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Lean on me? The influence of parental separation and divorce on children's support networks in four European countries

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

Abstract:

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

Zusammenfassung:

Unter Verwendung von Daten 14-jähriger Kinder in vier europäischen Ländern vergleicht diese Studie die Unterstützungsnetzwerke von Kindern in intakten und getrennten Familien. Es wurde festgestellt, dass die elterliche Trennung signifikante Effekte auf die Zusammensetzung dieser Netzwerke hat: Kinder, deren Eltern sich getrennt haben, neigen dazu, die Väter wie auch die Mütter weniger häufig in ihre Netzwerke einzuschließen als Kinder in intakten Familien, wobei dieser negative Effekt hinsichtlich der Mütter schwächer ausgeprägt ist. Konflikte nach der Trennung sind negativ mit der Präsenz der Eltern im Netzwerk assoziiert, wohingegen Arrangements, bei denen die Kinder zeitweise beim Vater leben, positiv mit der Erwähnung des Vaters im Netzwerk assoziiert ist. Andere Personen im Netzwerk (Verwandte, Freunde) werden jedoch von den Kindern getrennter Eltern nicht häufiger erwähnt. Auf der Theorieebene bestätigen unsere Ergebnisse Hypothesen über die physische und emotionale Verfügbarkeit, Hypothesen über die Kompensation innerhalb des Unterstützungsnetzwerkes durch andere Personen außer den Eltern werden hingegen nur wenig gestützt. Es wurden einige länderspezifische Abweichungen bezüglich der Trennungseffekte festgestellt, negative Effekte bestehen aber in allen vier Ländern. Die praktische Relevanz unserer Befunde besteht darin, dass der gestiegene Unterstützungsbedarf, den Kinder empfinden wenn sich ihre Eltern trennen, oft mit einer Verringerung des Unterstützungsangebotes einhergeht.

Key words: support, support network, parental separation, parental divorce, parental conflict, cross-national, network compensation

Schlagwörter: Unterstützung, Unterstützungsnetzwerk, Trennung der Eltern, Scheidung der Eltern, Konflikte zwischen Elternteilen, internationaler Vergleich, Kompensation durch Netzwerke

Introduction

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

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

As far as we know, there is hardly any systematic evidence on children's support networks during or after divorce. Research that comes closest to our present topic stems from a line of studies on the relationship between divorce on the one hand and parental supervision and socialization on the other hand. Classic papers in this line of study suggest that there is less parental control and supervision after divorce (Astone/McLanahan 1991; Thomson/Hanson/ McLanahan 1994). Our study is also related to sociological studies on support networks (Fischer 1982), but that line of research has typically examined adults and especially older adults (Broese van Groenou/Van Tilburg 1996). Network changes

have been studied in relation to divorce as well, but those studies focus on the divorced individuals and not on their children (Terhell/Broese van Groenou/Van Tilburg 2004). As an exception, research exists on African Americans that has pointed to the important role of members of the extended family as sources of support for children in poor single-parent families (Sarkisian/Gerstel 2004; Stack 1974).

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

Background and hypotheses

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

Physical availability

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

come friends, confidants or marriage partners. The structural theory relies on opportunity for contact, and hence, on the physical availability of persons.

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

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

Emotional availability

Even though opportunity for contact is important, in the present context, we need to broaden the concept of availability by looking at emotional availability, a concept that is used in attachment theory in developmental psychology (Bowlby 1988). Emotional availability is defined as the degree of sensitivity of the parent figure to the emotions of the child and the degree to which the parent expresses emotions to the child (Biringen 2000). One of the hypotheses in attachment theory is that emotional unavailability of parents undermines the (secure) attachment that children have with parents (Bowlby 1988). Attachment insecurity, in turn, is an important source of stress, anxiety and depression in adolescent children (Duchesne/Ratelle 2014). Attachment theory has also been used to explain why children of divorce develop more emotional problems during adolescence and why there are long-term implications for how children of divorce function in relationships later in their life (Amato/Cheadle 2005).

What hypotheses can we develop when considering the notion of emotional availability? Parents who go through a divorce often experience personal problems. For example, studies show that both men and women have more depressive symptoms after divorce and are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviour like heavy drinking (Simon 2002; Williams/Umberson 2004). These effects are stronger when divorced couples have children living at home (Williams/Dunne-Bryant 2006). Of course, these are averages and there will be considerable heterogeneity in the effects of separation on parents' mental health. Nonetheless, the mental health problems that parents experience may make them less available to the child. Some separated parents may be preoccupied with their problems and pay less attention to the problems of the child. The child may also feel that he or she should not burden a parent who already has problems. Finally, feelings of guilt may make it difficult for parents to communicate with the child about something that they themselves were partly responsible for. Based on the notion of emotional availability, we expect that children less often mention the father and the mother in the network when the parents are separated than when the parents are married (hypothesis 5). Moreover, we expect that even fathers who engage in co-parenting will less often be mentioned in the network (hypothesis 6). In other words, if we only find negative effects for fathers and only for fathers who do not engage in co-parenting, the notion of physical availability is confirmed; if, on the other hand, we also find effects for mothers and for co-parenting fathers, emotional availability plays a role as well.

Availability and post-separation conflict

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

How post-separation conflict affects the support networks of children has not been studied, as far as we were able to observe. Following the notion of attachment and emotional availability, it can be expected that among separated parents, interparental conflict will reduce the emotional and physical availability of the parent. Post-separation conflict will therefore have a negative effect on the presence of separated parents in the support network (hypothesis 7). In addition, one would suspect that interparental conflict leads to conflicting loyalties. A child who is caught in the middle of the parents' fighting, may feel pressured to take sides or may want to avoid the parents altogether (Amato/Afifi 2006; Kalmijn 2013). Relying on both parents may therefore be especially difficult when there is much conflict. Finally, we suspect that when there is much conflict, and when one

parent is chosen, it will more often be the resident parent because that lowers the risk of additional conflicts between the child and the resident parent about meeting the other parent and thus is simply more practical. In sum, we expect that post-separation conflict will reduce the chances that both parents will be included (hypothesis 8) and will reduce the chances in particular that the father will be included (hypothesis 9).

Compensation

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

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

In considering the other network members, it is important to make a distinction between the kin and non-kin segments of the network (Fischer 2011). In the case of separation, kin members of the network will in part be emotionally involved in and affected by the conflicts in the separation process. Kin may therefore play a different role than, for instance, friends who are less deeply involved in and affected by the separation. In particular, we expect that some family members – especially those connected to the father – are more affected by the separation than other family members. Studies have shown, for example, that paternal grandparents less often have contact with the grandchild after separa-

tion than maternal grandparents (King 2003). On average, we would thus expect that the effect of separation on the level of support from family members (maternal or paternal) is weaker than the divorce effect on support from friends, teachers, and other non-kin persons (hypothesis 11).

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

Contextual variations

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

The four countries included in our analysis may reveal different relations between parental separation and children's support, because the role of the welfare state is different in these societies (Daatland/Herlofson 2003; Esping-Andersen 1993). Generosity of welfare benefits and services (and the way they are provided) may allow women to support themselves and their children, independently of the divorced father, which may reduce their economic strain (Oppenheimer 1997; Jalovaara 2003). Less economic strain can increase

the emotional availability of separated mothers and perhaps also of separated fathers because relationships between ex-partners are less problematic. Less economic strain may also increase the physical availability of separated mothers in so far as they have to work for pay less often. Germany and the Netherlands belong to the conservative welfare states, which seek to maintain the social position of the family after a decline in the economic and social position of the family (unemployment and separation). Sweden belongs to the social-democratic welfare states, which provide services to individual fathers and mothers in order to avoid social and economic inequality. The British liberal welfare state does provide services to individual fathers and mothers, but only to very poor members of that society. Based on these differences, one would expect weakest effects of separation on the presence of parents in the network in Sweden, strongest effects in England, with Germany and the Netherlands somewhere in between (hypothesis 12). Note that these countries differ in many other respects as well, hence, we have no strong design to test hypotheses about welfare states.

Data and variables

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

1 I.e., England as a country that is part of the United Kingdom.

2 The CILS4EU research project was funded by the NORFACE ERA NET Plus Migration in Europe programme. NORFACE stands for New Opportunities for Research Funding Agency Co-operation in Europe (www.norface.org) It is a partnership between fifteen research councils to increase co-operation in research and research policy in Europe. We only use the first wave as there were too few occurrences of divorce during the panel.

Information about the separation of the parents is collected by two questions: do you live with both your natural parents and if not, what is the reason for that? We selected (a) children living with both biological parents and (b) children who lived with their mother (as their primary household) and whose parents were divorced or separated. All other households were removed and we also did not consider other reasons for not living with two parents (widowhood, parents who never lived together, unknown reasons, parent living abroad).

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

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

In a separate analysis, we add three post-separation circumstances. First, we consider whether or not the mother is living with a new partner (married or not). The coding is cumulative: the separation variable is coded 1 for separated mothers and repartnered mothers (0 otherwise), while the repartnering variable is coded 1 for repartnered mothers only (0 otherwise). In this coding scheme, the effect of repartnering captures the difference between repartnered mothers on the one hand and separated and single mothers on the other hand. To compare repartnered parents and married parents – a less useful contrast – we need to add the effects of separation and repartnering. Second, we consider co-parenting, which is defined as living half of the time in another household where the biological father is also living. Note that this operationalization of co-parenting is not a legal one, but based on living arrangements. Coding is again cumulative, the co-parenting effect compares co-parenting separated fathers on the one hand to separated fathers who do not have a co-parenting arrangement on the other hand. Third, we measure current conflicts between the biological parents (which is not per se immediately after the separation).⁴ The questions about current conflicts were only asked in the Netherlands. The following items

3 In the questionnaire, the first questions on the father stated that the questions should be answered for the biological father.

4 No questions were asked about how long ago the parents got divorced or separated.

were presented, all referring to the biological parents: (a) fierce discussions between parents, (b) parents strongly blamed each other, (c) parents refused to talk to each other, (d) quarrels between parents escalated. Answering categories were: never (1), sometimes (2), often (3), and always (4).⁵ The scale is constructed by taking the mean of the standardized items. The reliability of the scale is excellent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$). We include one dummy variable in the model which is coded 1 for separated parents who have above-average levels of conflict (0 for all other cases). This implies that we again have a cumulative scheme that allows us to compare married parents, separated parents with little conflict, and separated parents with much conflict. An advantage of building categories of this continuous variable is that we can easily retain children of married parents in the model.

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

Table 1: Means of independent variables used in the analysis

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

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

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

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

Table 6 looks at country differences.⁶ This order does not fully correspond to the order of the hypotheses or the theoretical mechanisms. The chosen order below makes it easier to discuss the results. Note that the type of regression model used depends on the outcome variable; this will be explained below.

Results

Descriptive results

We start with a discussion of children's support networks in the entire sample. To whom would 14-year olds turn when they experience personal problems or concerns? And does this differ across countries? Table 2 provides the answers to these questions. We see that a large majority – two-thirds to three-quarters – would go to the mother for support. About half of the children would go to the father. Siblings are also quite important (32% to 41% would turn to a sibling) but other family members are less important. Of the non-kin relationships, friends are clearly the most important, about as important as mothers. Boy-friends and girlfriends are not so important, in part because many students are not yet dating someone (a little more in Germany where the students were older). All the other types of non-kin persons are much less important as sources of support, showing that primarily strong ties are used for support. Country differences are modest. One interesting difference is that members of the extended family are more often mentioned in Germany and England than in Sweden and the Netherlands.

Table 2: Support networks of 14-year olds: Proportions of native students that would go to specific persons for support

	England	Germany	Netherlands	Sweden
To mother	0.770	0.682	0.746	0.715
To father	0.523	0.438	0.493	0.480
To sibling (if siblings)	0.410	0.381	0.315	0.325
To other family member	0.307	0.203	0.123	0.086
To friend	0.808	0.722	0.694	0.673
To boy/girlfriend	0.306	0.422	0.177	0.141
To classmate	0.192	0.167	0.119	0.234
To teacher	0.185	0.040	0.119	0.069
To someone else	0.063	0.096	0.063	0.096
To no one	0.057	0.071	0.080	0.096
N	2175	2208	2829	2472

Note: Proportions are weighted. N is unweighted. Multiple answers were possible.

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

6 We keep married parents in this part of the analysis because it allows us to compare children of married parents to children of specific types of divorced parents. This will become clearer when we discuss the findings.

The general separation effect

Table 3 presents the basic regression models for the pooled countries. The first two models (1 and 2) are logit models and have the presence of the father or the mother as parallel dependent variables. We compare the effects of separation on fathers and mothers (across these two equations) using seemingly unrelated probit models.⁷ The third model is a multinomial logit model where four outcomes are compared: (a) both parents are in the network, (b) only the father is, (c) only the mother is, and (d) no parent is in the network. The first category is used as reference.

We see that children of separated parents less often mention the father in the network than children of married parents. The difference is substantial: compared to children of separated parents, children of married parents have almost twice the odds to mention the father ($e^{+.680} = 1.97$). While this supports the notion of physical availability (hypothesis 1), we also see an effect for mothers. Children of married parents have a 27% higher odds to mention the mother in the network compared to children of separated parents. This supports the notion of emotional availability and suggests that it is not only physical availability that counts (in line with hypothesis 5 and in contrast to hypothesis 2). A test for the difference between the effects on fathers and mothers is significant ($b = -.175$ for mothers and $b = ^{-.400}$ for fathers, test of equality yields $\chi^2 = 40.2$, $p < .01$). From the fact that both parents are affected but fathers more strongly, we conclude that the combination of physical and emotional availability plays a role here.

Table 3: Logistic and multinomial regression of the presence of parents in the support network: Divorce effects and control variables

	Model (1) Mother	Model (2) Father	Model (3) ^a Neither parent ^a	Father only ^a	Mother only ^a
Parents separated	-0.242*	-0.680*	0.608*	0.859*	0.890*
Daughter (vs. son)	-0.003	-0.827*	0.502*	0.070	1.127*
Child age	-0.160*	-0.191*	0.254*	0.004	0.140*
Mother works	0.104	0.094	-0.133~	-0.256~	-0.102
Mother's education secondary	0.092	0.171*	-0.180*	-0.070	-0.171*
Mother's education tertiary	0.139~	0.363*	-0.334*	-0.009	-0.392*
Mother's education missing	-0.077	-0.105	0.145	-0.064	0.057
Family size 1	-0.009	-0.006	0.004	0.107	0.022
Family size 4+	-0.162~	-0.021	0.133	0.120	-0.069
Germany vs. England	-0.330*	-0.379*	0.487*	0.473*	0.370*
Netherlands vs. England	0.027	-0.159*	0.095	-0.238	0.179*
Sweden vs. England	-0.338*	-0.375*	0.532*	-0.500*	0.164~
Constant	3.360*	3.231*	-4.655*	-2.559~	-3.201*
N	9877	9877	9877		
Model Chi ²	91.8	621.0	990.3		

~ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$

^a Multinomial model, with both parents as the reference outcome.

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

7 Seemingly unrelated logit models are not available in standard statistical software packages.

In the multinomial model in Table 3, we look at the joint distribution of parents in the network. When we look at the sample as a whole, we see that 45% of the children mention both parents, 28% mention only the mother, 4% mention only the father, and 23% mention no parent at all. Clearly, most children rely on both their parents. The model shows that children of separated parents are less likely to have neither parent as compared to both parents in the network than children of married parents. More importantly, these children are also more likely to have only one parent – either the mother or the father – in the network. This supports the notion that ‘teamwork’ by parents is less feasible after separation (hypothesis 4).

The role of post-separation circumstances

We now consider the effects of circumstances that occur after separation (not necessarily directly after separation). In Table 4, we see that co-parenting has a strong positive effect on the presence of the father in the network, in line with our expectations (hypothesis 3). The effect refers to the difference between separated fathers with and without a co-parenting arrangement. To further examine if it is just physical availability that is relevant or also emotional availability, we need to compare separated fathers with a co-parenting arrangement to married fathers. This effect is positive, $b = -1.047 + 1.254 = .207$ ($p = .02$), suggesting that there might be a positive effect of separation. Although this seems to refute our hypothesis (hypothesis 6), we need to be concerned here with reverse causality. The choice for co-parenting might be selective: children for whom the father is an important source of support during the separation process are more likely to opt for a co-parenting arrangement after separation. In this sense, we cannot test hypothesis 6 conclusively in the absence of panel data and we cannot treat this effect as evidence against the notion of emotional availability. The finding itself stands, however, and is interesting in its own right.

We now focus on the role of the mother’s repartnering. We had no clear predictions and we also find no clear effects. When comparing children of separated mothers with and without a partner, there are no differences in the presence of the (biological) father or mother in the network. Hence, the stepfather does not seem to ‘compete’ with the biological father, at least not when we consider the four countries combined. Later on, we show how this varies across countries.

Post-separation conflict can only be analysed for Dutch children. The model is presented in Table 4 as well (Model 3 and 4). We see strong effects of post-separation conflict between parents. The dummy effect essentially compares separated parents with above-average conflict to separated parents with below-average conflict. The effects show that children of separated parents with ‘low’ conflict have a 1.63 times higher odds to name the mother ($e^{.491}$) and a 2.51 times higher odds to name the father ($e^{.919}$), compared to children of separated parents with much conflict. This supports the notion of emotional availability and is in line with our hypothesis (hypothesis 7).

For separated parents who have little conflict, the separation effect is still significant and negative for fathers (-.450) but absent for mothers (.011). This suggests that emotional availability has a lot to do with the effects of separation on support. Without conflict, the mother remains present in the network. That the separated father is still less often in the network than the married father, even in the absence of conflict, can be attributed to the physical (un)availability of the separated father.

In the last model in Table 4, we use a logit model to contrast children with both parents in the network and children with only one parent in the network. The effect of conflict on this outcome is negative, showing that conflicts between separated parents make it difficult for the child to consult both (hypothesis 8). Yet, we also saw that the effect of post-separation conflict on consulting the father was more negative than the effect on consulting the mother. This difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.96, p = .03$).⁸ This is in line with expectations (hypothesis 9): if one parent needs to be chosen, for all practical purposes it will be the resident parent, which typically is the mother.

Table 4: Logistic regression of the presence of parents in the support network: Effects of divorce and post-divorce conditions

	Model (1) Mother	Model (2) Father	Model (3) Mother (NL)	Model (4) Father (NL)	Model (5) Two parents vs. one
Parents separated	-0.279*	-1.047*	0.011	-0.450*	-0.603*
Mother new partner ^a	0.008	0.052	-0.069	-0.565*	-0.474~
Co-parenting ^a	0.135	1.254*	-0.017	1.106*	0.957*
High conflict divorce ^a			-0.491*	-0.919*	-1.075*
Daughter (vs. son)	-0.001	-0.820*	0.036	-0.804*	-0.973*
Child age	-0.158*	-0.179*	-0.238*	-0.180*	-0.087
Mother works	0.101	0.070	0.143	0.280*	0.267*
Mother's education secondary	0.090	0.162*	0.045	0.364*	0.505*
Mother's education tertiary	0.137~	0.357*	-0.143	0.469*	0.646*
Mother's education missing	-0.074	-0.079	-0.691	0.349	0.300
Family size 1	-0.009	-0.012	-0.107	-0.056	-0.065
Family size 4+	-0.167*	-0.062	-0.085	0.046	0.173
Germany vs. England	-0.331*	-0.396*			
Netherlands vs. England	0.023	-0.202*			
Sweden vs. England	-0.350*	-0.494*			
Constant	3.340*	3.123*	4.565*	2.579*	1.628
N	9877	9877	3022	3022	2401
Model Chi ²	94.7	751.8	36.6	331.4	322.1

~ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$

^a Children of married parents are included in the analysis. Effect of co-parenting refers to separated parents with co-parenting. Effect of conflict refers to separated parents with high conflict. Effect of re-partnering refers to re-partnered mothers.

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

Compensation

Thus far, we have focused on the presence or absence of the parents in the support network. In the present analysis, we will look at other members of the network. The dependent variable is a count ranging from 0 to 5, depending on the number of persons mentioned as possible support. Both variables were analysed with Poisson regression, which is often

8 Tested with seemingly unrelated probit models.

used for analysing counts. The model for the non-kin network includes a control variable for whether or not the respondent is dating someone.

Table 5 shows first that children with separated parents do not have more other kin or more non-kin persons in their support networks than children with married parents. The question about compensation can be examined by looking at the absence of parents in the network, preferably in connection to parental separation. To examine this, we include a dummy variable for having no parents in the network, probably the most difficult situation for a child. We also include an interaction between the absence of parents and parental separation. This interaction is not significant for both the kin and the non-kin segment of the network. Moreover, the main effect of absent parents is negative for both segments of the network. In other words, children who cannot rely on their parents also cannot rely heavily on other parts of their network.

In a more general sense, these associations suggest that children who do have support also have multiple forms of support. The positive association across types of support can be due to social skills, personality traits, characteristics of the network itself, or to the classical Matthew effect: “the rich get richer, the poor get poorer” (Merton 1968). Reporting tendencies may play a role, too: when using a series of similar questions in a grid, respondents may have a tendency to answer questions in a similar way (Fricker/Galesic/Tourangeau/Yan 2005). Leaving these speculations aside, we nonetheless conclude against the compensation hypotheses (hypothesis 10 and 11).

Table 5: Poisson regression of the presence of kin persons and nonkin persons in the support network and logit model of dating

	Model (1) Kin	Model (2) Kin	Model (3) Nonkin	Model (4) Nonkin	Model (5) Dating
Parents separated	-0.014	0.002	-0.010	-0.005	0.370*
No parent in the network		-0.708*		-0.170*	0.469*
x parents separated		0.026		0.000	-0.123
Child is dating			0.428*	0.441*	
Daughter (vs. son)	0.137*	0.146*	0.276*	0.277*	0.507*
Child age	0.007	0.026	0.007	0.011	0.440*
Mother works	-0.050	-0.055~	0.004	0.002	-0.147*
Mother's education secondary	0.017	0.006	0.001	-0.002	-0.117
Mother's education tertiary	0.117*	0.098*	0.053*	0.047~	-0.030
Mother's education missing	-0.117	-0.109	-0.024	-0.021	0.032
Family size 1	-0.218*	-0.219*	0.006	0.006	0.113~
Family size 4+	0.079*	0.096*	-0.011	-0.007	0.136
Germany vs. England	-0.167*	-0.134*	-0.087*	-0.078*	0.057
Netherlands vs. England	-0.396*	-0.393*	-0.258*	-0.256*	-0.198*
Sweden vs. England	-0.582*	-0.534*	-0.211*	-0.196*	-0.491*
Constant	-0.472	-0.637*	0.058	0.036	-7.849*
N	9877	9877	9877	9877	9877
Model Chi ²	384.4	820.4	1408.7	1577.1	413.7

~ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$

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

One possible sign of compensation is found in the last model, i.e., the logit model for dating. Children of separated parents have a 45% higher odds to date someone than children of married parents. This is in line with previous studies (Ivanova et al., 2011). Moreover, we find that children who have no parents in the support network are more likely to date someone. Even though the interaction between separation and the absence of parents in the network is not significant in this last model, these findings do suggest that children of separation more often have someone of the opposite sex to lean on, which could function for them as a form of compensation. The effect is somewhat stronger for girls ($b = .443$) than for boys ($b = .175$), but the difference is not significant ($p = .11$).

Are there country differences?

Finally, we examine country differences in Table 6. In the first model, we include only the separation variable and interactions with the indicator variables for the four countries. In the second model, we include separation and repartnering and interactions with country. England is the reference but at the bottom of the model, we present the effects for each country as implied by the main and interaction effects simultaneously.

We do not find any country differences in seeking support from the mother: in all four countries, children of separated parents less often go to their mother. The effect of repartnering on the presence of mothers in the network is also stable across contexts. This is different for the probability of including the father in the network. We find significant interactions between separation and the country indicator variables on the probability of including the father in the network (Model 3). At the bottom of Model 3, we can see that differences between children of married and separated parents are largest in England and the Netherlands, and weaker in Germany and Sweden. When we add repartnering to the model, the results change. The effect of separation in Model 4 applies to children of separated fathers when the mother did not repartner. For these cases, England has the strongest negative effect of separation on including the father, while the other three countries have weaker effects. Sweden still has the weakest separation effect, however. These results are partially in line with our hypothesis that in weaker welfare states (like England), effects of separation are stronger than in stronger welfare states (like Sweden). The evidence is partial because no differences are found for the effects of separation on the presence of mothers in the network. Finally, we observe that both in the Netherlands and in Sweden, there are strong negative effects of repartnering. This suggests that there is more substitution between stepfathers and biological fathers in these countries.

Table 6: Logistic regression of the presence of parents in the support network with country interactions^a

	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
	Mother	Mother	Father	Father
Germany vs. England	-0.389*	-0.388*	-0.485*	-0.485*
Netherlands vs. England	-0.007	-0.006	-0.214*	-0.213*
Sweden vs. England	-0.399*	-0.399*	-0.494*	-0.493*
Parents separated	-0.361*	-0.394*	-0.914*	-0.970*
x Germany	0.182	0.250	0.379*	0.557*
x Netherlands	0.088	0.131	0.143	0.471*
x Sweden	0.190	0.249	0.421*	0.633*
Mother new partner		0.100		0.167
x Germany		-0.200		-0.538*
x Netherlands		-0.129		-1.034*
x Sweden		-0.220		-1.014*
Constant	3.426*	3.425*	3.345*	3.314*
Implied divorce effects^b				
England			-.914	-.970
Germany			-.535	-.413
Netherlands			-.771	-.499
Sweden			-.492	-.337
Implied repartnering effects^b				
England				.167
Germany				-.371
Netherlands				-.867
Sweden				-.847
N	9877	9877	9877	9877
Model Chi ²	97.9	99.4	644.1	643.2

~ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$

^a Same control variables as were used in Table 3.

^b Calculated based on the main effect and the interaction effects.

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

Conclusion and discussion

In this paper, we examined the support networks of 14-year old native-born children in four European countries. Our basic finding is that children whose parents are separated are less likely to include the non-resident father in their support network, compared to married children. Children of separated parents are also less likely to include the mother in the network but this difference is smaller. Theoretically, we argued that these effects are due to the reduced physical and emotional availability of parents after separation. That mothers are also affected and not just fathers suggests that it is not merely physical availability that plays a role, but also emotional availability. This conclusion is strengthened by our finding that conflicts between separated parents also reduce the probability that children include their parents in the network. Conflicts cause parents to be more preoccupied with each other, probably at the cost of being unavailable for the child. Moreover,

when separated parents have below-average levels of conflict, the children mention the mother as often as children of married parents (at least in the Netherlands where the level of conflict was measured). Analyses of other post-separation circumstances further suggest that co-parenting – measured as living half of the time with the father – increases the probability that the father is part of the network, compared to separated fathers without a co-parenting arrangement. We note that reverse causality plays a role here: when fathers are more important in the network, they may be more likely to obtain a co-parenting arrangement. In two countries (the Netherlands and Sweden), we find that the father is mentioned less often in the network when the mother has a new partner. This could be seen as a form of substitution of the biological father by the stepfather.

In contrast to our expectations, parental separation does not increase the probability that children mention other people (kin or non-kin) in the support network. In other words, there is no network compensation. This is true even for children who have no parents in their network: these children also do not rely on other parts of their kin or non-kin network. One possible explanation might be that a separation reduces the attachment that children have with all relevant adults (family members, teachers, and so forth). Another explanation is that a separation may lead to frictions in the kin network of parents which, in turn, makes the network less available to the child. There is only one finding that could be seen as compensation, however. Children with separated parents and children who have no parent in the support network are more likely to be in a dating relationship. This confirms a positive shift from ‘old’ to ‘young’ in the network. While boyfriends or girlfriends may provide social and emotional support, early dating is related to early marriage and early marriage in turn increases the risk of subsequent separation (Dronkers/Härkönen 2008).

Finally, we find some cross-national variation in the effects of separation. We find stronger effects of separation on the presence of the father in the network in England, which is a liberal welfare state, than in Sweden, which is a social-democratic welfare state. The Netherlands and Germany are in between. This is not fully consistent with a welfare state hypothesis, however, since the effect in the Netherlands is stronger than in Germany. Moreover, we find unexpected differences when we look at the mother’s re-partnering behaviour and we find no differences in the effect of separation on the probability that the mother is included. All in all, the country comparisons are not very clear. What these analyses do show is that the negative effects of separation on the presence of fathers and – to a lesser extent – mothers in children’s support networks are present in all four countries. That by itself is an important conclusion since it shows that the increased demand for support that children experience when their parents separate, goes together with a reduction in the supply of support.

We finally need to discuss some limitations of our analysis. The data are cross-sectional so that no changes in support networks after separation could be observed. With panel data, we could for example test more strongly if co-parenting affects the role of the father in the network. The CILS4EU is a panel but there were too few separation events between the first and second wave. Moreover, no information is available about the timing of separation. Perhaps other parts of the network are compensating immediately after the separation but play a smaller role later on in the process. Such network dynamics are interesting but beyond the scope of this paper. We also have no way to separate family

members of the father's side and family members of the mother's side. Our hypothesis was that primarily the mother's family would compensate and not the father's, but we could not test this. Finally, conflict between parents was only measured in the Netherlands, so it is unclear how generalizable this finding is. We have to realize that the CILS4EU is not specifically focused on family issues but covers a broad range of important social, cultural, and structural characteristics. Moreover, as far as we know, there have been only a few previous sociological analyses of the effect of separation on children support networks. In this sense, the present analysis provides important 'basic findings' and opens up an interesting avenue for further research.

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