

Chapter 3

Differentials in face-to-face contact between parents and their grown-up children

Matthijs Kalmijn & Pearl A. Dykstra

Introduction

Face-to-face contact between parents and their adult children has long been an important indicator of intergenerational relationships (Lye, 1996). There are several reasons for this. Firstly, face-to-face contact is an important condition for the development of what has been called ‘family solidarity’ (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997), which is defined as the degree to which family members care for each other. It has generally been argued that support is more likely when contact is more frequent. This is true not only because frequent contact reduces the costs of giving support but also because frequent contact makes children more aware of their parents’ needs. Face-to-face contact is also a good indirect measure of intergenerational support because it includes many forms of instrumental support that are too idiosyncratic to measure in standard surveys.

Second, intergenerational contact is a central concept in the older research literature on family change in the early stages of modernisation. Social and geographic mobility accompanying industrialisation and urbanisation were viewed as threats to the viability of the modern family, in which members of different generations were becoming estranged and isolated from one another. Empirical reality proved otherwise. Frequency of contact and geographic proximity came to replace coresidence as indicators of family cohesion. The ‘new’ family in the working class was characterised by day-to-day contact and residential proximity (living in the same neighbourhood). This family pattern was reminiscent of the earlier extended family and was therefore labelled the ‘modified extended family’ (Adams, 1968; Goldthorpe, Llewellyn, & Payne, 1980; Greenwell & Bengtson, 1997; Litwak, 1960a, 1960b; Young & Willmott, 1957). In this approach, structural characteristics of family relationships, rather than their content were the defining features.

Although contact is an important indicator of intergenerational relations, it also has its limitations. One limitation is that the frequency of contact cannot be equated with the quality of contact, although there clearly is a positive correlation between the two (Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994). Elementary exchange theories argue that higher levels of affection increase contact and that frequent contact in turn increases affection (Homans, 1961). The correlation between contact and affection (or other evaluative aspects of the relationship) is not very high, however. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, feelings of

obligation can lead to high levels of contact even when the quality of the relationship is poor. If family norms are very strong, people can even be stuck in bad family relationships. Secondly, certain restrictions may lead to low levels of contact even when the quality of the relationship is high. Examples are children who study abroad and yet have very close ties with their parents.

Contact frequencies have been studied in many different countries, such as the United States (Lye, 1996), Germany (Szydlik, 2000) and Great Britain (Grundy & Shelton, 2001). In this chapter, we present new evidence of contact patterns using the data of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS). Contact patterns have previously been examined in the Netherlands. Dykstra and Knipscheer (1995) have analysed data from a 1992 survey of older persons to assess the frequency of interaction between older parents and their children. De Graaf (1997) has examined how often adult children were in touch with their fathers and mothers using data from a national survey conducted in 1992. And Verweij and Kalmijn (2004) have analysed data from a national survey of married and cohabiting couples, which was conducted in 1995 to compare how often people see their parents and their parents-in-law. In this chapter, we present new data for the Netherlands. Compared with the earlier studies, our data are more recent, larger in scope, and include contact measures for each of the respondents' parents and for each of their children.

The first aim of our contribution is to present descriptive information on the level and patterns of contact in the Netherlands. How often do parents and children see each other? How common is it for parents to see at least one child frequently? How often have children lost contact entirely? And how do parents divide their time and attention between their children? The second aim is to assess how contact levels are differentiated. Whereas some people have daily contact with their parents, others only see their parents occasionally or not at all. We assess whether such differences are related to important social demarcations. We focus on three possible forms of differentiation: differences in contact (a) by socioeconomic status (i.e. education, employment and class), (b) with respect to cultural characteristics (i.e. religiosity and family-oriented socialisation), and (c) by demographic characteristics (i.e. age, stage in the life course and family size).

Theoretical background

Although the aim of this chapter is primarily to describe differentiation in contact patterns, it is worthwhile reviewing some of the basic theoretical arguments why people have frequent or infrequent contact with their parents or children. Differences in contact levels, together with differences in the degree of intergenerational support, have been explained in terms of two

complementary theoretical perspectives (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Klein Ikkink, Van Tilburg, & Knipscheer, 1999; Rossi & Rossi, 1990).

One theoretical perspective argues that people weigh the costs and benefits of contact when deciding how often to see their children or parents. Important examples of costs are travel time and the foregone pleasure of alternative social contacts (i.e. not seeing one's friends). Important examples of benefits are the affection one feels for one's family and, of course, the support one may obtain from children or parents in times of need. This cost-benefit approach is consistent with an exchange perspective on intergenerational relationships, but the exchange perspective has mainly been applied to intergenerational support rather than to contact.

Another perspective on intergenerational relationships emphasises the norms and values that surround family ties. There are norms in society prescribing that one should care for one's children or parents, regardless of whether one enjoys doing this and regardless of how much it costs. These norms are generally rooted in religious ideologies. Adherence to traditional family norms is often enforced through sanctions, although more so by parents than by children. The norms may also become internalised so that they have an effect in the absence of sanctions. Feelings of guilt toward parents for not providing support or not maintaining contact are an example of a traditional family norm operating without sanctions.

In the remainder of this section, we present the various aspects of social differentiation that are considered in the analyses. We discuss what patterns we can expect to find in the data, using the more general theoretical arguments just presented.

Expected socioeconomic differentials

We shall look at two aspects of socioeconomic status: educational attainment and occupational class. Past research has often demonstrated a sharp class or status gradient in family patterns (Goldthorpe et al., 1980). The working class was characterised by day-to-day contact between parents and children, who lived in the same neighbourhood. Similar results were found for the role of education – the lower educated are more likely to have daily face-to-face contact with their parents – but education and class have rarely been examined simultaneously. Two general arguments have been presented for these effects (Kalmijn, 2006). One argument focuses on the costs of contact and argues that the higher strata of society are often required to move away from their region of origin to find suitable schools and jobs. This suggests that the effects of class and educational attainment on contact are indirect, via geographic proximity. Another argument focuses on norms and values and argues that the higher strata are less strongly attached to traditional norms about the family. The normative line of reasoning suggests that there are also direct educational and class effects on contact, after controlling for geographic proximity.

A third socioeconomic characteristic we shall address is employment. Working hours can be relevant because they reduce the amount of leisure time people have, thereby increasing the costs of having contact. This argument has most frequently been applied to women. Women have always been more active in maintaining family ties so that women's employment would have the clearest negative effect on intergenerational ties. In the broader debate about the future of family solidarity, the rise of married women's employment has often been regarded as one of the more important 'new' restrictions. While the reasoning is sound enough, empirical evidence for this line of reasoning has so far been limited (Klein Ikkink et al., 1999; Starrels, Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, & Yamada, 1995).

Expected cultural differentials

We shall address two indicators of cultural differentiation: religiosity and family-oriented socialisation. The main reason for expecting religious differences lies in prevailing norms and values about the family. Most Christian denominations in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the Western world promote the norm that one should love and respect (and care for) one's parents, regardless of the costs and benefits of doing so. The same holds for Islamic doctrines. As a result, one would expect people who identify themselves as being religious to be more likely to have frequent contact with their children and parents than those who do not consider themselves to be religious. There may also be differences among the Christian denominations. Within the Protestant church, there is a sharp cleavage between Orthodox denominations and the Dutch Reformed denomination(s), with the former being more traditional in their views on the family than the latter. Cross-national studies suggest furthermore that Catholic countries are more 'family minded' than Protestant and secular countries (Inglehart, 1997). Having said that, Dutch Catholics have generally been more liberal, so it is unclear what to expect (Felling, Peters, & Scheepers, 2000).

We shall also look at ethnic differences. More specifically, we shall compare Dutch people to people of Turkish and Moroccan descent and of Caribbean (Surinamese and Antillean) descent. For Turks and Moroccans, we expect more frequent contact between parents and children. These differences may, in part, be related to educational differences — on average, people of Turkish and Moroccan descent are less educated than the Dutch. Another factor that plays a role is that Islamic cultures tend to be more familialistic than Christian cultures (Reher, 1998). We should also note, however, that the migration process itself may counteract such tendencies. After all, many immigrants have a parent who lives abroad. For Caribbeans, we also expect more frequent contact with parents, but here an important gender difference may emerge. More specifically, Caribbeans are more likely to grow up in single-parent homes, especially in single-mother homes (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003), and this may lead to reduced contact between children and fathers at a later age.

Similar patterns have been observed in the United States among black Americans (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

In addition to addressing differences in religiosity, we shall also look at what we call family-oriented socialisation, by which we mean the degree to which a person was confronted with a family-oriented lifestyle during childhood. Was the respondent living in the same neighbourhood as his or her grandparents, did he or she go on holiday with extended family members, and how often were there overnight stays of uncles and aunts, cousins and grandparents? We expect that people who were brought up amidst extended family will repeat such patterns when they grow up themselves. This would result in more frequent visiting of their parents later in life.

Expected demographic differentials

The life course has been a central element in the literature on intergenerational relationships (Hagestad, 2003). The life course is characterised by both discrete changes (experiencing life course transitions) and continuous changes (becoming older). Effects of the life course can be studied from the perspective of children or the perspective of parents. Some authors examine how intergenerational relationships are affected by the life course of their children (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Here, the focus is on comparing parent-child relationships across the early life course stages of the children, i.e. living at home, living alone, entering into marriage, and becoming a parent. Other authors examine how intergenerational relationships are affected by the life course of the parents (Lye, 1996; Manning & Smock, 1999; Seltzer, 1991). Here, the focus is on later life course stages of the parents, such as divorce, remarriage, and widowhood.

When focusing on the parental life course, we expect that parents, especially fathers, will have less contact with their children if they are divorced from the mother of their children (Seltzer, 1991). The reasons for this are well-known. Fathers are less able to invest in their children after divorce, which may have negative effects later on in life. Fathers also miss the kinkeeping role of mothers when they divorce. And finally, children may experience a conflict of loyalties after divorce. They may choose between the father and the mother, and on average, this will lead to a reduction in contact for both parents. Fathers seem to be blamed more often for a divorce than mothers (Jennings & Howe, 2001), so this reduction tends to be asymmetric: Fathers will have less contact with their children after divorce than mothers (even though divorced mothers will also have less contact with their children than married mothers).

Widowhood is expected to have a different effect. Widowhood increases the needs of the surviving parent, which will lead to an increase in contact with the children (Barrett & Lynch, 1999; Dykstra, 1993). Whether this applies equally to men and women is less clear.

Given that women are often the kinkeepers in the home, men develop few skills in maintaining contact with their children. If their wife dies, this may also result in reduced contact with children. In a sense, when men become widowers, they lose not only a wife, but also a kinkeeper.

Are there also continuous effects of the life course? Conflicting arguments have been given for the effects of the parents' age. Whilst parents need more support from their children as they grow older and experience more health problems and physical limitations (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998), the physical limitations may, at the same time, reduce mobility and vitality, which in turn will reduce the frequency of contact. This suggests that intergenerational contacts become less frequent but at the same time more instrumental as parents grow older.

With respect to the life course of the children, the most important effect can be expected from family formation. When adult children become parents themselves, the parents will often become more important in their lives (Oppelaar & Dykstra, 2005; Silverstein & Marengo, 2001). One reason for this lies in the increased need for information and support by the children as they become parents. Another reason is that grandparents often want to see their grandchildren, which will, as a by-product, increase contact with their children. There may also be developmental life course effects. Some authors argue that over the course of children's lives, a period of disengagement from parents in early adulthood is followed by a period of increasing closeness in mid-life (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). The disengagement is part of a process in which children become adults and establish their own lives.

Finally, we shall look at the role of family size. In the past, large families were common in the Netherlands. About half of all people born before World War II in the NKPS data had three or more children, a quarter had four or more children and ten percent had five or more children. Note that childlessness was also common in this cohort (12 percent never had a child). Family size plays an important role in the cost of contact. The more children a parent has, the less time there is for each child. Hence, we expect that there will be less contact at the dyad level in larger families (Dykstra & Knipscheer, 1995; Spitze & Logan, 1991; Uhlenberg & Cooney, 1990; Waite & Harrison, 1992). To some extent, these effects can be reduced because parents may also see their children at the same time. In other words, children are not full 'rivals'. The family size effect may also be more subtle. Visiting one's parents takes time and children may try to share these 'costs' with their siblings. In families with many siblings, each sibling may reduce his or her level of contact with the parents.

Family size is expected to have a different effect at the dyad level than at the family level. From the perspective of the parent, the likelihood of frequent contact with at least one child is greater in large families than in small families. If the chance of having frequent contact is p , the chance of having frequent contact with at least one child is $1 - (1-p)^s$, where s

is the number of children. For example, if the chance of having frequent contact is 50 percent, the chance of seeing at least one child in a family of two is 75 percent (assuming the chances are independent). In a sense, a large family provides better protection against social isolation than a small family. The same logic implies negative effects as well. For example, the chance that contact is lost with at least one child, is also likely to be greater in larger families.

Empirical analyses of contact

In this chapter, we focus on the frequency of face-to-face contact between parents and children: ‘how often have you seen [target person] in the last 12 months?’ Seven answer categories, ranging from ‘never’ to ‘daily’ were used. For the descriptive analyses, these were regrouped into five categories that are often used in research (see Table 3.1). For the analysis of socioeconomic, cultural and demographic differentials, we recoded the answering categories to numerical scores indicating the approximate number of contacts per year. This leads to a skewed outcome variable, but as a transformation to more normal scores (a log-transformation) did not change the significance levels of the statistical tests. Hence, we decided to focus on the untransformed numerical scores. An advantage of these scores is that they have an intuitively attractive interpretation: the means refer to the average number of contacts per year in a specific social category. Though the focus of our analyses is face-to-face contact, we provide additional data on phone contact (including contact by email and letters).

Intergenerational contacts can be analysed from the perspective of parents or children. When analysing contact from the perspective of parents, the focus is on how the social characteristics of parents affect contact levels. When analysing from the perspective of children, the focus is on how the social characteristics of children affect contact. In this chapter, we use both perspectives. The role of parental characteristics is studied in Tables 3.3 and 3.4. For these analyses, we analysed all anchors (i.e. primary respondents) who were parents of adult biological children aged 25 or older. The role of children’s characteristics is studied in Table 3.6. For these analyses, we analysed all anchors who had at least one living non-coresiding biological parent. Anchors were 18 years or older but no older than 79.

In the analysis of parents, contact can be studied at the level of the dyad and at the level of the family. Parents generally have more than one child and our data include contact measures for all living children. This means that we can include all parent-child dyads in the analysis. In such an analysis, the units are not statistically independent, but is solved in this chapter by correcting the standard errors for clustering (using the program Stata). An important advantage of this approach compared with previous analyses is that no data are thrown away. Previous studies often made a random selection of one of the children per

parent. A different approach is to switch the analysis to the level of the family, or more precisely, of the parent. This level of analysis provides insight into the aggregated outcome of contacts within a family. For example, how often do parents have frequent contact with at least one child? And how often is contact lost in a family? And what about the distribution of contact? Do parents have the same amount of contact with all their children or is it shared unequally among children? In this chapter, we use the dyadic approach in Tables 3.1, 3.3 and 3.6, and the family approach in Tables 3.2 and 3.5.

Contact frequency was only measured for children who were not living with their parents and for parents who were not living with their children. Obviously, coresidence is an intensive form of contact, but it is not common in the Netherlands. We focus on children who are 25 or older, and in that group, only 5 percent still live in the parental home. It is even less common for elderly parents to live with their children.

The number of parent anchors in the analyses was 2,683 and they reported on 6,293 children who were living independently and who were older than 25. The number of child anchors who were 25 or older and who had at least one non-coresident parent was 4,795 and they reported on 7,535 parents.

How much contact is there?

Table 3.1 provides information on the frequency of contact in the past 12 months.

[Table 3.1 about here]

In about half the parent-child dyads, there is at least weekly contact, suggesting that contact is quite intensive in Dutch families. Contact by phone is even more frequent: about 65 percent have at least weekly phone contact. The percentage of dyads in which there was no face-to-face contact at all during the past 12 months is small (4%).

Contact is most frequent in mother-daughter dyads and least frequent in father-son dyads. Mixed dyads (i.e. father-daughter and mother-son dyads) are found between these two extremes, but they are closer to the father-son dyads than to the mother-daughter dyads. This shows that the mother-daughter tie stands out. This finding is even more striking when we look at phone contact.

How do our figures compare with earlier studies for the Netherlands? For technical reasons, our figures can best be compared with those of De Graaf (1997). De Graaf analysed a representative survey of all adult ages in the population and he separated face-to-face contact from phone contact. In his analysis, 47 percent of the respondents had at least weekly contact with their parents. Our percentage is very close to his. This is an important finding since it suggests that our sample is not biased toward strong families. The topic of our survey—family relationships—may have attracted respondents with good family ties and the

nonresponse may disproportionately consist of people with weak or poor ties. Since the survey analyzed by De Graaf was a general survey, which did not explicitly focus on family matters, the similarity between the two estimates is reassuring.

How do our figures compare with other countries? In Great Britain, about 50 percent of the independently living children have weekly face-to-face contact with parents (Grundy & Shelton, 2001). In the United States, this is about 40 percent (Lye, Klepinger, Davis Hyle, & Nelson, 1995). Compared with Germany, face-to-face and phone contact need to be combined. This shows that in both the Netherlands and Germany about 75 percent of children have weekly contact with their parents (Szydlik, 2000). Hence, parent-child contacts in the Netherlands seem to be as frequent as they are in Great Britain and Germany and they are more frequent than in the United States.

In Table 3.2 the level of analysis shifts from the dyad to the family. Here, we present information on face-to-face contacts between anchors and all their children taken together. The analyses were conducted separately for fathers and mothers.

[Table 3.2 about here]

As Table 3.2 shows, 73 percent of mothers in the Netherlands have weekly (or more frequent) contact with at least one of their children. For fathers, the percentage is somewhat lower, at 68 percent. The results reveal a high level of contact with children. Keeping in touch and visiting one another seem to be the norm among Dutch parents and their children.

On the other side of the contact continuum, we see that 5 percent of mothers do not have face-to-face contact with (at least) one of their children. For fathers, this number is higher: 7 percent have lost contact with at least one of their children.

The table also presents the total number of annual contacts, a number that will become more relevant when we analyse the role of family size. Another aggregate measure is the correlation between pairs of children within a family of frequency of contact with the parent. A negative correlation would suggest that children serve as rivals or substitutes: contact with one child implies less contact with the other child. A positive correlation would suggest an equitable distribution: contact with one child is not necessarily at the expense of contact with the other child. A positive correlation might also suggest that children are seen at the same time. Of course, the correlation says nothing about the way in which get-togethers are organised. Do children make their behaviour contingent on their siblings' interactions with their parents? Do parents engage in efforts to give their children equal amounts of attention? As Table 3.2 shows, the correlations are moderately positive. Hence, the contact level of one child resembles that of his or her sibling. Another way of seeing this resemblance is by referring to an underlying family factor. In some families, there is frequent contact; in other families, there is only little contact. The correlation is far from perfect, however, which also shows that parents do not see all their children equally often.

The last aggregate measure is the intra-family variation in contact. Here we look at the child who has the most frequent contact with the parent and the child who has the least frequent contact. We calculate the difference between these two levels, and divide this by the mean number of contacts per child (calculated over all the children). Although the number itself is not meaningful, it is important for comparative purposes. The higher the number, the greater the differences between children in terms of the frequency of contact with their parents. In our analysis of the socioeconomic, cultural and demographic differentials in contact, we use this measure as an indicator of intra-family differences.

Differentials by parent and child characteristics

To analyse differentials, we use multivariate regression models in which all explanatory variables are included simultaneously. Hence, we analyse the role of one determinant while controlling for the influence of the other determinants in the model. Rather than presenting regression parameters, we present the results in terms of adjusted means (this is often called a multiple classification analysis, or MCA for short). The adjusted means are not the observed means for each category of a certain variable, but the means that one would observe if the respective categories all had the same score on the other variables (the average score on all variables). We also present statistical tests (usually F-tests) which tell us whether group differences are significant. These tests are corrected for the clustering of dyads within families.

The model for parent characteristics at the dyad level is presented in Table 3.3, the model for parent characteristics at the family level is presented in Table 3.5, and the model for child characteristics is presented in Table 3.6. Rather than discussing the tables in sequence, we shall organise our discussion around the various explanatory variables.

Socioeconomic differentials

The first important finding is that education plays an important role. The higher the parent's level of education, the lower the number of contacts. The effects are quite substantial (Table 3.3, and Figure 3.1).

[Table 3.3 and Figure 3.1. about here]

After controlling for distance (the second model in Table 3.3), the effects are much smaller, showing that the effect of educational level tends to be indirect. This can also be seen in Figure 3.1. The higher educated have considerably less contact with their children, but this may largely be explained by the fact that they live further away from their children. The effects are similar for fathers and mothers. Moreover, the effect also exists when we look at

the child's level of education (Table 3.6). For a more extensive analysis of educational effects, see Kalmijn (Kalmijn, 2006).

[Tables 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 about here]

When we look at families as a whole, the effects of education are rather similar (Table 3.5). We find that better educated parents are also less likely to have weekly contact with at least one child. Among less educated parents, about 80 percent have weekly contact with at least one child; among university educated parents, this is only 40 percent. Interestingly, we see greater variation in intra-family contact in less educated families. Even though the less educated see their children more frequently, the relative differences among children are greater.

After controlling for education, we see only a small effect of social class, especially when looking at the class of the parent (Table 3.3). In other words, socioeconomic differentials appear to be more a matter of education than a matter of class, in contrast to what most of the traditional stratification literature suggests. The class effects are somewhat larger when the focus is on the child (Table 3.6). The higher non-manual classes in particular appear to have infrequent contact. But again, the educational effect is much stronger than the class effect.

It is sometimes argued that the time constraints posed by employment are an important reason why people – and women in particular – experience difficulties in maintaining family ties. Our findings are not in line with this view: the effect of employment was not found to be significant. Employed women have the same amount of contact with their parents as non-employed women (Table 3.6). More detailed analyses show that the number of working hours among working women does not have a negative effect on intergenerational contact either.

Cultural differentials

When we look at sociocultural determinants, we first see that religiosity plays a role. In line with expectations, we find that parents who identify themselves as being religious have more contact with their children than other parents. We also see denominational differences. Whereas Catholic parents see their children most often, Orthodox Protestant parents have the least contact. The Orthodox group appear to have the same level of contact as the secular group. This is contrary to what one would expect because the Orthodox are also the most traditional in their values. Differences by religiosity are somewhat reduced when distance is controlled for. A similar pattern emerges when we look at the children (Table 3.6). Whereas Catholic and Dutch Reformed children have the highest level of contact with their parents, non-religious and Orthodox children have the lowest level of contact. Note that these

differences by religiosity have been adjusted for the possibly confounding influence of family size. Note also that religious differences are large.

With respect to ethnic differences, we made a comparison with respondents from the ethnic minority oversample, the so-called NKPS-SPVA data, because the number of Turkish, Moroccan and Caribbean respondents is too small in the main sample. We focused on two ethnic groups: people of Turkish or Moroccan descent and people of Caribbean descent. The underlying subgroups are combined for practical purposes. By ‘foreign descent’ we mean that either the respondent or one or both of the parents was/were born abroad. In Table 3.4, we compare these two groups with Dutch-born people of two Dutch-born parents in the main NKPS sample. For practical purposes, we focused on children anchors (aged over 25). The results in Table 3.4 show dramatic differences. About 80 percent of Turkish and Moroccan adult children were found to have at least weekly contact with their mothers. Almost one in third had daily contact. These numbers are higher than the corresponding figures for Dutch respondents. Similar results were found for fathers. When we compare Turkish and Moroccan respondents to less educated Dutch respondents, the differences are smaller, suggesting that educational differences partly explain why Turkish and Moroccan respondents had such frequent contact with their parents. Even in this more stringent comparison, however, it is clear that contact is more frequent among Turkish and Moroccan respondents, and this is probably related to the more familialistic orientation of Islamic culture.

Important to note, however, is that many immigrants had parents who live abroad. Of Turkish and Moroccan respondents aged 25 and over, 51 percent of the fathers and 54 percent of the mothers lived abroad. In these cases, there is still contact—77 percent see their fathers ‘about once a year’ and 81 percent see their mothers ‘about once a year’—but it is obviously much less frequent than what is suggested in Table 3.4. This shows that the Turkish and Moroccan contact pattern is heterogeneous: Either there is very intensive contact (when the parent is living in the Netherlands) or there is very extensive contact (when the parent lives abroad). In that sense, the contact levels in Table 3.4 do not describe the overall experience of Turkish and Moroccan people in the Netherlands very well.

When we look at the Surinamese and Antilleans (the Caribbean group), we see that contact is also more frequent compared with the Dutch. Compared with the Turkish and Moroccan groups, the Caribbeans appear to have somewhat less contact. The main exception are Caribbean fathers. Compared with the Dutch, Caribbeans were found to have less frequent contact with their fathers and to have broken off contact with their fathers more frequently than the Dutch. This may probably be explained by the fact that many Caribbeans grow up in single-mother families.

A third cultural determinant is the degree to which the respondent grew up in a family-oriented environment. A series of retrospective questions was used for this measure: whether the anchor ever stayed with maternal or with paternal family (two separate questions), whether paternal or maternal family members ever came and stayed with the anchor (two separate questions), whether maternal or paternal grandparents lived in the same city or town (two separate questions), and whether the anchor ever went on holiday with relatives (other than the immediate family). All questions refer to when the anchor was 15 years old. The scale (range 0-7) is a count of the dichotomous items and is broken down into three categories (lower, middle and higher third).

The results show that daughters who grew up in a family-oriented environment tend to see their parents relatively frequently (Table 3.6). Interestingly, differences by family-oriented socialisation do not emerge for sons. Intensive interaction with extended family during childhood does not appear to affect sons' tendency to visit their parents. When we look at the parents (Table 3.3), we see no effect. In other words, the socialization effect does not travel across generations. If people are socialized by their parents into the importance of extended family, this does not affect the relationship they later will have with their own children, it only affects the relationship they have with their parents.

Demographic differentials

We see that both continuous (age) and discrete (stage) aspects of the life course have an effect on intergenerational contact. Contact was found to become less frequent as parents age, which suggests that the decline in mobility and vitality with age is probably more important than the increased need for support. The age decline is much steeper for mothers than for fathers. This does not imply that mothers end up with less frequent contact than fathers in late life. A closer inspection of the data in Table 3.3 shows that mothers start at higher levels when they are younger. Among children, the effect of age was found to be similar (Table 3.6). The older the child becomes, the lower the level of contact. The oldest children are an exception—they have frequent contact—but this is a small group. It is tempting to examine whether it is the age of the parent or the age of the child that matters most, but these ages are so highly correlated ($r = .84$) that the effects can hardly be separated.

Note the effect of age on intra-family variation in contact. As Table 3.5 shows, the differences in contact frequency among children in the same family increase as parents become older. As parents reach an age at which they start experiencing difficulty managing on their own, contact may become more functional—more related to support. And when contact is more functional, parents may perhaps lean more heavily on a single child to obtain the support they need. This increases inequality in contact within the family.

We also see major differences by parental life course stage, i.e. whether the parent is in a first marriage, single after divorce, single after widowhood, remarried after divorce or remarried after widowhood. Note that unmarried cohabitation is included in the marriage and remarriage categories. We use marriage terminology for clarity of presentation. Differences by life course stage are considerably stronger for fathers than for mothers. The experience of divorce has a strong negative effect on contact with children. First-married fathers have more than three times as much contact with their children as divorced fathers who live alone. When parents remarry or ‘recohabit’ after divorce, the effect remains negative. Although the negative divorce effect has often been documented for fathers, we see that it also exists for mothers, albeit to a lesser extent. Divorced mothers have less contact with their children than first-married mothers.

Levels of contact with adult children do not differ between parents in a first marriage and parents who are ‘single’ because they have lost their spouse through death. In other words, widowhood appears to have neither a positive (which we had expected given an increased need for companionship and support) nor a negative effect on contact with adult children. The arrival of a new partner does, however, seem to lead to a change in contact levels. Widowed parents who live with a new partner see their children less often than those who live alone .

At the family level, we see large differences by life course stage (Table 3.5). Among parents who are divorced, about 16 percent have lost contact with at least one child. The proportions are higher among fathers than among mothers. Among fathers, 22 percent of those who are single after divorce and 25 percent of those who have remarried have lost contact with at least one child. Among mothers, these figures are 11 percent and 17 percent respectively. Intra-family variation in contact frequency is lowest among parents in a first marriage. Apparently, if parents are still together levels of contact with children are more similar than if the parental marriage has come to an end. Intra-family variation in parent-child contact frequency is relatively high among single divorced parents. When parents are divorced, differences in the level of contact with children increase. For fathers, these effects are even more striking (numbers not shown). This suggests that divorce has the effect of harming relationships with some children while not affecting the relationships with others. Perhaps the children are in some sense ‘divided’ over the two parents. Note that inequality is also high among widowed parents who live with a new partner, but this is a rather small group in our data.

When we look at the life course of children, we see smaller differences in parent-child contact (Table 3.6) than when we look at the parents’ life course. Contact levels do not differ between never-married adult children and those who are married. This finding suggests the transition from being single to being married has no effect on relationships with parents.

Note that these findings are based on adult children aged 25 and up. If those aged 18-24 are included in the analyses, we do find differences in the frequency of contact with parents between those who are still single and those who are married (Kalmijn & Dykstra, 2004). Whereas the transition to marriage is associated with a reduction in contact for sons, for daughters there is a slight increase in contact after marriage.

Divorce is not associated with a drop in level of contact, as shown in an earlier study conducted in the Netherlands (Dykstra, 1998). Adult children who have divorced see their parents equally often as adult children in intact marriages. Grandparenthood appears to have the greatest consequences for contacts with the older generation. Daughters who have children living at home have higher levels of contact with their parents than do daughters who are childless or whose children have left the home. These differences by parental status are not observed for sons. More detailed analyses show that the differences in contact levels hold for both mother-daughter ties and father-daughter ties.

Finally, we see that family size has a very strong effect on contact levels. The more children a parent has, the less contact they have with each of their children (Table 3.3). When the perspective changes to the child, we see similar results. The larger the number of siblings (Table 3.6), the less often the child has contact with his/her parents. The effect is of the same magnitude as observed in the analysis of parents. These are obvious results showing that children are to some extent each other's rivals for their parents' time. Alternatively, children with a larger number of siblings might feel less obliged to keep in touch with their parents.

Effects of family size are also visible at the aggregate level. We illustrate these effects in Figure 3.2.

[Figure 3.2 about here]

At the dyad level, the mean number of annual contacts decreases with an increase in family size. However, the total number of contacts is much higher in larger families. Hence, children may be rivals, but the total amount of time parents spend with their children is also greater in larger families. Of course, parents also see their children together, which saves time.

Differences by family size in terms of the likelihood of at least weekly contact do not follow a clear-cut pattern (see Table 3.5). There is a tendency for weekly contact to increase with family size, but the most important difference is between family size one and higher. Given that the effect of family size is driven by the logic of probability, we can compare the actual effect to what one would expect. At the dyad level, the chance of weekly contact is about 50 percent (see Table 3.1). This means that when there are two children, the probability of having weekly contact with at least one child is 75 percent. For larger families, these estimations are: 88 percent for a family size of three, 94 percent for a family of four, and 97 percent for a family of five. When we compare these estimates to actual numbers, as we do in Figure 3.3, we see two differences.

[Figure 3.3 about here]

First, the level of contact in families with one child is higher than estimated. Apparently, ties to a single child are quite strong. Second, the level of contact in families of size two and above are lower than estimated. This possibly points to the fact that children share responsibilities towards their parents.

Large families also entail risks, however. We see that the likelihood that a parent will lose contact with at least one child is much higher in big families than in small families. For example, in the most common family type – families with two children – about 2 percent of the parents have lost contact with one child (Table 3.5). In families of seven or more, 16 percent have lost contact with at least one child. This pattern is presented graphically in Figure 3.3. The findings suggest that in larger families, there is a greater likelihood of parents having a problematic relationship with an adult child. Although this finding is simply the result of probability (as shown by the expected curve in Figure 3.3), it is an important and hitherto neglected aspect of reality.

Finally, it is interesting to see how intra-family variation in contact frequency is associated with family size (Table 3.5). Note that the differences are controlled for the confounding effect of the average number of contacts because we have used a relative measure of intra-family variation (i.e. the difference in level of contact divided by the mean number of contacts). We see that variation increases with increasing family size. In other words, in large families it appears to be more difficult than in small families to maintain similar levels of contact with all children.

Conclusion

Parents and children see each other frequently in the Netherlands. This first main finding corresponds well with findings from other western European countries. Although contact levels are high, there is a strong degree of differentiation in contact. This differentiation exists when we look at characteristics of both parents *and* children.

One important source of differentiation is level of education. The better educated have contact with parents and children less frequently than the less educated. To a large extent, this is due to the fact that the better educated live further away from their family members. When class and education were analysed simultaneously, class differences turned out to be rather small, and much smaller than educational differences. This sheds a somewhat different light on the older literature on the modified extended family of the working class. Contact patterns, which have been interpreted as being particular to certain occupational classes, might actually be particular to the attained level of education. Our findings show little evidence for differentiation in contact levels by employment status. Contrary to popular

belief, we find no support for the idea that the time women spend on employment outside the home competes with the frequency of contact with their parents.

We also failed to find strong differences in family contact by religiosity. There are denominational differences, but there is no sharp contrast between the religious and the non-religious. Given the strong effects of religious background and church membership on virtually all aspects of demographic behaviour in the Netherlands, including marriage, cohabitation, fertility and divorce, our findings are surprising. In the Netherlands, as elsewhere, people who identify themselves as being religious tend to have more traditional family attitudes (Lesthaeghe & Meekers, 1986). Nevertheless, these traditional attitudes do not appear to translate into strong differences in intergenerational contact patterns.

In line with earlier studies, we find that the life course strongly patterns intergenerational contact. Both continuous and discrete life course effects were distinguished. Contact frequency declines as parents and children become older. More importantly, we find that a parental divorce strongly reduces contact, especially for fathers, but also for mothers. Children's divorce, however, does not have a negative effect on parent-child relations. For daughters, but not for sons, parental status is an important determinant of the frequency of contact with parents. Contact levels are highest when daughters have children living at home. Whereas widowhood is not associated with greater contact with children, it has no negative effect either. Our findings also show that the frequency of contact is relatively low in the event of parental remarriage, whether after widowhood or after divorce. We can only speculate about what takes place in these relationships. Does having a new partner mean there is less time, need, attention and energy for the children? Does having a step-parent mean that children are less willing to visit?

We not only examined contact at the dyadic level, but also looked at aggregate indicators of family contact. These analyses yielded additional and in some cases novel findings. First, we looked at the question of how often parents have contact with at least one child. We view this as a measure of protection against social isolation. Pronounced differences by level of educational attainment emerged. Better educated parents in particular were found to be unlikely to see at least one child on a weekly basis. The findings for this group stand out from those of other parents, suggesting that the 'problem' of intergenerational solidarity (Heath & Stacey, 2002) is probably a problem that is primarily experienced by the better educated. They are the ones who do not interact frequently with their children. Contact levels are much higher in the other educational attainment groups. Though one would expect the percentage of parents who see at least one child weekly to be much higher in large than in small families, this is not borne out by our findings. Whereas the likelihood of at least weekly contact in one-child families is higher than expected on the basis of chance alone, in families of size two and up the likelihood of at least weekly contact is lower than expected on the basis

of chance alone. Single children appear to feel particularly responsible towards their parents. Children in larger sibships appear to delegate these responsibilities among themselves. Still, if we look at total levels of contact, we do find that they are higher in larger families than in smaller families.

A second indicator at the family level is the percentage of parents who lost (face-to-face) contact with at least one child. One striking finding here is that divorced parents who live alone, especially divorced fathers, often lost contact with a child: 22 percent of single divorced fathers lost contact with at least one child. Another striking finding lies in family size. In larger families, it is more common for contact to be lost with at least one child. Hence, even though total levels of contact are higher in larger families, they also tend to face greater family problems.

Finally, we looked at the way in which parents divide their time and attention between their children. Do they see all their children to the same degree, or do they see some children more often than others? Although there certainly is variation in contact within families, we saw that there is a positive and moderately strong correlation between the contact levels of siblings. This suggests that there is an underlying family factor at work: whereas contact is intensive in some families, and this applies to all dyads in the family, there is little contact in other families. The degree of variation varies, however. First, we found that there is greater variation among less educated parents than among better educated parents. This could possibly be explained by the higher levels of family conflict in less educated families, which may reduce contact with some children without reducing contact with others. We also found that variation increases with age. One explanation is that when contacts become more functional – as is often the case when parents grow older – parents tend to rely on a single child. Finally, we saw that variation is greater when parents divorce, suggesting that a divorce negatively affects contacts for some children but not for others. Given these findings, a direction for future research is to more closely examine the source of differences in contacts within families.

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Figure 3.1 Parent-child contacts by parental education

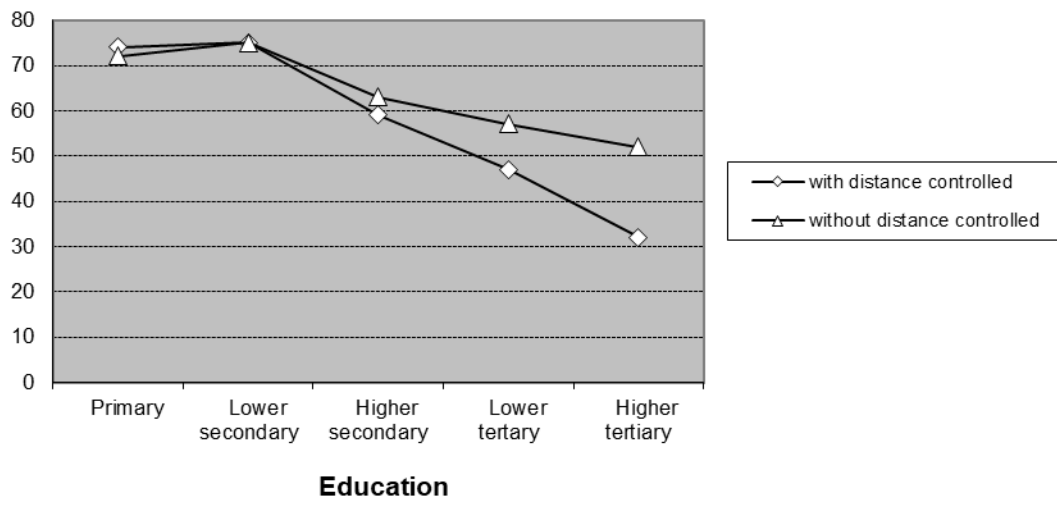


Figure 3.2 Parent-child contacts by family size

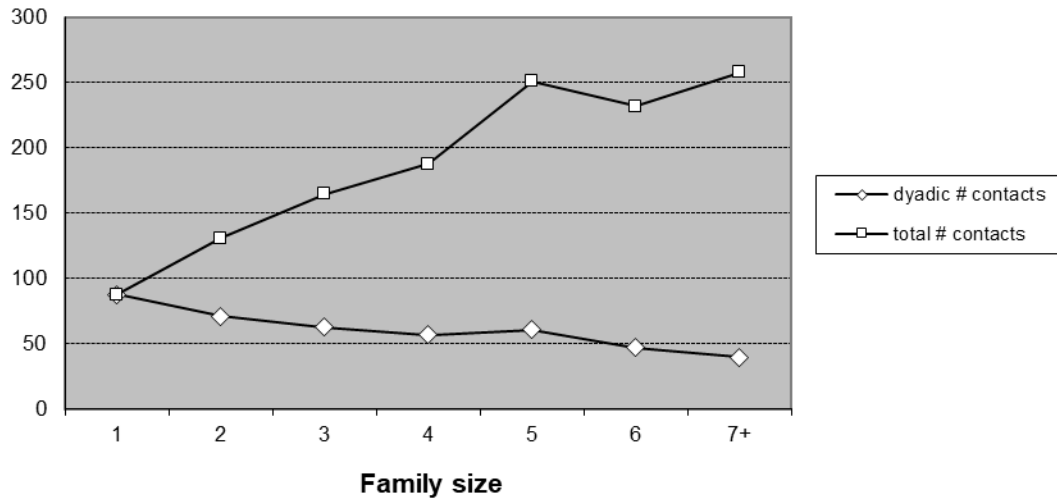


Figure 3.3 Weekly contact with at least one child and lost contact with at least one child by family size

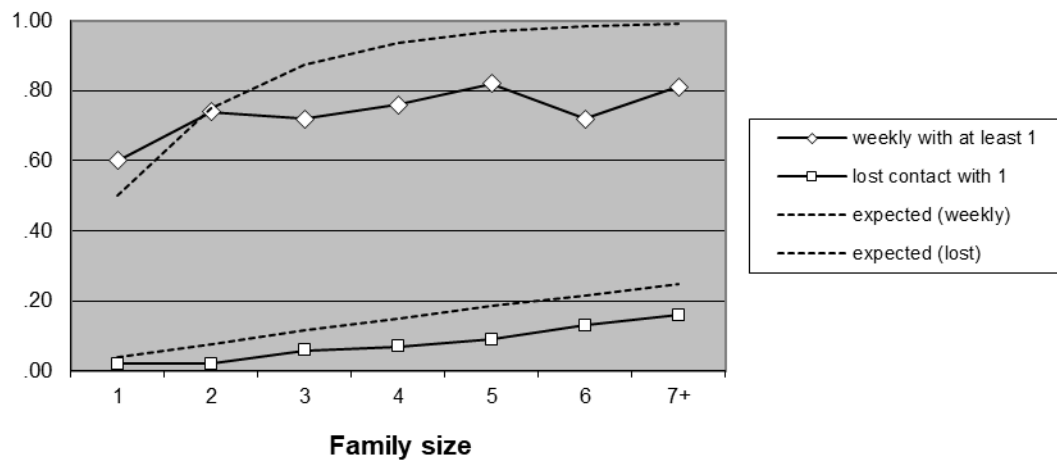


Table 1.- Contacts between parents and children: Percentages and means for dyads

Face-to-face	Father son	Father daughter	Mother son	Mother daughter	All dyads
Percentage					
Never	5	4	3	2	4
Once a year or more	16	14	16	12	14
About monthly	35	29	33	28	31
Weekly or more	39	46	41	49	44
Daily	5	7	7	8	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Mean annual number	54	68	61	76	65
Phone+ contact					
Phone+ contact	Father son	Father daughter	Mother son	Mother daughter	All dyads
Never	7	7	4	3	5
Once a year or more	14	12	14	6	12
About monthly	23	16	21	12	18
Weekly or more	53	57	56	66	58
Daily	4	8	4	12	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Mean annual number	61	80	65	105	78

Notes:

Parent anchors reporting (N = 6293 dyads; N = 2683 parents); weighted results.

Contacts pertain to parents and non-coresiding children age 25 and older.

Correlation phone and face-to-face contact $r = .43$.

Table 2.- Contact indicators at the level of families: Percentages, means and correlations for parents

	Fathers	Mothers	All
Percentage with at least one child with weekly contact (0-100)	68	73	70
Percentage with one (or more) child without any contact (0-100)	7	5	7
Annual number of face-to-face contacts across children (0-1320)	141	161	151
Correlation between pairs of children (logged contact)	0.42	0.34	0.38
Intra-family variation in contact (0-6.7)	1.09	1.02	1.06

Notes:

Parent anchors reporting (N = 2683); weighted results.

Contacts pertain to face-to-face interactions between parents and non-coresiding children age 25 and older.

Table 3.- Annual number of face-to-face contacts with children at the level of dyads by selected parent characteristics: MCA analy

Parent characteristic	Fathers and mothers		+ Adjustment for distance		Mothers		Fathers	
	adjusted mean	F-test	adjusted mean	F-test	adjusted mean	F-test	adjusted mean	F-test
Education		25.8*		8.8*		15.3*		14.2*
Primary	74		72		75		73	
Lower secondary	75		75		78		71	
Higher secondary	59		63		53		65	
Lower tertiary	47		57		51		43	
Higher tertiary	32		52		24		33	
Social class		5.3*		3.6*		4.6*		0.6
Lower manual	73		73		77		66	
Higher manual	64		67		70		59	
Lower nonmanual	57		61		60		55	
Higher nonmanual	64		69		67		59	
Employment		0.1		0.1		0.0		0.4
Not working	64		68		68		58	
Working	65		68		68		62	
Family-oriented socialization		1.7		2.2		0.4		1.8
Lower third	65		68		67		62	
Middle third	61		65		67		55	
Highest third	66		71		70		62	
Religiosity		6.9*		4.9*		4.2*		6.6*
No religion	57		62		65		46	
Catholic	71		72		75		65	
Dutch Reformed	67		70		69		64	
Orthodox	58		62		56		63	
Age category		15.5*		13.0*		15.8*		3.5*
45-55	81		85		86		74	
55-64	69		72		75		61	
65-74	59		63		60		57	
75-+	45		51		43		44	
Life course stage		41.1*		31.5*		16.1*		41.1*
In first marriage	71		74		72		68	
Single after divorce	45		48		58		21	
Single after widowhood	70		72		76		65	
Remarried after divorce	29		35		36		21	
Remarried after widowhood	39		48		39		41	
Number of children		8.3*		5.8*		3.5*		5.3*
One child	88		90		81		98	
Two children	71		73		74		65	
Three children	63		68		68		57	
Four children	57		63		61		52	
Five children	61		64		66		56	
Six children	47		54		54		38	
Seven or more children	40		46		45		35	

Notes:

Parent anchors reporting (N = 6293 dyads; N = 2683 parents); unweighted results.

Adjustments obtained from a multivariate model containing all variables listed and sex.

Contacts pertain to face-to-face interactions between parents and non-coresiding children age 25 and older.

Tests corrected for clustering.

* p < .05

Table 4.- Contacts with parents according to children: Comparison of ethnic groups

Face-to-face with mother	Dutch born of Dutch parents	Dutch born of Dutch parents (lower educated)	Persons of Turkish or Moroccan descent	Persons of Caribbean descent
Never	2	3	2	2
Once a year or more	12	9	9	15
About monthly	30	21	9	23
Weekly or more	51	58	49	41
Daily	5	10	31	20
Total	100	100	100	100
N	3708	945	177	246
Face-to-face with father	Dutch born of Dutch parents	Dutch born of Dutch parents (lower educated)	Persons of Turkish or Moroccan descent	Persons of Caribbean descent
Never	3	5	2	14
Once a year or more	15	14	4	25
About monthly	32	22	10	17
Weekly or more	46	51	55	37
Daily	5	8	28	7
Total	100	100	100	100
N	2605	570	174	207

Notes:

Child anchors reporting. NKPS data for Dutch, NKPS-SPVA data for minority groups.

Contacts pertain to parents and non-coresiding children age 25 and older.

Weighted results.

Table 4.- Contact indicators at the level of families by selected parent characteristics: MCA analysis

Parent characteristic	Weekly contact with at least one child		No contact with one child		Total number of contacts		Inequality in contact	
	adjusted proportion	Chi2-test	adjusted proportion	Chi2-test	adjusted mean	F-test	adjusted mean	F-test
Education		73.8*		4.1		28.9*		5.5*
Primary	0.81		0.05		183		1.03	
Lower secondary	0.79		0.03		177		1.15	
Higher secondary	0.69		0.04		137		1.11	
Lower tertiary	0.63		0.04		109		1.04	
Higher tertiary	0.41		0.02		72		0.95	
Social class		6.2*		3.8		4.9*		1.6
Lower manual	0.74		0.04		171		1.04	
Higher manual	0.78		0.04		151		1.15	
Lower nonmanual	0.70		0.04		134		1.11	
Higher nonmanual	0.73		0.03		150		1.04	
Employment		0.8		1.3		0.3		0.0
Not working	0.72		0.04		150		1.06	
Working	0.74		0.03		153		1.06	
Family-oriented socialization		2.8		3.8		1.8		1.2
Lower third	0.73		0.04		154		1.11	
Middle third	0.71		0.03		144		1.05	
Highest third	0.74		0.03		155		1.04	
Religiosity		34.9*		6.2		6.9*		0.7
No religion	0.66		0.04		135		1.08	
Catholic	0.79		0.03		168		1.09	
Dutch Reformed	0.74		0.03		158		1.01	
Orthodox	0.68		0.02		131		1.04	
Age category		8.6*		5.6		7.8*		22.9*
45-55	0.72		0.02		143		0.71	
55-64	0.74		0.04		162		1.13	
65-74	0.74		0.04		155		1.19	
75-+	0.64		0.05		113		1.22	
Life course stage		136.6*		153.9*		44.3*		3.7*
In first marriage	0.78		0.02		168		1.00	
Single after divorce	0.55		0.16		109		1.19	
Single after widowhood	0.78		0.05		170		1.13	
Remarried after divorce	0.44		0.19		71		1.10	
Remarried after widowhood	0.62		0.11		72		1.31	
Number of children		25.3*		52.1*		26.0*		80.2*
One child	0.60		0.02		88		nap	
Two children	0.74		0.02		131		0.67	
Three children	0.72		0.06		165		1.16	
Four children	0.76		0.07		188		1.62	
Five children	0.82		0.09		251		2.03	
Six children	0.72		0.13		232		2.42	
Seven or more children	0.81		0.16		258		2.89	

Notes:

Parent anchors reporting (N = 2683); unweighted results.

Adjustments obtained from a multivariate model containing all variables listed and sex.

Contacts pertain to face-to-face interactions between parents and non-coresiding children age 25 and older.

Tests corrected for clustering.

* p < .05

Table 5.- Annual number of face-to-face contacts with parents at the level of dyads by selected child chara

Child characteristic	Sons and daughters		Daughters		Sons	
	adjusted mean	F-test	adjusted mean	F-test	adjusted mean	F-test
Education		33.5*		18.5*		13.6*
Primary	74		78		66	
Lower secondary	79		84		71	
Higher secondary	66		73		57	
Lower tertiary	51		57		45	
Higher tertiary	37		40		31	
Social class		7.5*		4.2*		3.3*
Lower manual	70		71		68	
Higher manual	65		76		56	
Lower nonmanual	68		74		52	
Higher nonmanual	56		61		48	
Employment		2.9		2.7		0.0
Not working	66		72		52	
Working	60		66		52	
Family-oriented socialization		3.9*		5.7*		0.1
Lower third	58		61		52	
Middle third	61		67		53	
Highest third	65		74		53	
Religiosity		13.3*		8.3*		6.9*
No religion	55		62		45	
Catholic	74		80		64	
Dutch Reformed	72		77		66	
Orthodox	56		56		55	
Age category		9.5*		7.7*		3.5*
25-34	68		77		55	
35-44	59		63		53	
45-54	52		58		45	
55+	67		73		64	
Life course stage		0.8				1.3
Single, never married	63		68		55	
In first marriage	62		69		50	
Single after divorce	64		66		60	
Remarried after divorce	57		61		50	
Widowed	60		62		65	
Children		9.6*		11.1*		2.2
No children	56		58		53	
Children at home	67		74		55	
Empty nest	54		59		43	
Number of siblings		9.4*		5.3*		5.3*
Only child	67		70		63	
One sibling	71		79		60	
Two siblings	63		67		56	
Three siblings	56		62		47	
Four siblings	55		60		46	
Five siblings	48		53		41	
Six+ siblings	46		55		33	

Notes:

Child anchors reporting (N = 7535 dyads; N = 4795 children); unweighted results.

Adjustments obtained from a multivariate model containing all variables listed and sex.

Contacts pertain to face-to-face interactions between parents and non-coresiding children age 25 and older.

Tests corrected for clustering.

* p < .05