

**Joint physical custody in the Netherlands
&
the well-being of children**

Ed Spruijt and Vincent Duindam

Utrecht University
Department of Adolescence
email: (e.spruijt@uu.nl)

**Preliminary version
September 2008**

Paper to be presented at the
European Divorce Network Meeting
September 18th – 19th September 2008, Oslo, Norway.

Keywords

Joint physical custody (co-parenting), developments in the law,
mother families, father families, children's well-being

Abstract

Since January 1, 1998 joint *legal* parental custody after divorce is usually between both parents in the Netherlands. In over 90 percent of the divorces after 1998, shared parental custody continues to exist. It also has turned out that since that year, there have been more regulated visitation agreements. On the average children stay with their non-resident fathers significantly more often than before. Consequently, between 1998 and 2008, joint *physical* custody (when children actually have shared residences) has increased from 5 up to 16 percent.

An important question rises: does joint physical custody (co-parenting) make children and their parents feel better? Several theoretical articles give different indications: some researchers prove that joint physical custody seems to be better for children, others state it to be a risk factor for developmental problems.

We have come to the conclusion that the effects of joint physical custody for children and mothers, on the average, are not negative at all. As far as fathers are concerned, the results are even better, if only a little.

In the Netherlands, however, joint physical custody still is only the arrangement for a minority of about 16 percent of all children with divorced parents. The majority of them live with one biological parent, mostly the mother. The frequency of contact with the other parent is an important issue, both emotional, juridical and empirical. For that reason we have compared in this article the effects on children of growing up in different kind of families:

- mother families with low contact frequency with the father,
- mother families with high contact frequency with the father,
- co-parenting families,
- and father families.

Our conclusion is: the well-being of children from joint physical custody families is not more negative compared to the well-being of children from sole custody families.

Introduction

The Dutch Context: the rapid rise of joint physical custody

In several countries there is a tendency towards more equal parenting between mother and father after divorce. It is often hard to ascertain objectively which spouse is to blame for the breakdown of the marriage. Furthermore, father movements struggle for more equal responsibility between the ex-partners after divorce. In Denmark and the Netherlands for instance, the law has been changed in favour of joint legal parental authority after divorce. As a consequence, it has become easier to arrange a situation of joint physical authority (co-parenting). An important background value is the principle that a child has the right to grow up with its two parents (Jeppesen de Boer, 2008)

In the Netherlands new legal changes have been adopted by the Dutch parliament (Second Chamber) and are currently pending before the First Chamber. Central topics in the new law are the right of the child on equal care by both parents after divorce (after long discussion the specification of a 50/50 norm has been skipped and the obligation to make a parenting plan as a precondition for the request of divorce).

Until recently, joint physical custody used to be a rather rare custody arrangement and it accounts for only 5-10% of post-divorce families in the USA (Emery, Kitzmann & Waldron, 1999), Norway (Breivik & Olweus, 2006) and the Netherlands (CBS, 2003). More recent studies mention higher percentages. In Denmark approximately 20% of all children after divorce have shared residence (Heide Ottosen, 2004). About the same percentage, 20% can be found in Sweden (Breivik & Olweus, 2006). In the Netherlands the percentage of joint physical custody is rapidly rising. On January 1st, 1998 the most occurring situation, when the mother only had parental authority while the father only had the right of contact, information and consultation, came to an end. In everyday language this was called custody (for the mother) and guardianship (for the father).

Since January 1998 joint legal parental custody has become current in the Netherlands. According to figures of the CBS (2006) joint legal parental custody stays intact after more than 90 percent of divorces. In case that a judicial court grants custody to only one of the parents, in at least three cases out of four it is the mother who is assigned custody.

It is necessary to distinguish joint *legal* and joint *physical* authority or custody. In this article we do not discuss the effects of practising joint legal authority in general but we focus on the (still relatively small) group of children who live in the joint physical custody situation, shared residences, or co-parenting. Practically, this means the following: during week 1 children live with one parent and during week 2 with the other, or they stay 4 nights and days at the house of parent 1 and 3 nights and days at the house of parent 2.

In literature, there is no general agreement on the effects of co-parenting after divorce. Arguments in favour of joint physical custody have often focused on benefits for the child maintaining relationships with both parents: “.. ongoing and frequent access to both parents may mitigate potential effects of parental absence as seen in sole custody households, and access to the households and resources of both parents may reduce economic stress and disadvantage for the child.” (Bauserman, 2002). Additionally, co-parenting might lessen the work load for a parent, create better child-parent relationships, increase the collaboration between the parents and dampen potential custody disputes (Breivik & Olweus, 2006). King (2002) points out the pervasive negative effect of divorce on fathers, in contrast to mothers. Her results suggest that distrust can be reduced, if not eliminated, when fathers have custody or frequent contact with their children after divorce. The ability to maintain an exceptionally strong father-child relationship before and after the divorce is even more influential. Yet the number of fathers who do so are relatively small (King, 2002). Bender (1994) concludes in his review article that joint physical custody is always in the best interest of the child, even in situations of conflict. His main argument is that co-parents have to communicate and as a result they have to control their conflicts. His results are in line with Nagel, who states that two separated parents, equal in influence and equal in care, can be happy parents and a source of inspiration for their children (Nagel, 2006).

By contrast, opponents have argued that joint physical custody disrupts the needed stability in a child's life and that ongoing parental conflicts can damage children. Children will suffer from the lack of stability as a result of the constant change of households and this arrangement could turn out to be detrimental if the parents have a highly conflictual relationship (Kuehl, 1993). According to Delfos (2006) growing up in two houses implicates the absence of a real basis. She hypothesizes that “one stable home with a good running contact with the other parent seems to be most positive for the development of children of divorce..”. Several studies stress the specific requirements for successful joint custody

arrangements, such as good communication and ongoing trust between the parents. They point to a high measure of conflicts as a contra-indication (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002)..

Additionally, joint physical custody leads to a lot of travelling for the children, complicated planning, and the possibility of parents being manipulated (from pocket money to piercings). Furthermore, parents have to live relatively close to one another (Nagel, 2006). Not all parents succeed in maintaining joint physical custody. An early Dutch study researching failure of continued joint physical custody shows that it takes a lot of flexibility and patience to carry on with such an arrangement. Failures most often had to do with ongoing conflicts, unequal division of care tasks and disagreements on finances (Lampe, 1998). In an Australian study joint custody appeared to be an instable arrangement (Austin, 1993).

Single father families seem to be most risky for adolescents (Amato, 2006, Spruijt, 2007, Breivik & Olweus, 2006; Vandervalk et al, 2005). In those families more externalising problems and substance use has been noticed. Some say those families might have less financial space. Other possible explanations would be: single fathers tend to monitor their children less, they should behave more distantly to them, and they should be less involved with their children's friends and school (compared to mothers). This more uninvolved parenting style could probably heighten the risk of antisocial behaviour and substance use among these adolescents (Breivik & Olweus, (2006). On the other hand, Breivik & Olweus also notice that the negative effects could (partly) be owing to selection-effects. Children with more problems are also to be found in father families more often than other children (see also Spruijt, 2007).

Naevdal and Thuen (2004) have studied the well-being of 1,686 adolescents in Norway in relation to their residence arrangement. In line with other studies they conclude adolescents from intact families scored highest in the field well-being, followed by those from mother families. Adolescents from father families scored at lowest rate. The authors state that the observed interactions between residence arrangement and the child's gender on psychosocial problems, can be interpreted in different ways: "It might be that living with one's father increases the likelihood of developing psychological problems if the child is a girl, and of becoming involved in stealing behavior if the child is a boy. However, these effects may

alternatively reflect different selection for boys and girls into father or mother custody,” (Naevdal and Thuen, 2004).

To put it in a nutshell growing up in two families (co-parenting) after divorce seems to have positive and negative effects. An important requirement for success is the control of continuous conflicts between the parents and the capacity to communicate with each other. Empirical findings on joint physical custody are inconclusive and contradictory.

Sex of adolescents and parents

Several studies suggest that boys experience more negative consequences following parental divorce than girls do (e.g., Amato, 2001; Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbusch, 1996; Emery et al., 1999; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Spruijt & Duindam, 2005). According to Owusu-Bempah & Howitt (2000) the literature even states gender as a factor which cushions girls against the adverse impact of parental divorce. Being female seems to be a protective factor against the effects of psychological or emotional adversity in childhood and adolescence (e.g. Rutter, 1987). Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbusch (1996) conclude that the general consensus is that boys are more adversely affected by marital conflict and divorce.

In other studies few gender differences in early adolescence have been found (Hetherington, 1999). However, gender differences during adolescence may be difficult to unravel due to a possible confound between divorce adjustment and the population shift from greater male vulnerability in childhood to higher rates of female disorder in later years (Rutter, 1987; Videon, 2002). Forehand et al. (1991) report such a shift in a study of early and late adolescents and found it to be unrelated to family structure.

In addition, gender differences may be attributed to sampling and methodological issues. For instance, boys show more externalising and troubled behaviour, while girls tend to internalise possible negative effects of parental divorce. While the behaviour of boys is very often examined, one underestimates the possible behavioural problems of girls. In clinical samples boys are often overrepresented.

According to Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1997) children in sole-custody arrangements are better adjusted when they live with the same-sex than with the opposite-sex parent. Camara and Resnick (1988) also have reported that younger children too are better adjusted when their residence is at their parent of the same gender. Owusu-Bempah & Howitt (2000)

also find that children in the custody of a same-sex parent, following divorce, make better adjustments than those in opposite-sex custody. And Amato and Keith (1991) confirm as well this “Same sex hypothesis” in their meta-analysis.

However, Buchanan et al. (1996) do not report positive effects of children living by the parent of the same gender. And Downey and Powell (1993) have examined the same-sex hypothesis in a sample of eight graders containing large numbers of both single parent mothers (n= 3483) and fathers (n= 409). Comparing the means of the 35 socio-psychological and educational outcomes, they did not find a single outcome that provided evidence for a same-sex benefit for both girls and boys.

Parental support

Recent studies seem to indicate that the perceived parental support from the custodial parent may be more important than the adolescent’s gender or the gender of the custodial parent.

Dunlop et al (2001) have found that perceptions of mothers did not differ significantly at any time from those *of mothers* in intact families, but that, in common with other studies (Amato and Keith, 1991; Zill et al., 1993) adolescents’ support *of fathers* in divorced families were perceived to be poorer than those in intact families. They can show this by lower ratings of father support at each interval. They have also found that it was the perceived quality of the relationship with the custodial parent, rather than the adolescent’s gender or the gender of the custodial parent which predicted self-image scores.

Kaltenborn & Lempp (1998) analysed the psychological and psychiatric reports of 60 children in Germany. The child’s relationship preferences towards the father or mother were significantly depending on the existence of the mother’s psychological problems, and/or diminished capacity to parent, the current residential status of the child, and the child’s gender; hence the child tended towards the father when the mother had psychological problems and/or diminished capacity to parent, towards the residential parent (father or mother) and to the same-sex parent.

In a national longitudinal study of adolescents and their health Videon (2002) finds that parent-adolescent relationships prior to marital dissolution moderate the effects of parental separation on adolescent’s delinquency. The higher the adolescents’ satisfaction with

their relationship with the same-sex parent prior to residential separation, the greater their increases in delinquent behaviour when they are separated from this parent. Opposite-sex parents constitute a significant influence on adolescents' depression regardless of family structure. These findings seem to suggest that research on parental influences on children's well-being needs to pay more attention to gender-specific effects.

Although the research on custody arrangements and the well-being of adolescents is contradictory and inconclusive in a number of ways, the conclusion seems to be warranted that the quality of the parent-child relationship is more important for the good adjustment of children than the structural aspects of the custody arrangements (Buchanan et al., 1996; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kaltenborn, 2001; Vandervalk, 2004; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000).

In this paper we have examined three main issues.

The first research question is whether on average children in joint-custody arrangements will be the same in adjustment than children in sole-custody arrangements. It is hypothesized that negative aspects of this living arrangement are compensated by positive aspects.

Furthermore, we will examine whether total parental support (from mother and father) differs in sole custody and joint custody families. It is expected that total parental support is highest in joint physical custody families, maternal support is highest in mother custody families and paternal support is highest in father custody families.

Thirdly, we will explore the possible differences between boys and girls. Do children have a better adjustment in sole custody family with the parent of the same sex?

Method

Procedure

In 2006, 2007 and 2008 a research entitled Youth and Families was conducted at the Utrecht University, among youth from 10 up to and including 16 years of age. In this research the main question was: What are the effects of parental conflicts on the well-being of children from non-divorced as well as from divorced families? In total, 3561 children filled in a written questionnaire, 1659 in 2006, 726 in 2007 and 1176 in 2008. The 3562 children attended 57 different schools in 51 cities from all over the Netherlands. The written

questionnaires were filled in classically in May 2006, May 2007 and May 2008 in the presence of 2 students researchers. Only a few children for different reasons did not filled in the questionnaire, so the response is over 90 percent. No schools from Amsterdam, Rotterdam or The Hague were involved, which makes this research representative for the Netherlands minus the three big cities.

General measures

The research group of 3561 youngsters consists of 51 percent girls and 49 percent boys. The average age is 13.1 years, range 10-16. The percentage native youth is 89, the percentage non-native 11. To make the research group as representative for Dutch school going youth as possible, an extra number of VMBO-schools (lower vocational education) were involved in the study. Nationwide about 55% of the students visit the VMBO (www.minocw.nl). The distribution of youth by school type in the research is as follows: Primary School 4 %, VMBO-beroeps (low vocational): 23 percent; VMBO-theoretisch (low administrative): 20 percent; HAVO (middle vocational): 22 percent; VWO/Gymnasium (high vocational, grammar): 31 percent. There is thus an *under* representation of VMBO-students (added up about 44% against 55% nationwide), which is possibly related to the missing three big cities. The distribution according to size of place of residence is as follows: country/villages: 41 percent; towns: 38 percent; (larger) cities: 21 percent. As to religion 52 percent claim to have no religion, 24 percent are Catholics, 12 percent are Protestants, 8 percent are Muslims and 4 percent have another religion. Finally it has to be pointed out that 17 percent of the parents of the children of divorce were not married but were cohabitating before the divorce.

The average educational level of fathers is no longer much higher than that of mothers. Mothers have slightly more often MAVO (low vocational) and fathers slightly more often a scientific training. Harkonen and Dronkers (2006) pose, following William J. Goode, that the relation between divorce and education shifts when a country is more contemporary and richer. They conclude that in prosperous countries women with a higher education less often get divorced. Do these findings apply for the Netherlands? It turns out that mothers and fathers both higher educated significantly get divorced less. Overall, the percentage of divorced parents in the low educational classes is about 20% and in higher educational classes about 11%. When both parents are lower educated (lower vocational) the percentage of divorced parents is even 25%. In our research it was also checked whether the *difference* in educational level between father and mother correlates with the chance of divorce. It appears

that divorce rates do not or hardly differ when mother is higher educated or when both have an equal level of education. Divorce rates, however, are clearly lower when father is higher educated than mother.

There is still a strong relation between the educational level of parents and the educational level of children. The correlation coefficient between educational level of parents and the school type of youth, for instance, is 0.42. Therefore it will not come as a surprise that there is a strong relation between school type and percentage of children of divorce, see table 1.

Table 1. Schooltype children and percentages of divorced parents

	% divorced parents
VMBO-beroeps (low vocational)	24
VMBO-theoretisch (low administrative)	20
HAVO (middle vocational)	17
VWO (high vocational)	14
Gymnasium (grammar)	3
<i>Mean</i>	<i>18</i>

Main measurements

Parental situation is measured by asking the marital status of the parents: marriage, divorce, cohabitation, ended cohabitation or widowhood, see table 2.

Table 2. Parental marital status

Marriage	75.6	
Cohabitation	3.5	
Divorced	15.8	
Break-up cohabitation		3.3
Widowhood	1.9	
	100=3561	

Divorce or break-up of the cohabitation happened on average 7 years ago, 4% this year, about 10% last year, 10% 2 years ago and so on.

In this article we excluded the widowed families and we distinguished 5 family types: intact families, mother families with no or little contact with father (contact less than once a month), mother families with regular contact with father (once a month and more), co-parenting situations (on average 3 or 4 overnights in mother- and father family) and father families.

Table 3. Living situation of children after divorce in percentages

	Boys	Girls	total
Mother families, few contact father	25	27	26
Mother families, regular contact with father	49	50	49
Co-parenting	19	15	17
Father families	7	8	8
	100=317	100=350	100=667

Little contact is composed in no contact (15%) and less than once a month (12%).

The high number of joint physical custody-families, especially with boys, is striking. In 2001 still 80 percent of the children appeared to live with the mother after divorce and over 10 percent with the father and in about 4 percent of the cases there was joint physical custody (De Graaf, 2001). The research Youth and Families 2006 and other recent research (De Graaf, 2005) show that joint physical custody becomes more popular: more than 15 percent of the children are living in such a situation after a divorce, according to the most recent findings. The percentage of father-families continues to be quite constant at around 8 to 10 percent. For the main characteristics of the four family types of divorce, see table 4.

Table 4. Characteristics 4 family types

	Age	Boys %	Age Moth.	Age Fath.	Education Moth. Fath.	
Mother, few contact father	13.2	46	43	45	3.8*	3.9*
Mother, regular contact father	13.0	47	42	45	4.2	4.2
Co-parenting	12.7*	53	42	45	4.4*	4.5*
Father, few/regular contact mother	13.5*	47	42	46	4.0	4.0

	Divorce Year	migrant background	break-up cohabitation
Mother, few contact father	- 5.0*	17	24*
Mother, regular contact father	- 4.0	10	15
Co-parenting	- 3.5*	4	12*
Father, few/regular contact mother	- 4.0	10	20

*(bold and *: differences are significant $p < .05$)*

We measured the following outcome variables.

Parental bonding was measured by the support subscale of the Network of Relationship Inventory (NRI) with good psychometric properties (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).

Personal well-being was measured by the Cantril-scale (Cantril, 1965).

Fear or anxiety was measured by a short version of the Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED-R, Muris & Steerneman, 2001).

Depressive feelings were measured by a short version of the depressive symptoms scale (Craighead, Smucker, Craighead, & Ilardi, 1998).

Aggression was assessed with the direct and indirect aggression scales (DIAS, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Osterman, 1992).

School results were measured by asking for the last marks of Dutch language, mathematics, history, geography and biology (Spruijt, 2007).

Rows and conflicts before the divorce and nowadays were assessed by the perception of interparental conflict scale (CPIC, Grych & Fincham, 1992).

Table 6 presents the main results of the compare means analysis.

Table 6. Means 5 family types: bonding with parents

	Bonding with			
	Mother	Father	Stepmother	Stepfather
Intact family	3.9	3.8	-	-
Mother, few contact father	3.9	3.0*	2.5*	3.2*
Mother, regular contact father	3.9	3.7	3.1	2.9
Co-parenting	3.9	3.9*	3.2	2.9
Father, few/regular contact mother	3.5*	3.6	3.0	2.5*

It is striking that, on average, the bond with mother hardly differs per family type, especially when the child keeps residence at his or her father's; in that case the relationship with mother clearly is less strong. It is not surprising that the bond with father is relatively weak when the child lives in a mother family and there is little or no contact at all with father.

Table 7. Means 5 family types: well-being

	Well-being:			Child:		
	Child	Mother	Father	Fear	Depression	Aggression
<i>Intact families (2736)</i>	8.1*	8.0*	8.1*	18.1	19.9	17.9
Mother, few father (136)	7.6	7.7	6.2	19.3	22.1	18.0
Mother, regular father (312)	7.7	7.5	7.4	19.2	21.2	17.8
Co-parenting (110)	7.7	7.7	7.7	18.2	20.8	18.0
Father, few/reg. mother (50)	7.3	6.8	7.1	20.1	21.8	19.0

General well-being and happiness (Cantril) is obviously highest in intact family situations, both for children, mothers and fathers. As expected mothers score the lowest in father families and fathers the lowest in mother families. If put together, the three outcomes show that members of co-parenting families do score well, although not significantly better than mother families with regular contact with father.

If one takes a look at the variables feelings of fear, feelings of depression and direct and indirect aggression of children, children in co-parenting situation certainly do not score worse compared to children in other divorced families. School results of the children in the 5 family situations do not differ significantly.

From literature it is known that the level of conflict is the most important factor for child problems, both in divorce families as well as in intact families. So we have measured the level of parental conflict in the 5 distinguished family situations, see table 8.

Table 8. Outcomes different level of rows intact families (n=2815) and divorced families (n=679)

	Well-being Child		Well-being Mother		Well-being Father	
	intact family	divorced family	intact family	divorce family	intact family	divorce family
Little rows	8.5	8.0	8.4	8.0	8.4	7.6
Some rows	8.3	8.0	8.3	7.9	8.3	7.6
Mediate rows	7.9	7.9	7.8	7.6	7.9	7.6
Heavy rows	7.8	7.5	7.6	7.6	7.7	7.2
Very heavy rows	7.1	7.2	6.9	6.9	6.9	6.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>8.1</i>	<i>7.7</i>	<i>8.0</i>	<i>7.5</i>	<i>8.1</i>	<i>7.2</i>

Table 8 shows it simply and clearly: very heavy rows are *most negative* both in intact families as in divorced families.

The level of conflict in divorced families was measured at the time of interviewing and at the time of divorce. As expected, parents who decide to a co-parenting situation after divorce, had the lowest score on level of conflicts (11.8) in the past. The level of conflict nowadays does not differ significantly between the 4 family types of divorce. Even in co-parenting families there are, old and new, conflicts and rows, see table 9.

Table 9. Outcomes 5 family types: rows before divorce and nowadays

	Rows	
	Before divorce	Nowadays
<i>Intact families</i>	-	8.5
Mother, few father	13.6	11.0
Mother, regular father	12.7	11.0
Co-parenting	11.8	10.4
Father, few/reg. mother	14.4	10.9

In conclusion, we can distract from all these results that children (and parents) in co-parenting situations do not score worse than children and parents in other family types after divorce. The scores are generally even a little bit better, but the differences are not significant. The first research question hereby is answered, children in co-parenting situations are not doing worse than children in one-parent families.

The second research question was about the difference in the bonding with the parents between co-parenting families and one-parent families (table 6). The relationship with both parents is indeed the strongest in co-parenting families, just as strong as in intact families and nearly as strong as in mother families which maintain regular contact with the father. It is no surprise that the score on the variable bond with the parent with less child-parent contact is lower.

To answer de third research question concerning the differences between boys and girls, and mothers and fathers, referring to the same sex of different sex hypothesis, we take a look to the tables 10, 11 and 12.

Table 10. Means 5 family types: well-being boys and girls

	Well-being:			Mother	Father
	Child				
	Boys	Girls	Total		
<i>Intact families (2736)</i>	8.2	8.0	8.1	8.0	8.1
Mother, few father (136)	7.8	7.5	7.6	7.7	6.2
Mother, regular father (312)	8.1	7.4	7.7	7.5	7.4
Co-parenting (110)	7.9	7.6	7.7	7.7	7.7
Father, few/reg. mother (50)	7.2	7.3	7.3	6.8	7.1

Table 11. Means 5 family types:

	Fear			Depression		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
<i>Intact families (2736)</i>	<i>16.5</i>	<i>19.9</i>	<i>18.1</i>	<i>19.0</i>	<i>20.9</i>	<i>19.9</i>
Mother, few father (136)	16.4	21.4	19.3	20.3	23.5	22.1
Mother, regular father (312)	16.9	21.4	19.2	19.2	23.1	21.2
Co-parenting (110)	16.9	19.7	18.2	19.1	22.6	20.8
Father, few/reg. mother (50)	17.8	21.7	20.1	22.1	21.4	21.8

Table 12. Means 5 family types:

	Aggression			Schoolmarks		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
<i>Intact families (2736)</i>	<i>19.3</i>	<i>16.5</i>	<i>17.9</i>	<i>4.0</i>	<i>4.1</i>	<i>4.1</i>
Mother, few father (136)	18.8	17.3	18.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Mother, regular father (312)	18.6	17.1	17.8	3.9	3.9	3.9
Co-parenting (110)	19.6	16.3	18.0	3.9	4.1	4.0
Father, few/reg. mother (50)	20.0	18.1	19.0	3.8	3.9	3.9

Table 10 shows that on well-being, girls on the average do score lower than boys. This matches with the general image in literature. It is striking that boys in father families do not score higher, so there is no support of the same sex hypothesis. Also the results from table 11 and 12 do not support the same sex hypothesis. The answer to the third research question is: children are not better off in one-parent families with parents of the same gender.

Conclusions

Simultaneously with juridical changes, the number of co-parenting situations after divorce in the Netherlands has risen from around 5 up to 15 – 18%. Children in co-parenting situations and mothers and fathers do not score worse than children and parents in single parent families after divorce. They even score a little better, but those differences are not significant. There is no support for the same sex hypothesis: children are not better off in one-parent families with parents of the same gender. The level of parental conflict both in intact families as in divorced families still remains an important negative factor for the well-being of children.

References

- Amato, P.R. (2001). *Children of Divorce in the 1990s: An Update of the Amato and Keith (1991) Meta-Analysis*. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15, 355-370.
- Amato, P.R. (2006). Marital Discord, Divorce, and Children's Well-Being: Results from a 20-years Longitudinal Study of Two Generations. In: A. Clarke-Stewart & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Families Count, Effects on Child and Adolescent Development*. New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Amato, P. R., & Keith, B. (1991). Parental Divorce and the Well-being of Children: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110, 26-46.
- Austin, J.F. (1993). The impact of school politics on noncustodial parents. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 20, 153-170.
- Bauserman, R. (2002). Child Adjustment in Joint-Custody Versus Sole-Custody Arrangements: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 16, 91-102.
- Bender, W.B. (1994). Joint Custody: The Option of Choice. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 21 (3/4), 115-130.
- Bjorkqvist, K., Lagerspetz, K.M.J., & Osterman, K. (1992). *The Direct and Indirect Aggression scales*. Vasa, Finland: Abo Akademi University, Department of Social Sciences.
- Breivik, K., & Olweus, D. (2006). Adolescent's Adjustment in Four Post-Divorce Family Structures: Single Mother, Stepfather, Joint Physical Custody and Single Father Families. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 44 (3/4), 99-124.
- Buchanan, C.M., Maccoby, E.E., & Dornbusch, S.M. (1996). *Adolescents after divorce*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Camara, K.A., & Resnick, G. (1989). Styles of conflict-resolution and cooperation between divorcerd parents. Effects on child-behavior and adjustment. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 59, 560-575.
- Cantril, H. (1965). *The Pattern of Human Concerns*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutger University Press.
- CBS (2003). Maandstatistiek van de bevolking (Monthly Population Statistics). Voorburg/Heerlen, CBS.
- CBS (2006). Maandstatistiek van de bevolking (Monthly Population Statistics). Voorburg/Heerlen, CBS
- Coysh, W., et al. (1989). Parental Postdivorce Adjustment in Joint and Sole Physical Custody Families. *Journal of Family Issues*, 10, 52-71.

Craighead, W.E., Smucker, M.R., Craighead, L.W., & Ilardi, S.S. (1998). Factor analysis of the Children's Depression Inventory in a community sampl. *Psychological Assessment, 10*, 156-165.

Delfos, M.F. (2006). *Weekendvaders (Weekend fathers)*. Amsterdam: SWP.

Downey, D.B., & Powell, B. (1993). Do children in single-parent households fare better living with the same-sex parents? *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 55*, 55-71.

Dunlop, R., Burns, A., & Bermingham, S. (2001). Parent-Child Relations and Adolescent Self-Image Following Divorce: A 10 Years Study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 30*, 117 – 134.

Emery, R. E., Kitzmann, K. M., & Waldron, M. (1999). Psychological Interventions for Separated and Divorced Families. In E. M. E. Hetherington (Ed.), *Coping with Divorce, Single Parenting, and Remarriage. A Risk and Resiliency Perspective* (pp. 323-345). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Fabricius, W.V., & Luecken, L.J. (2007). Postdivorce Living Arrangements, Parent Conflict, and Long-Term Physical Health Correlates for Children of Divorce. *Journal of Family Psychology, 21*, 195-205.

Furman, W., & Buhrmeister, D. (1985). Children's perceptions of the personal relationship in their social networks. *Developmental Psychology, 21*, 1016-1024.

Furstenberg, F.F., & Cherlin, A.J. (1991). *Divided Families*. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press.

Grych, J.H., & Fincham, F.D. (1993). Children's appraisals of marital conflict: initial investigations of the cognitive-contextual framework. *Child Development, 64*, 215-230.

Harkonen, J., & Dronkers, J. (2006). Stability and change in the educational gradient of divorce. A comparison of seventeen countries. *European Sociological Review, 22*, 501-507.

Hawkins, D., Amato, P., & King, V. (2007). Nonresident Father Involvement and Adolescent Well-Being: Father Effects or Child Effects? *American Sociological Review, 72*, 990 – 1010.

Hetherington, E. M. (1999). Should We Stay Together for the Sake of the Children. In E. M. E. Hetherington (Ed.), *Coping with Divorce, Single Parenting, and Remarriage. A Risk and Resiliency Perspective*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Forehand, F., Neighbors, B., & Wierson, M. (1991). The transition to adolescence. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines, 32*, 929-937.

Hetherington, E.M., & Kelly, J.B. (2002). *For Better or for Worse*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Hetherington, E. M., & Stanley-Hagan, M. M. (1997). The Effects of Divorce on Fathers and Their Children. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (pp. 191-211). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

- Heide Ottosen, M. (2004). *Samvaer og bornsd trivsel*. Copenhagen, Social Studies Institute.
- Hoffmann, J. (2002). The Community Context of Family Structure and Adolescent Drug Use. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64, 314-330.
- Jeppesen de Boer, C.G. (2008). *Joint Parental Authority; A Comparative Legal Study on the Continuation of Joint Parental Authority after Divorce and the Breakup of a Relationship in Dutch and Danish Law and the CEFL Principles*. Antwerpen-Oxford-Portland: Intersentia.
- Kaltenborn, K.-F. (2001). Children's and Young People's Experiences in Various Residential Arrangements: A Longitudinal Study to Evaluate Criteria for Custody and Residence Decision Making. *British Journal of Social Work*, 31, 81 – 117.
- Kaltenborn, K. F., & Lempp, R. (1998). The Welfare of the Child in Custody Disputes after Parental Separation or Divorce. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 12, 74-106.
- Kelly, J. B. (2000). Children's Adjustment in Conflicted Marriage and Divorce: A Decade Review of Research. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 39, 963-973.
- Kelly, R. et al., Determinants of Sole and Joint Physical Custody Arrangements in a National Sample of Divorces. *Family Law Custody Research*,
- King, V. (2002). Parental Divorce and Interpersonal Trust in Adult Offspring. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64, 642-656.
- Kuehl, B.P. (1993). Child and Family-Therapy, A Collaborative Approach. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 21, 260-266.
- Kurki-Suonio, K. (2000). Joint Custody as an interpretation of the best interests of the Child in critical and Comparative Perspective. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 14, 183-205.
- Lampe, P. (1998). *Gedeelde kinderen (Divided children)*. Amsterdam: Ambo.
- Lundberg, S. (2005). Sons, Daughters, and Parental Behaviour. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 21, 340 – 356.
- Muris, P., & Steerneman, P. (2001). The revised version of the Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED-R). *The British Psychological Society*, 40, 35-44.
- Naedval, F., & Thuen, F. (2004). Residence Arrangements and Well-being: A Study of Norwegian Adolescents. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 45, 363 – 371.
- Nagel, Y. (2006). *Co-ouderschap, het beste van twee ouders (Co-parenting, the best parts of two parents)*. Baarn: Uitgeverij De Kern.

Owusu-Bempah, K. & Howitt, D. (2000). Socio-genealogical connectedness: on the role of gender and same-gender parenting in mitigating the effects of parental divorce. *Child and Family Social Work*, 5, 107-116.

Rogers, K. (2004). A Theoretical Review of Risk and Protective Factors Related to Post-Divorce Adjustment in Young Children, *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 40 (3/4), 135-147.

Rutter, M. (1987). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57, 316-331.

Spruijt, E. (2007). *Scheidingskinderen (Children of Divorce)*. Amsterdam: SWP.

Spruijt, E., & Duindam, V. (2005). Problem behavior of boys and young men after parental divorce in the Netherlands. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 43, 141-156.

Videon, T.M. (2002). The Effects of Parent-Adolescent Relationships and Parental Separation on Adolescent Well-Being, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64, 849-503.

Wallerstein, J. S., Lewis, J. M., & Blakeslee, S. (2000). *The unexpected legacy of divorce. A 25 year landmark study*. New York: Hyperion.

Vandervalk, I, van der (2004). *Family Matters*. Utrecht: ISED.

Vandervalk, I., Spruijt, E., Goede, M. De, Maas, C., & Meeus, W. (2005). Family structure and problem behaviour of adolescents and young adults: A growth-curve study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 34, 533-546.

Zill, N., Morrison, D.R., & Coiro, M.J. (1993). Long-term effects of parental divorce on parent-child relationships, adjustment, and achievement in young adulthood. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7, 91-103.