

Following in their parents' footsteps: intergenerational transmission of divorce in the Netherlands?

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## **Abstract**

Following in their parents' footsteps: intergenerational transmission of divorce in the Netherlands?

The intergenerational transmission of divorce risk in the Netherlands is analyzed using data from the Netherlands Family Survey 1992-1994. We have controlled for factors which might explain divorce of parents and children. The aim of these controls was to see whether the intergenerational transmission of divorce can be explained by three possible mechanisms: stress, economic deprivation and stigmatisation. We found that these three mechanisms cannot explain the significant intergenerational transmission of divorce risk in the Netherlands. We did not find that this effect of parental divorce was less for a younger generation or that this effect of parental divorce was any different for sons and daughters.

## **Introduction**

The debate in the continent of Europe on the advantages and disadvantages of divorce for children often rightly makes a distinction between parental conflict and divorce and points, also with justification, to the effects of parental conflict on children. Dronkers (1996) showed with a large national sample of Dutch youth that the well-being of pupils living in single-mother families is higher than that of pupils living in two-parent families with much parental conflict and that the degree of parental conflict after divorce is more important for the well-being of the children than the degree of contact with the departed father. However, this debate often also suggests that divorce itself does not have serious consequences for the children involved, provided it does not result in economic deprivation due to loss of income and the children are not stigmatised.

The latter point is not supported by the findings of academic research, however. Divorce does have consequences for the well-being of minor children, not only in the USA (reviews: Acock & Demo, 1994; Amato & Keith, 1991; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), but also in European societies like France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (for references: Borgers, Dronkers & van Praag, 1996). From these European studies it appears that the effects of divorce upon children cannot be entirely accounted for by parental income, occupation or education, or by stigmatisation by society. Contrary to these arguments, the European research that is available shows that, for children, parental divorce is more than just a life crisis brought about by a radical change in their lives, and that the damage is not only caused by stress prior to the divorce. Dronkers (1996) found that effects on the well-being of Dutch youth are not only found in a short period after the divorce but are also found long after the parental divorce has occurred. These longterm effects are clearly connected to the degree of parental conflict, which continues often after the divorce.

The playing down of the effects of divorce on children can be blamed partly on European family researchers who either brush the subject aside or claim that there are

no long-term consequences. A good example of this can be seen in a scientific handbook on families which was published recently in the Netherlands, in which Zwaan (1993, 294) says: *'The opinions of researchers are deeply divided about the effects of divorce on children. Some point, for example, to their relatively poor school performance and increasing problems in emotional development, others assert that these do not exist or are less important than some have argued. In general it seems that the research is still influenced too much by the moral or ideological viewpoints of the researchers.'* In the light of the literature which is available, this quotation certainly does not reflect the full picture today. At the end of the passage cited above, Zwaan makes a forceful statement, which he does not, however, back up with reference to the literature: the upward trend in divorce *'illustrates the trend pointed out earlier that children are coming to occupy a less prominent place in the lives of adults. Ironically, however, the same upward trend will probably alleviate the disadvantages of divorce for children: they will not be stigmatised as much as they used to be and they will share their lot with a growing number of others.'*<sup>1</sup>

A good illustration of how fundamental the effect of parental divorce is on the children involved, is provided by the fact that the effects of divorce are not only felt during the initial years after the divorce. Effects are also found much later (educational achievement, unemployment, social mobility, age at first relationship, age at birth of first child, life expectancy). The fact of the existence of a significant long-term effect is interesting, as the effects of many choices which are considered important in life (for example choice of educational subjects) diminish over time, being lost in the consequences of decisions and choices made later. Evidently the effects of parental divorce are resistant to the healing effect of time.

This article will examine one specific long-term effect of divorce: the intergenerational transmission of divorce. To put it in less formal words: are the children of divorced parents at greater risk of getting divorced themselves? The existence of this higher risk has been confirmed on many occasions in the USA, for example by Bumpass and Sweet (1972), Pope and Mueller (1976), Mueller and Pope (1977), Kulka and Weingarten (1979), Mott and Moore (1979), Teachman (1982), Greenberg and Nay (1982), Kitson, Babri and Roach (1985), Mueller and Cooper (1986), Glenn and Kramer (1987), Keith and Finlay (1988), McLanahan and Bumpass (1988), Kuh and Maclean (1990), Bumpass, Martin and Sweet (1991), Amato and Booth (1991), Webster, Orbuch and House (1995) and Wolfinger (1996). The existence of this increased risk of divorce has also been demonstrated in Germany (Diekmann and Engelhardt, 1995; Wagner, 1993), but not for other European societies. A reason for this European leeway is the more recent rise of the divorce rates in Europe compared to the USA, which prevented the analysis of the intergenerational transmission of divorce in Europe by a lack of sufficient numbers of divorced parents and adult children. As the reader will notice, this is still a problem in this analysis.

Because intergenerational transfer of divorce would indicate a meaningful consequence of divorce in Dutch society as one of these European societies, it is important that this be established empirically with the aid of different datasets. There has not been a great deal of research on this topic in the Netherlands. Klijzing (1992, 61) found no effect among men and women born between 1928 and 1965 of not growing up in a single-parent family on divorce in their first marriage, but Klijzing did

not make the vital distinction between one-parent families created by divorce and those which came about due to other causes (mainly death). Spruijt (1993) found that young people between the age of 12 and 24 from one-parent families created by divorce, when compared with young people from stable and unstable two-parent families, had already had more relationships, had their first sexual experience at a younger age, had had sex with people more often, had more often had their first sexual experience with a casual partner, had less traditional ideas about relationships and were less likely to say that they wanted to start a family. These findings still held good after they had been controlled for the influence of social class of the parents and for the degree of modern views held by the parents. Bosch, Dronkers, Goor, Groot, Oei, Punt, Selleger and Windhorst (1994) have shown that more of the young adult children of divorced parents have had more than one relationship, and more have had no relationships at all, than the children of parents who had not divorced. Manting (1994) found that women born between 1950 and 1969 were at greater risk of divorce in their first relationship if their parents were divorced, but that this higher risk could be explained by features of the marriage of these women.<sup>2</sup> Dykstra (1996) found that the children of men and women born between 1903 and 1937 were at greater risk of divorce if their parents were divorced, but she only controlled for the age of the child and the size of the parents' families. De Graaf (1996) found that the risk of separation among men and women living together as married or unmarried couples, and born between 1951 and 1975, was one-and-a-half times as great among people from one-parent families than among people from two-parent families. Among the men it was 16% as against 10%, and among the women 20% as against 12%. He also found that respondents from one-parent families gave 'a happy family life' less frequently as an important goal in life, but more often chose 'to enjoy life'. However, De Graaf did not control for social background characteristics of parents and children (such as religious denomination). Spruijt and De Goede (1996) found that adolescents from one-parent families created by divorce had more conflicts with their partners, and broke off their relationships more often than adolescents from two-parent families (both those in which there was conflict among the parents and those in which there was no such conflict) and stepfamilies. These findings still held good after controlling for parental income, gender, age and the children's own educational achievements.

This article is primarily of a descriptive nature. However, I am also able to make use of the explanations which American research has given for the existence of this link. McLanahan and Bumpass (1988) name three mechanisms which could account for the existence of this relationship: 1. The stress hypothesis. The stress which accompanies the parental divorce is a 'push' factor which induces the children to leave the parental home prematurely to get married, and to take on adult roles at a young age more frequently; 2. The socialisation hypothesis. The socialising circumstances in the parental home lead to the children developing certain attitudes and ways of behaving, which make them later on less able or willing to maintain their relationship, and more likely to leave an unsatisfactory relationship at an early stage; 3. The economic hypothesis. The economic circumstances which follow a parental divorce affect the lives of the children in a negative way (educational and occupational attainment), which could increase the risk of the children getting divorced.

The stress and the economic hypotheses is often also applied to all single parent families, whatever its cause. The reasoning runs mostly that the single parent has too few economic resources to raise the children and that being a single parent produces too much stress. If this reasoning is correct, the divorce risk of children from single parent families, not caused by parental divorce, should also be higher. Therefore the divorce risks of children from single parent families caused by the premature death is also discussed in this article.

Spruijt (1993) and Zwaan (1993) add a fourth mechanism to this: the negative stereotyping of divorce. The stigma of parental divorce would affect the life opportunities of their children in a negative way. We call this the stigmatisation hypothesis. The stigmatisation hypothesis can be provisionally tested using the possibly decreasing effect of parental divorce on the younger generations. This article will investigate, for the first time in the Netherlands, whether one really can speak of a decreasing effect of divorce. There has not been much research into changes in the degree of intergenerational transmission of divorce, even in the USA. Kulka and Weingarten (1979) and McLanahan and Bumpass (1988) did not find any systematic trend in the degree of intergenerational transmission. Wolfinger (1996) did find that the effect of parental divorce on their children was less in recent samples than in older samples<sup>3</sup>. His explanation for this finding is decreasing stigmatisation of the children of divorced parents as a result of the sharp rise in divorce. This possible decrease in intergenerational transmission of divorce as a consequence of decreasing stigma will be analyzed in the penultimate paragraph. If such a decrease is not found, this must mean that the stigmatisation hypothesis does not offer a good explanation for the existence of the link between generations when it comes to divorce.

It is not clear whether divorce among children of divorced parents differs between sons and daughters, as findings on this have been conflicting. A meta-analysis of 24 American studies, carried out by Amato and Keith (1991), revealed that the daughters of divorced parents were at a slightly higher risk of getting divorced themselves than the sons of divorced parents. However, Diekmann and Engelhardt (1995) found that in Germany the sons of divorced parents were at greater risk of getting divorced than the daughters of divorced parents. Possible differences in divorce between sons and daughters of divorced parents will be discussed in the penultimate paragraph.

This article will address the following questions:

1. Is there a positive link between parental divorce and divorce among their children, and if so, can this be explained in terms of relationships between other characteristics of the parents and children?
2. Is there a positive link between premature death of one of the parents and divorce among the children, and if so, can this be explained in terms of relationships between other characteristics of the parents and children?
3. To what extent can the relationship between parental divorce and divorce among their children be explained in terms of the stress hypothesis and the economic hypothesis of McLanahan and Bumpass (1988)?
4. Is the relationship between parental divorce and divorce among their children greater for sons than for daughters?
5. Is the relationship between parental divorce and divorce among their children

lower for a younger generation than for an older generation?

## Data

In order to answer these five questions, we need data on both the histories of the adult children's relationships and the histories of their parents' relationships, as well as data on other relevant characteristics of both parents and children. Moreover, the adult children must not only include young adults, because then their relationship histories would be too short. At the same time the adult children should not be too old, because then the number of divorced parents would be too small for the statistics to be useful. To my knowledge there are only two national representative Dutch datasets which contain this information in sufficient measure. The first is Telepanel which was used by Bosch et al. (1994), and the second is the Netherlands Family Survey 1993 (Ultee and Ganzeboom, 1995). We are using the second dataset in this article. The Netherlands Family Survey contains data on socio-economic characteristics and family backgrounds of married couples in households and of a sub-sample of people living alone. The data was gathered in 1992-1993 in a multi-stage random sample of the Dutch population aged 21 to 64, taken from the Registry of Births, Marriages and Deaths. In this article I will be using the data on the 1,000 respondents who were interviewed in addition to completing written questionnaires, and data on 400 randomly selected surviving parents of the respondents. For further information about the Netherlands Family Survey, I refer the reader to the documentation on this which is available from the principal researchers Ultee en Ganzeboom (1995).

The following variables are used in this article:

*Divorced parents.* The coding of this variable which was constructed as a dichotomous variable was based on the response given by the respondent to the question as to whether he/she was living with both his/her parents at the age of 15. If the response was negative, and the parent with whom the respondent was not living was still alive, I have coded these parents as divorced. This method could have led to a slight overestimate of the real number of divorced parents, because parents who no longer lived together for reasons other than a broken marriage (for example because of war) were still coded as divorced. I also coded parents as divorced if the living parent stated at interview that he or she was divorced. This second stage could have led to a slight underestimate of the real number of divorced parents, because the parents of 600 respondents were not given the opportunity to answer this question. However, it is also possible that this second stage could have led to an overestimate of the real number of divorced parents, since these parents could have divorced after their children became adult. Using this method 65 (7%) of the 1,000 parents of the respondents were coded as divorced. Although this is a small number of divorced parents, it reflects the real distribution of divorced parents of the current adult Dutch population.

*One or both parents deceased before the respondent reached the age of 15.* The coding of this variable, which was constructed as a dichotomous variable, was based on the response given by the respondent to the question as to whether he/she was living with both his/her parents at the age of 15. If the answer was negative and the parent

with whom the respondent was not living was deceased, a code was given for a one-parent family where one or both parents was deceased. Using this method 43 (4%) of the 1,000 parents of the respondents were coded as deceased before the fifteenth year of the respondent.

*Mean year of birth of parents.* This is the average of the year of birth of both parents as given by the respondent. The mean year of birth of all the parents is 1920, with 1906 and 1933 as the years of the standard deviations and 1882 and 1952 as the minimum and maximum.

*Highest level of education completed by father.* The answer given by the respondent was used. The scale runs from not completing primary school to post-graduate education. *Highest level of education completed by mother.* The answer given by the respondent was used. The scale is the same as was used for fathers.

*Occupation of father.* The answer given by the respondent to the question as to what his/her father's occupation was when he/she was 15. The occupations were coded using Sixma and Ultee's (1983) occupational prestige score. The small number of absent scores were scored as average.

*Occupation of mother.* The answer given by the respondent to the question as to what his/her mother's occupation was when he/she was 15. The occupations were coded using Sixma and Ultee's (1983) occupational prestige score. If the mother had never had a paid occupation (31%), she was given the average score for the mothers who had worked at some time (33.32).

*Mother always been a housewife.* This dichotomous variable was derived from the respondent's answer to the question as to what occupation his/her mother had ever had. If the mother had never had a paid occupation (31%), she was coded as a housewife.

*Denomination of both parents.* To construct these variables I used the respondent's reply to the question as to whether each of his/her parents were members of a church while he or she was growing up. Based on the responses for both fathers and mothers, six new dichotomous variables were constructed: neither parent a member of any church, both parents Roman Catholic, both parents members of the Dutch Reformed Church, both parents members of another Protestant church, both parents members of a non-Christian religious community. The reference category was parents of mixed faith.

*Church attendance of both parents.* For this variable I used the respondent's reply to the question as to how often each parent attended church when he or she was young. An average was calculated (slightly less than once a month).

*Respondent divorced.* This variable was constructed from a number of questions which were put to the respondent. The first question asked for his/her present marital status. If the respondent said that he/she was divorced or separated, he/she was coded as divorced. Then the respondent was asked whether he/she had been married before, or whether he/she had cohabited with a different partner on a long-term basis (longer than 1 year). If the answer was in the affirmative, they were asked how the relationship had ended. If the response was that they had separated, the respondent was also given the code for divorced. To limit the category of 'divorced' to those who are legally divorced, could potentially lead to the effect of parental divorce being

underestimated, because, in the Netherlands as elsewhere, the children of divorced parents are more likely to live together without being married (de Graaf, 1996). 112 (12%) of the respondents had at some time ended a long-term relationship or marriage through separation. Although this is almost two times the percentage of parental divorces, this does not represent the final score for these 21 to 64 year-olds. A significant percentage (21%) had never been married or cohabited on a long-term basis, and therefore could not have separated. This also applies, to a lesser degree, to those who had only recently got married or started cohabiting.

*Age of respondent.* Number of years.

*Gender of respondent.* 1 = man, 2 = woman.

*Highest level of education completed by respondent.* The answer given by the respondent was used. The scale is the same as for the father.

*Occupation of respondent.* The answer given by the respondent as to his/her current or most recent job, not counting holiday jobs and temporary work lasting less than three months. The occupation was coded using Sixma en Ultee's (1983) occupational prestige scores. Absent responses were given an average score.

*Denomination of respondent.* To construct these variables the respondent's answer to the question as to whether he or she is currently a member of a church or religious community were used. Based on the responses, six new dichotomous variables were constructed: respondent does not belong to any church, respondent is Roman Catholic, respondent is a member of the Dutch Reformed church, respondent is a member of another Protestant church, respondent is a member of a non-Christian religious community.

*Church attendance of respondent.* For this variable the respondent's answer to the question as to how often he/she goes to church was used (the average was slightly less often than once or a few times per year).

*Age at which the respondent set up home independently.* This variable was based on the respondent's answer to the question as to when he/she first set up home independently (average was just over the age of 22), which may or may not coincide with getting married or starting to cohabit. 45 respondents were still living with their parents.

*Age at which the respondent married for the first time or started a long-term cohabitation.* This variable was based on the respondent's answer to the question as to the year of his/her marriage or the year that he/she entered into a long-term cohabitation for the first time. The lower age of the partners was used to determine this age (average was just over 24). It was not possible to give an age for this variable for 211 of the 1,000 respondents, because they were still unmarried and were not living with anyone. A dichotomous variable, having or not having a relationship, was constructed based on this data.

*Age at which the respondent had his/her first child.* This variable was based on the year of birth of the respondent's first child, including adopted and foster children (average age 27). It was not possible to give an age for this variable for 302 of the 1,000 respondents, because they had no children. A dichotomous variable, having or not having a child, was constructed based on this data.

**The relationship between parental divorce and divorce among their children.**

**Table 1** Divorce among parents and children

	child not divorced	child divorced	total
parents not divorced	787 88.2%	105 11.8%	892
parents divorced	48 73.8%	17 26.2%	65
total	835	122	957

$\chi^2= 9.20; p=0.00$

Table 1 shows the relationship between parental divorce and divorce among their children. Just under 12% of the children of non-divorced parents divorce, as against over 26% of the children of divorced parents. There are only 957 respondents and their parents in this table, because the respondents who had a parent who had died have been removed in order to make a fair comparison in the analyses of this paragraph.

As pointed out in an earlier paragraph, the percentage of divorced children here is an underestimation, because not all of them have had the opportunity to divorce yet. This is why I begin the multivariate analyses with a correction for this underestimate using the age of the respondent and the square of that age, since the older the respondent, the greater the chance that he/she will ever have been divorced. However, the increase starts to drop off above a certain age, when only stable relationships remain and opportunities for new relationships decrease, so the relationship between divorce and age is a parabolic one. In order to estimate this relationship properly, I have used the age of the respondent and the square of the age of the respondent as independent variables. Because divorce is a dichotomous variable, I have used logistic regression. I could not apply event-history analysis because the data did not contain the precise timing of the divorce of the respondent.

**Table 2** The effect (odds ratios) of parental divorce on divorce among their children, controlled for other characteristics of the children and parents

Independent variables	equations			
	1	2	3	4
parents divorced	2.65**	2.70**	2.38**	2.21**
age of respondent		1.25**	1.24**	1.24**
square of age of respondent		0.99**	0.99**	0.99**
church attendance of respondent				0.53**
respondent member other prot. church			5.29**	5.81**
occupation of father				1.02**
-2 Log Likelihood	721.13	709.66	679.64	669.35
N	957	957	957	957

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $0.05 > p > 0.01$ .

In the first equation, reproduced in table 2, parental divorce is the only independent variable, while in equation 2, parental divorce, the age of the respondent and the square of the age of the respondent are the independent variables. The odds ratios are included in table 2: a ratio greater than 1.00 means that the risk of divorce is greater, a ratio of less than 1.00 means that those risks are smaller. Equation 1 shows that the chance that the children of divorced parents will also divorce is 1.65 (2.65-1) times greater than the chance of children of parents who are not divorced. The correction for the age of the respondent does not change this risk ratio very much. The other parameters of equation 2 show that the assumption that the risk of ever having been divorced will rise as years pass by is born out, but that this rise lessens after a period of time to stabilise by the age of 60.

In the next two equations in Table 2, I look into whether the effect of parental divorce on divorce among their children can be explained by the common background of parents and children. In equation 3, I add all the named characteristics of the respondent stepwise (except for educational and occupational attainment, the age of setting up an independent home, the age at marriage and the age at the birth of the first child) to equation 2. Then in equation 4 all the named characteristics of the parents are added to equation 3 stepwise. These additions weaken the effect of parental divorce somewhat (2.21) but it remains significant. This means that the question as to whether there is a positive relationship between parental divorce and divorce among

their children is answered in the affirmative, and also that this relationship cannot be explained in terms of relationships between other characteristics of the parents and children.

**The relationship between early death of parents and divorce among their children.**

The link which has been found between parental divorce and divorce among their children need not have been caused by the divorce, but could also be accounted for by living in a one-parent family. In principle therefore, the three mechanisms which may account for divorce among the children (stress, socialisation and economic deprivation) could also be operating in families where one or more parents are absent due to premature death.

**Table 3** Premature death of one or both parents and divorce among their children

	child not divorced	child divorced	total
parents not deceased	787 88.2%	105 11.8%	892
parent(s) deceased	36 83.7%	7 16.3%	43
total	823	112	935

$\chi^2=0.72; p=0.39$

Table 3 shows the link between the death of one or both parents and divorce among their children. Just under 12% of the children who did not lose a parent due to premature death got divorced, as against over 16% of the children who did lose a parent due to premature death. There are only 935 respondents and their parents in this table, because I have removed the respondents with divorced parents in order to make the comparison fair. The difference in the risk of divorce is not significant (odds ratio 1.46). Then I looked into whether this insignificant effect could be explained by the age of the respondents or the other named characteristics of the respondents and the parents. Analyses were carried out which showed that the absence of a significant effect of early death of one or both parents upon divorce among their children cannot be explained by other common characteristics between parents and children, but these analyses are not reproduced here. This means that the effect of parental divorce on divorce among their children has to be explained by processes surrounding the divorce and not by living in a one-parent family.

## **Stress and economic deprivation**

McLanahan and Bumpass (1988) give two mechanisms which could explain the existence of this relationship and which I am going to test in this paragraph: 1. the stress hypothesis, which states that the stress accompanying parental divorce is a 'push' factor which causes children to leave the parental home earlier to get married and pushes them into taking on adult roles at a younger age; 2. the economic deprivation hypothesis, which states that the economic circumstances following the divorce of parents affects the lives of their children in a negative way (educational and occupational attainment), which may increase the risk of the children divorcing in their turn. I can test these two hypotheses by looking at the effects of parental divorce on the age at which the children set up home independently, the age of their first relationship, age at the birth of their first child, educational attainment and occupational attainment. Because the first two dependent variables are uncensored interval variables, I am using multivariate regression analysis.<sup>4</sup> The last three dependent variables are also interval variables, but they have been censored to the right. A number of respondents have still not left home, have not had a relationship yet or do not have any children yet. This could be connected with the parents' divorce, since, while it is true that the tension between parents may encourage a child to leave the family home earlier than he/she would otherwise have done, a divorce may also lead to a stronger bond between the remaining parent and the child, which may cause the child to stay at home longer. While the tension between the parents may prompt the child to enter a relationship earlier than he/she would otherwise have done, on the other hand the divorce may make the child anxious about entering into relationships. For this reason it is necessary to correct for this censorship to the right and I have used Cox regression in these three cases. The parameters reproduced in these three equations are comparable with those from the logistic regressions. In all six equations, parental divorce is added to the equation first, then age of respondent and the square of the age of the respondent, after which the other characteristics of the parents and children are added stepwise (except for educational and occupational attainment, age at setting up an independent home, age at first relationship and age at birth of first child).

**Table 4** Effects of parental divorce on educational and occupational attainment, and ages at which children leave home, get married and have their first child, controlled for other characteristics of children and parents.

Independent variables	equations		odds ratios		
	$\beta$		age leave home	age first relationship	age first child
	educational attainment	occup. attain.			
parents divorced	-0.04	-0.05	1.23	1.18	1.17
parents' year of birth			1.01**	1.01**	0.99**
education of mother	0.17**	0.10**			
education of father	0.22**	0.17**		0.92**	0.92**
occupation of father	0.17**	0.13**	1.07**		
occupation of mother			1.01**		
mother a housewife		-0.06*			
church att. parents	0.09**				
parents Reformed		-0.09**			1.39**
age of respondent	-0.14**	0.10**			
gender	-0.09**	-0.18**	1.61**	1.27*	1.54**
church att. respondent			0.90**		
resp. Roman Catholic			0.82*		
resp. other Prot. church				0.59*	
Adjusted $R^2$	0.24	0.11			
-2 Log Likelihood			10868.38	9367.82	8187.03

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $0.05 > p > 0.01$

Table 4 reproduces the results of these five equations. There is no evidence to support the economic deprivation hypothesis. While it is true to say that the betas of parental divorce do leave the expected negative mark on both educational and occupational attainment of their children, they are not significant. This result means that the effects of parental divorce upon children in the Netherlands do not come about due to economic or cultural deprivation. It also means that the children of divorced parents manage to catch up their educational lost ground in the long term, because I found that these Dutch adults were not as far behind in their education as the children and adolescents of divorced parents investigated in earlier Dutch studies.

Table 4 does not provide any evidence to support the stress hypothesis either, if we take account of the fact that these age variables have been censored.<sup>5</sup> There are no significant effects of parental divorce on the three dependent variables, which measure aspects of the children's first relationships.

**Table 5** The effect of parental divorce (odds ratios) on the divorce of their children, controlled for significant characteristics of children and parents

Independent variables	equations			
	1	2	3	4
parents divorced	1.91*	2.00*	2.74	1.41
age of respondent	1.19*	1.32**	1.25**	1.26**
square of age of respondent	0.99*	0.99**	0.99**	0.99**
church att. respondent	0.57**	0.59**	0.54**	0.54**
respondent member diff. church	5.23**	5.07**	5.81**	5.87**
occupation of father	1.01**	1.01**	1.02**	1.01**
age leave home	0.89**	0.91**		
children or no children		0.42**		
parents divorced*gender			0.86	
parents divorced*generation				2.49
-2 Log Likelihood	651.62	642.27	669.29	667.15
N	915	915	957	957

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $0.05 < p < 0.01$

Next I added the variables for educational and occupational attainment and age of leaving home, entering a first relationship and birth of a first child to equation 4 in Table 2 in new logistic regression equations, in order to see whether these variables have a significant effect on divorce among the children. Only the variable, age of leaving home, has a significant effect, the other four variables do not. The significant parameters of this equation are in equation 1 in Table 5. A comparison of the parameters of equation 4 in Table 2 and equation 1 in Table 5 shows that the younger age at which the children of divorced parents leave home to live on their own accounts for part of the effect of parental divorce on their divorce: the risk ratio drops from 2.21 to 1.91. At the same time, the significant parameter of parental divorce in the first equation of Table 5 makes clear that early independence does not explain the intergenerational transmission of divorce. In other words, the stress hypothesis only accounts for part of the effect of parental divorce. The remainder of the effect can only be explained by the socialisation hypothesis. Having or not having a child also seems to have an effect on divorce. When the children have one or more children themselves, their risk of divorce is reduced. This can be seen from equation 2 in Table 5. However, the effect of parental divorce on that of their children is not affected by this factor.

### Differences between sons and daughters

Table 2 shows that the gender of the child has no significant effect on that child's risk of divorce. Neither should there be any such effect, since an equal number of men and women are involved in divorce. To test whether the degree of intergenerational

transmission of divorce differs for sons and daughters, I added the interaction between the gender of the child and whether or not the parents were divorced to equation 4 in Table 2 as an independent variable. The result is given in equation 3 of Table 5. As the parameter of this interaction between gender and parents' divorced or not divorced is not significant, I conclude that there is no significant difference between divorce to the sons and daughters of divorced parents.

### **Is intergenerational transmission of divorce decreasing?**

Table 2 shows that the mean year of birth of the parents does not have a significant effect on their children's divorce, if we control for the age of the children and the square of the age of the children. To test whether the degree of intergenerational transmission of divorce risk differs between older and younger generations, I added the interaction between generation and whether their children are divorced or not to equation 4 in Table 2 as an independent variable. Generation is constructed as a dichotomous variable, where parents whose mean year of birth is before 1923 are counted as the older generation (score 0) and the parents whose mean year of birth is after 1922 are counted as the younger generation (score 1).<sup>6</sup> The result is given in equation 4 of Table 5. As the parameter of this interaction between generation and whether or not the parents are divorced is not significant, I conclude that there is no significant difference between the divorce of children from the older and younger generations of Dutch adults.

### **Conclusion**

A positive link has been found between parental divorce and the risk of their children divorcing and this link cannot be explained in terms of relationships between other characteristics of the parents and children. This means that divorce clearly has a long-term effect on the lives of the children of divorced parents. Furthermore, this long-term effect does not disappear when the educational and occupational attainment of the divorcing parents is taken into account. This confirms the findings of other Dutch researchers, Manting (1994), Dykstra (1996), de Graaf (1996) and Spruijt and De Goede (1996), even after common characteristics of the parents and children have been controlled for, and it is in keeping with research findings elsewhere in the USA and Germany.

There is no positive link between the premature death of one of the parents and the divorce among their children, and the absence of any such link cannot be explained in terms of relationships between other characteristics of the parents and children. This means that growing up in a one-parent family does not, in itself, increase divorce. Since Klijzing (1992) unfortunately neglected to distinguish between divorce and death, he found no effect. It is the experience of parents splitting up, and not the experience of growing up in a one-parent family, which increases divorce among the children. This also means that not all life crises brought about by drastic changes during childhood and youth increase divorce in the long term. The findings of this

article cannot be taken as a warning against the single parent family.

The link between parental divorce and divorce among the children cannot be explained by McLanahan and Bumpass's (1988) economic deprivation hypothesis. This refutes, first and foremost, the suggestion that the low income and poor education of the single parent is responsible for the effects of divorce on children. Even when the effects of the age of setting up home independently, and having or not having children, are taken into account, the positive link between parental divorce and divorce among their children remains. The only possible explanations which remain after that are the deviant socialisation of the children of divorced parents and the effect of stigmatisation upon the children of divorced parents.

The link between parental divorce and the divorce among their children is the same for sons as for daughters.

The link between parental divorce and the divorce among their children is the same for a younger generation of adults as for an older generation of adults. No support has been found, therefore, for the suggestion put forward by family researchers that the intergenerational transmission of divorce will weaken as divorce becomes a more normal event. This finding could also be interpreted as a provisional rejection of the stigmatisation hypothesis because, if stigmatisation were to offer a good explanation of the intergenerational transmission of divorce, this transmission would have to decrease in the younger generation. There is no support in national or international literature either for the hypothesis that stigmatisation is an important cause of the effects of parental divorce on children.

Growing up in a one-parent family does not increase divorce, but if that one-parent family has been created by divorce, this has long-term consequences.

## Notes

1. There are no literature references at all in this passage on the effects of divorce on children.
2. Manting uses the duration of the first relationship as one of several characteristics of the marriages of these women.
3. The use of year of the sample in stead of the year of parental divorce by Wolfinger makes his result less valid, because the year of the sample will have a different meaning as year of parental divorce.
4. Pairwise deletion of missing cases.
5. There is a negative effect of parental divorce on the age at which the respondent left the family home to live independently, even after other relevant characteristics of parents and children have been controlled for, if we only look at the age of the children who have already left home. Evidently some of the children of divorced parents stay at home longer, but if they do leave, they do so at a younger age than the children of non-divorced parents.
6. This boundary was chosen so that the number of divorced parents would be about the same in both generations. Using 1923 as the mean year of birth of the parents means that their children were about 15 years old in the 1960s.

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