreover, children's well-being is also lower in cases where the mother never lived with the father. These findings show that the negative effects of father absence on children's well-being that have been documented for the majority populations of Europe also exist for the children of immigrants in Europe.

We subsequently compared the effect of father absence on children's well-being across minority groups and between minority groups and natives. We found a significant interaction of the share of absent fathers in a minority group and the individual effect of absent fatherhood on children's well-being. This is in line with the institutionalization hypothesis. A graphic representation of the interaction effects further confirms this conclusion. The interaction is only found for problem behavior and for self-esteem, not for depressive feelings. These interactions were found after taking into account the socioeconomic resources of families, suggesting that economic explanations are not underlying the institutionalization effect. Obviously, we were unable to control for household income and for the income of the absent father. For this reason, economic explanations cannot be ruled out completely.

Two mechanisms underlying the institutionalization hypothesis were proposed. One theory argued that in groups where there are weaker norms against divorce and single parenthood, the effect of father absence would be weaker because children would feel more accepted and less out of the ordinary. The argument also implies that in groups where there are

strong norms *against* divorce and single parenthood — such as is the case in Middle Eastern groups — children in father-absent families would feel *more* isolated than native children in such families. That the interaction effect is symmetric, at least for self-esteem, confirms this interpretation. The stronger effect on depression for children from the Middle East in Germany is consistent with this notion as well. A second explanation lies in social network support. Among minority groups from the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa, kin networks are more strongly developed and these networks may offer support to children in case the nuclear family breaks down. Related to this is that women play a more important role in the networks in these groups than men (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004). The matrifocal orientation of some of these groups suggests a smaller loss of social resources when fathers leave the household and, hence, a less dramatic change for a child. This interpretation also receives support since children of Caribbean and African origins reveal the largest contrast with natives.

We also explored the role of other contexts in which students were embedded, in particular the school and the country of destination. For the school, we partly confirm earlier studies showing that students in schools with a high share of single-parent families had a poorer performance in school (Pong 1998). We find a similar contextual effect, but it is only significant for problem behavior and not for depression and self-esteem. Because problem behavior is dependent in part on social control (Barber, Olsen, and Shagle 1994), this suggests that the school-level effect of single parenthood may be explained in terms of the lower degree of social control in communities where many students live in single-parent families. We do not find an interaction effect of father absence at the school level and the individual level. This is inconsistent with the institutionalization hypothesis. A possible reason for this refutation is that the arguments about stigma and social support may not apply to different types of contexts in the same way. Since schools are changing continuously, it is possible that there is less time for cultural traditions to develop. Single parenthood may be common in a school at one point in time, but it can decline later. In contrast, a long history of single parenthood in certain ethnic groups may lead to stronger social norms and patterns of behavior which can be beneficial in times of family dissolution. Following this cultural reasoning, one would expect stronger effects for the group context than for the school context.

Although the data we used provide a unique opportunity to look at the family structure of immigrant children in detail in many groups in multiple destination countries, the data also have drawbacks which need to be discussed. First, effects of father absence are estimated in a cross-sectional fashion. Longitudinal data that compare children before and after divorce or separation would be more suitable to estimate the causal effects of father absence. Even though the CILS4EU data are collected in three subsequent waves, the number of family transitions is too low to estimate effects for so many different minority groups. It is not easy to see, however, how the cross-level interactions will be affected by selection bias. This nonetheless remains an important issue which can be addressed only if very large-scale longitudinal data become available.

Second, the minority groups are defined on the basis of national origins rather than on the basis of self-defined race or ethnicity. This is common practice in Europe where questions on race and ethnicity are less commonly asked. In particular, questions on race or being white or black are sometimes considered offensive in countries like the Netherlands and Germany. Although there is a clear link between national origins and ethnicity, it is certainly not perfect. For example, most Caribbeans and sub-Saharan Africans are probably black, but some will have a different race or ethnicity. Second, we aggregated detailed groups into regions in order to have sufficient numbers in each group. The alternative approach of analyzing detailed groups would imply a severe and non-random loss of cases since a large number of minority groups come from many different origins. In our view, the benefits of an inclusive approach outweigh the costs of internal heterogeneity within regions.

In closing, it is important to discuss the relevance of our findings. Much has been written about the double handicap that some immigrant children are facing. Some of these children not only come from a low-status background, they also are growing up in a single-parent family more often. The present analysis puts these concerns in perspective. At least for well-being, the effects are weaker in groups where these “disadvantages” are more common. When single parenthood is more of a problem in terms of prevalence, it is less of a problem in terms of consequence. The findings are also relevant from a theoretical point of view. That effects vary from group to group shows that the individual experience of a specific family structure depends on the context in which it is experienced. This supports the classic sociological idea that the social context shapes

the occurrence and influences of individual life course experiences (Mayer 2009).

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