Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce – the Swedish Trend

Michael Gähler and Juho Härkönen

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By Michael Gähler[1] and Juho Härkönen[2]

Abstract:

We analyze birth cohort patterns in the intergenerational transmission of divorce and family dissolution in Sweden. It is well known that parental separation is associated with a higher risk of own divorce, but less is known whether these associations have changed or remained stable over time. There are strong theoretical reasons to expect changes in this pattern, but there are only few empirical studies, partly due to the lack of appropriate data. Furthermore, the studies that exist yield contradictory conclusions (see, e.g., Amato and Cheadle 2005; Dronkers and Härkönen 2008; Engelhardt, Trappe and Dronkers 2002; Li and Wu 2008; Teachman 2002; Wolfinger 1999, 2011). We use population register data from six birth cohorts (born 1950-75) of Swedish men and women to study cohort patterns in the intergenerational transmission of divorce and family dissolution during a time of rapid family and social change. Our findings show no trend over the birth cohorts.

Keywords: intergenerational transmission, divorce, birth cohort, register data, Sweden

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Introduction

Decades of research has shown that parental divorce is associated with various negative outcomes in offspring (Amato 2000, 2010; Amato and James 2010; Bernardi et al. 2013), not only in the short-term (Amato and Keith 1991b) but also in the long-term (Amato and Keith 1991a) and even across more than two generations (Amato and Cheadle 2005). One of the most consistent and well-documented findings in this field is that individuals who have seen their parents divorce or separate are more likely than individuals from intact families of origin to divorce or separate themselves. Thus, increasing divorce and separation rates are, at least partly, due to a self-generating process, i.e. the intergenerational transmission of divorce. This link holds not only for the U.S. (Amato and Keith 1991a; Wolfinger 2011) but for most other countries as well (see Diekmann and Schmidheiny 2008; Dronkers and Härkönen 2008 for comparative studies) and is even further increased if *both* spouses were raised in split-up families (Amato 1996; Wolfinger 2005).

According to Amato (1996) there are three mediating mechanisms behind the intergenerational transmission of divorce. First, young adults from dissolved families of origin are more likely to be exposed to socioeconomic settings and to make life course decisions that increase their risk for union dissolution, e.g., quit school, leave the parental home early, and initiate marital and non-marital unions and have children earlier in life than their peers from intact families. Early family formation and scant socioeconomic resources are both associated with higher union dissolution risks. Second, they hold less negative attitudes toward divorce and feel less commitment to marriage. Third, they are more likely to exhibit patterns of interpersonal behavior that increase the risk of union dissolution, e.g. anger, jealousy, and insufficient ability to communicate. All these potential mechanisms have received empirical support (Amato and DeBoer 2001; Gähler, Hong and Bernhardt 2009). Thus, parental divorce and other circumstances surrounding this event, seem to lead children into other life paths than children from intact families, and to enter adulthood with other experiences and attitudes, increasing their own risk for divorce.

But does family dissolution mean the same to children and adolescents today as it used to? There are indeed reasons to claim that as divorce has become more common, its meaning and impact on the lives of those involved has changed. Indications of this are that people's attitudes towards divorce, and "alternative" family forms in general, have become more liberal, and that social stigma associated with the event has, accordingly, decreased (Sigle-Rushton, Hobcraft and Kiernan 2005; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001). Children also

remain in much more frequent contact with their absent parents than previously (Amato, Meyers and Emery 2009 [USA]; Gähler and Palmtag 2014; Statistics Sweden 1995, 2003, 2007 [Sweden]) and parents may have become more aware of children's needs and of how family dissolution affects children. Hence, today's parents might be better able to help their children alleviate any negative effects of parental divorce (Sigle-Rushton et al. 2005). These changes imply that living conditions for children from intact and dissolved families have become more equal and, thus, that the divorce "effect" has diminished over time.

The picture gets more complex, however, when we take other developments into account. During recent decades in Sweden, maternal employment rates have increased and a number of family and social policy programs have been introduced to reduce income dispersion between family types (Gähler 2001) and improve economic conditions for lone mothers (Hobson and Takahashi 1997). Although income differences are by no means eliminated, poverty levels are still lower, and employment levels higher, for single mothers in Sweden than in many other countries (Brady and Burroway 2012; Destro and Brady 2011), indicating that the link between childhood family type and young adults' life course choices and socio-economic conditions has diminished. The development may have been counterbalanced, however, by an increasing negative social selection into divorce. Whereas divorce was previously reserved for society's higher strata, it is now, just as predicted by Goode (1962), more common in the working class and among low educated, low income groups (Gähler and Palmtag 2014; Sandström 2012 [Sweden]; de Graaf and Kalmijn 2006a [the Netherlands]; McLanahan 2004 [USA]; Härkönen and Dronkers 2006 [seventeen countries]). The complexity of the issue is underscored by the finding that respondents from dissolved families are far less likely to claim economic difficulties during their childhood today than they were a century ago, but that the relative difference compared to respondents from intact childhood families has rather increased (Gähler and Palmtag 2014).

With increasing union instability, research also suggests that the character of divorce has changed. When social and economic barriers to divorce are low, couples may struggle less to avoid union dissolution (Wolfinger 2005). In accordance, severe divorce motives like violence and infidelity have become less common whereas relational and psychological motives have become more common (de Graaf and Kalmijn 2006). In Sweden, parental divorce has also become less strongly associated with severe family dissension during the last century (Gähler and Palmtag 2014). This implies that the interaction patterns and relational skills of children of divorce are less affected than they used to be and, consequently, that their relative divorce risk has diminished. This may, however, be neutralized by a decrease in

marital commitment. Parents who leave a low-conflict marriage may send a strong signal that doing so is an acceptable alternative to a seemingly well-functioning marriage (cf. Wolfinger 2005, pp. 27-30). In accordance, studies show that children's divorce risk is higher when parents' divorce ended a low-conflict marriage rather than a high-conflict marriage (Amato and DeBoer 2001). Thus, if low-level conflict divorce becomes more common over time, then this may rather increase the strength of the intergenerational transmission of divorce.

We have sketched a rather complex picture of what could be expected of the development in the intergenerational transmission of divorce over time. Whereas some changes surrounding parental divorce would lead us to believe that this link has weakened, others rather point to stability or even a strengthened association between parental and own divorce over time. Thus far only a handful of studies have dealt with this issue. This may partly be due to the lack of appropriate data. Ideally, data should cover a long time period, maintain identical measures over time, and be based on identical sampling procedures, but such data are rare (Amato 2001). Furthermore, the few studies that do exist yield inconclusive results and are mostly based on American data (see below). Thus, only little is known about the situation for other societies. With this study we extend present knowledge by providing results for Sweden. Comparison across societies, albeit indirectly, could at least give an indicative answer to the question which mechanisms and driving forces may govern any change in the intergenerational transmission of divorce. At our disposal we have high-quality and highly reliable register data that cover the entire Swedish population, born 1950-1975. Data span over a time period before and after which the divorce rate increased rapidly in Sweden and cover the most recent possible birth cohorts.

Previous Research on Trends in Divorce Transmission

One of the first American studies on trends in divorce transmission was conducted by Kulka and Weingarten (1979). They use survey data from 1957 and 1976 to compare how the strength in the intergenerational transmission of divorce has developed for men and women over time. Whereas the association seems to weaken by survey year for women it is strengthened for men but the general trend is unclear as no formal test of change over time is conducted. Moreover, time under risk for divorce is not controlled for. Hence the results cannot be straightforwardly interpreted. McLanahan and Bumpass (1988) use cross-sectional data from the 1982 National Survey of Family Growth, containing women born between 1938

and 1968, to show that the heightened risk for divorce among women from disrupted family backgrounds was similar for marriage cohorts before and after 1970.

Whereas these two studies analyze the intergenerational transmission of divorce as one of many outcomes, Wolfinger's (1999) study is one of the first to explicitly deal with the parent-offspring divorce trend. Here the General Social Surveys from 1973 to 1996 are used to analyze whether respondents report ever having been divorced and finds that the rate of divorce transmission has declined substantially over time. The interaction between parental divorce and survey year is negative and significant and hardly affected by the introduction of controls for e.g. parent's and respondent's education, catholic affiliation, race, and occupational prestige. According to Wolfinger's estimates, in 1973, respondents with divorced parents at age 16 were almost three times as likely to have experienced a divorce themselves compared to respondents from an intact family background. A quarter of a century later, in 1996, the corresponding risk was only 1.5, a reduction close to 50 percent.

Teachman (2002) uses five rounds of the National Survey of Family Growth, including women only and covering marriages formed in 1950-1984, to analyze if, and how, the impacts of several determinants for divorce, including age at marriage, premarital birth, premarital conception, age difference between spouses, education, catholic affiliation, race, and parental divorce, have changed over marriage cohorts. Except for race (the excess divorce risk for blacks versus whites decreases significantly over time), the association between these determinants and divorce is stable during the period. Thus, unlike Wolfinger, Teachman finds no change in the rate of divorce transmission over time.

This finding is supported by Amato and Cheadle (2005) who, using data from the study of Marital Instability Over the Life Course, find that the effect of parental divorce on own divorce is not associated with decade of birth (1920s-1970s) and Li and Wu (2008) who find no trend in their analyses, based on data from the National Survey of Families and Households, of intergenerational transmission of divorce over marriage cohorts 1935-1954, 1955-1974, and 1975-1984. Li and Wu also question the conclusion reached by Wolfinger (1999) and suggest that it results from a statistical artifact as Wolfinger does not take marital duration into account. According to Li and Wu, Wolfinger's finding of a decrease in the rate of divorce transmission over time could be due to the fact that later marriage cohorts were exposed to the risk of divorce for a shorter time period.

In a recent response, Wolfinger (2011) argues that right censoring would only produce biased results if it affected individuals from divorced and intact families of origin differently. Wolfinger also conducts new analyses on General Social Survey data. In order to avoid the

problem with right censoring, Wolfinger makes use of the fact that almost all divorces take place within the first thirty years of marriage. By studying such "completed" marriage cohorts for survey years 1973-1994, Wolfinger again concludes that the rate of divorce transmission has declined over survey years (and birth and marriage cohorts), by even more than the 50 percent that was found in his previous study (Wolfinger 1999). It should be noted, however, that the strategy of analyzing only completed marriage cohorts by necessity cannot be applied to study the development for recent years. Wolfinger includes marriage cohorts 1901-1964 and birth cohorts 1884-1948 in his study. That is, Wolfinger's study does not mirror the situation for cohorts born after 1948.

Results from the few studies on European countries also show inconsistent results. One German study uses data from the 1988 family survey of the German Youth Institute to compare divorce risks for cohorts born 1933-1945 with cohorts born after 1945. In both groups, respondents growing up with divorced parents are clearly more prone to divorce themselves. There is a tendency, however, that the association is weaker for later born cohorts but no formal test of change is conducted (Diekmann and Engelhardt 1999). Another German study uses data from the German Life History Study, including West and East Germany. An intergenerational transmission of divorce is found in both countries but the association seems to weaken over the three marriage cohorts under study: before 1970, 1970-1979, and 1980-1989. However, the change does not reach statistical significance (Engelhardt, Trappe and Dronkers 2002). Finally, Dronkers and Härkönen (2008) use data from the Fertility and Family Surveys to study the intergenerational transmission of divorce in eighteen countries (including the U.S.). Over and above the finding that this link is strongly significant in all but one country (Poland), they also find, when countries are pooled, that the link is negatively correlated with the extent of parental divorce. It could, then, be hypothesized that there is a trend in the intergenerational transmission of divorce as divorce rates have increased in all countries. An empirical test does not, however, corroborate this hypothesis. In fact, in none of the countries is the interaction between parental divorce and birth cohort (1938-1981) significant. In other words, not for one single of the eighteen countries do Dronkers and Härkönen find an indication of change over time in the intergenerational transmission of divorce. It should be noted, however, that the number of cases (marriages) in individual countries is limited, i.e. any statistical association needs to be rather strong in order to reach significance.

To conclude, the few existing studies which were able to study the trend for the intergenerational transmission of divorce directly, are mostly based on American data and

yield inconsistent results, although most seem to point in the direction of no or limited change over time. A problem with some of these studies is that they are based on relatively small-scale survey data and, thus, estimates of any change are uncertain. We overcome this problem by using Swedish population register data.

Data and Methods

The analyses in this paper are based on a compilation of Swedish register data, consisting of the entire Swedish population during the period 1950-2007. Data from different sources were matched in the *Sweden in Time – Activities and Relations (STAR) database*. For the purpose of this paper we use census data, the multi-generation register, the register on changes in civil status, the Sickness Insurance and Labor Market Studies Database (LISA), and annual total population registers.

We analyze birth cohorts born in 1950, 1955, 1960, 1965, 1970, and 1975. We formed our first dependent variable—divorce from first marriage—from the register on civil status changes and it runs from 1968 through 2007 and registers these changes on monthly accuracy. Of the men and women in our cohorts, 250,480 married and 66,604 divorced a first marriage during our observation period.

Sweden is widely perceived as a "forerunner" in the second demographic transition, one aspect of which is the radically declined marriage rate (Council of Europe 2008) and a general decoupling of marriage and family formation (Andersson and Philipov 2002). Therefore, in order to not focus only on a potentially selected sample of those who married, we formed a second dependent variable which measured family dissolution, that is, separations from coresidential unions with common children, regardless of marital status. This variable was based on the multigenerational register and annual total population registers (1968-2007) and measured with yearly accuracy. The latter registers contain identifiers of the property (building)—but not the actual apartment—a person resided in at the end of the year. We used this information together with information on children's biological parents (from the multigeneration registers) to infer parental coresidence at the birth of the child. Previous research using a similar set-up to identify parents' coresidence has shown that parents who most likely were living together when the child is born were not necessarily registered in the same building (as shown by the fact that children born later in the year are less likely to have both parents registered in the building at the end of that year) (Thomson and Eriksson 2013).

For this reason, we included unions in which the parents were not registered in the same building in the child's year of birth but were found together the next year.[1] In all cases, we set the duration of the union to begin from the year in which the first common child in a coresidential union was born. Table 1 shows how the age of "family formation" was lower than that of marriage, corresponding to findings of postponement in marriages and a re-ordering of marriage and childbirth (Andersson 2000; Ohlsson-Wijk 2011). We identified 244,283 such unions, 78,102 of which dissolved during the observation period.

Our main independent variable is parental separation, which is a dummy variable that is unity if the parents lived together at birth but separated by age 15 of the child and zero if the parents were living together up till that age. Our main reason for choosing age 15 as the cut-off point had to with the structure of the data and the quintannual censuses the childhood family structure histories were based on. Given our focus on experience of parental separation, we excluded those born to a single parent, whose parent(s) died, and whose parents both emigrated. This variable was constructed on the basis of census data that were collected every five years from 1960 to 1990. This information enabled us to create accurate family structure histories, in five year intervals, for the cohorts born from 1960 to 1975. For the earlier cohorts, i.e. 1950 and 1955, we had to infer the family history up until 1960 from this census. We did this by resorting to additional information of whether the parent could be identified and of the civil statuses of the parents. Given this "pre-second demographic transition period" of near-universal marriage (Ohlsson-Wijk 2011), we believe that this information enabled us to well separate those whose parents did not separate (i.e. divorce) from those whose parents did, while at the same time being able to exclude those whose parent died or who were born to a single mother. Actually, the biggest difficulty arose in separating the latter two groups from one another. This does not, however, affect the analyses conducted here. Our figures correspond to earlier findings, as discussed below (for further details on the construction of the childhood family type variable, see Appendix).

Our control variables are education of the father and of the mother[2], year of birth (five dummy variables, with 1950 as the reference year), and age at first marriage or at the beginning of first union with common children (in practice, at birth of first common child).

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[1] The fact that the registers contain information only of the building in which one resides, and not the actual apartment, means that it is impossible to identify cohabiting unions without children. We consider this as a minor drawback, however, given the huge heterogeneity in the seriousness of the relationship of such couples, especially at the beginning of the cohabitation.

[2] We choose to control for both parent's education, i.e., in the case of parental union dissolution we also control for the non-custodial parent's education. Studies show that child resources are otherwise underestimated (Gähler, Jonsson and Låftman 2009).

We chose this restricted set of control variables to avoid possible over-controlling with variables that are better seen as intermediate ones (such as own and partner's education). Information on parents' education was retrieved from the 1970 census (the first year in which this information existed) and from the Sickness Insurance and Labor Market Studies Database (LISA) in 1990. These were used to construct a measure of parents' education at age 5-20 years. Since parents' education could first be measured only in 1970, this led to some missing cases particularly for the 1950 cohort. The educational levels were coded into five categories: Compulsory schooling (up to 9 years) or less, or missing information (reference category); two or three years of additional vocational training; academically oriented high-school (12 years); lower tertiary education (up to 14 years); university degree.

We analyzed the data using log-logistic hazard regression, which is a suitable method for analysis of data on divorce and separations given the non-monotonic bell-shape of the hazard that is allowed (Blossfeld, Golsch and Rohwer 2007). Our models included the above specified independent and control variables and interactions between parental separation and year of birth to test for trends in the intergenerational transmission of divorce and family dissolution.[3] In addition to examining the parameter estimates for the separate interaction terms, we used likelihood-ratio tests to assess whether the interactions improved model fit. For divorces, we used month as our duration variable, whereas for family dissolutions the time variable was year. We reran our models for divorce using year as the time variable. The results remained robust. Given the size of our data, we flagged estimates only at the 1 % and 0.1 % levels of significance.

We further checked the robustness of our results to the choice of the specific method by re-running them with Cox proportional hazards regressions (parental divorce did not meet the proportional hazards assumption, tested using Schoenfeld residuals, and was therefore not used as the primary method). Our conclusions remained robust: the main difference was that Cox-regressions suggested that the intergenerational transmission of divorce and family dissolution became *stronger* in the youngest cohort (however, this result disappeared when censoring at 12 years of marriage/union duration).

Descriptive statistics for variables used in the analyses are displayed in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

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[3] As noted, previous studies have used different indicators on change over time in the intergenerational transmission of divorce, either birth cohort (as here), marriage cohort or survey year. Wolfinger (2011) tests all three and finds similar results independent of measure used, indicating high correlation.

Results

As mentioned, our analyses are based on six birth cohorts, 1950, 1955, 1960, 1965, 1970, and 1975. These birth cohorts cover a period that witnessed a rapid increase in the divorce rate. For the earliest born cohorts here, i.e. the 1950s, the share growing up with both their biological parents throughout childhood (up to age 16) reached an all-time high (for even earlier cohorts it was still relatively common to experience the death of one or both parents). Within just a couple of decades this situation was turned around into an all-time low, mainly due to the large increase in parental divorce and separation (Gähler and Palmtag 2014). This development is displayed in Figure 1, which is based on the census data used for the present analyses. It should be noted that these figures refer to the situation for our analytical sample, i.e. Swedish-born children, born into a family with two biological parents and not experiencing the death of either or both parents during their childhood. In other words, foreign-born children and children born into a single-parent family and/or with experience of parental death during childhood are not included. Of the children born in 1950 only 7 percent experienced a divorce or separation between their parents. For the cohort born a quarter of a century later, i.e. in 1975, the corresponding share was threefold, 22 percent.

[Figure 1 about here]

The next two figures display the development in divorce and family stability from the point of view of cohorts' own unions. Figure 2 shows Kaplan-Meier curves for the stability of legal marriages for the marriages contracted by those in our birth cohorts. They show how marital stability has decreased over the birth cohorts, and the most notable changes took place between cohorts 1950 and 1965. Figure 3 shows similar developments for family dissolution, that is, separation from unions with common children. Whereas the trends are similar, it is clear that marriages continued to be more stable than the more inclusive group of all unions. After ten years, 75 to 80 % of marriages were intact, the corresponding figure stood between approximately 62 and 78 % for all unions.

[Figures 2 and 3 about here]

Next we turn our focus to the main issue for this paper, i.e. the relationship between parental family dissolution and own divorce across the six birth cohorts to detect any cohort

differences. Table 2 presents the shares of divorces and family dissolutions 10 years after the start of the union. Just like previous studies, we find a strong parent-offspring divorce link. This descriptive table already shows how the gap in union stability by parental separation has remained very stable over the cohorts covered. Those whose parents had separated had 11-14 percentage points higher divorce rates throughout. The corresponding difference in family dissolutions varied between 15 and 18 percentage points.

[Table 2 about here]

The results (for all and separately for men and for women) from the loglogistic hazard regression models for divorce are shown in Table 3. The association between parents' and children's separation is slightly stronger for women. To test whether the findings of cohort stability in the intergenerational transmission of union stability remains, we include interactions between birth cohorts and parental family dissolution. We do, indeed, find one significant interaction term, for women born in 1965, for whom the parent-offspring divorce link is weaker than for women born in 1950. Otherwise we do not find any consistent pattern. For men we find no significant interaction term and, furthermore, estimates for both genders are close to 0, clearly indicating no trend in the intergenerational transmission of divorce in Sweden, at least not for the birth cohorts under study here.

[Table 3 about here]

The Swedish family structure, however, is no longer fully captured by marriage solely. Nowadays cohabitation is norm among young adults in Sweden (Bernhardt 1998; 2002) and only a minority of all children (45,5 percent in 2012) is born to married women (Statistics Sweden 2014, Table 4.25).[4] As a result, *divorce* is no longer equal to *family dissolution* but, rather, only one part of it, no more influential on family instability than *separation* among cohabiting couples. Thus, if the latter unions are not accounted for we cannot say whether there is a trend in the intergenerational transmission of family dissolution or not. If, for example, less committed couples to an increasing extent choose cohabitation, then this may actually affect the intergenerational transmission of divorce as only highly committed couples choose to marry (although the direction of this potential bias is not obvious). Therefore we

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[4] In due course, however, a large proportion of the cohabiting parents marry (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004).

next turn our attention to cohabiting couples with common children, i.e. coresidential unions that can be claimed to be viewed as "serious" by the partners. In Table 4, results from this analysis are displayed. Again, as found in Table 2, individuals from a dissolved family background are more likely than others to experience family dissolution themselves, and, again, there is no trend in this association over time. Thus the main conclusion from this analysis is that the results do not differ in any substantial way from the results that were previously presented for formal divorce. In other words, patterns for the trend in intergenerational transmission of divorce and intergenerational transmission of family dissolution respectively are equal. Only focusing on either of them, then, would not lead to biased conclusions.

[Table 4 about here]

Concluding Discussion

In this paper, Kaplan-Meier estimates and log-logistic hazard models on register data that cover the entire Swedish-born population, born in 1950, 1955, 1960, 1965, 1970, and 1975, were used to study the trend in the intergenerational transmission of divorce and family dissolution (for couples with common children). These birth cohorts cover a period in which parental divorce rates increased dramatically in Sweden. During the 1950s and early 1960s, family dissolution was rare as previously high levels of parental mortality had decreased to a minimum and parental divorce rates had yet not started to increase. Only decades later, i.e. during the 1970s and 1980s, the divorce rate had increased to a level where it has remained ever since, and increased parental cohabitation, with its heightened risk for dissolution compared to formal marriage, increased the number of children in split-up families substantially (Gähler and Palmtag 2014; Thomson and Eriksson 2013). Despite the marked change in family childhood structure during the period, we find no indication of change over time in the intergenerational transmission of divorce, i.e. independent of birth cohort the risk for union dissolution is higher for those who have seen their parents divorce or separate, but the increased risk does not change significantly between cohorts. These results remain also after controls for age at start of marriage/co-residential union, and mother's and father's education, and they are valid for men and women alike.

Our findings deviate from two previous American studies (Wolfinger 1999; 2011), both based on General Social Survey data, and two German studies (Diekmann and Engelhardt

1999; Engelhardt, Trappe and Dronkers 2002), which suggest that the intergenerational transmission of divorce has decreased over time. It should be noted, however, that one of the American studies (Wolfinger 2011) covers a relatively early time period (marriages initiated 1901-1964) and that in the German studies there is either no formal test of change over time (Diekmann and Engelhardt 1999) or the change does not reach statistical significance (Engelhardt, Trappe and Dronkers 2002). Instead, our findings accord with a number of other American studies (Amato and Cheadle 2005; Li and Wu 2008; McLanahan and Bumpass 1988; Teachman 2002) and a comparative study including eighteen countries (Dronkers and Härkönen 2008) showing no time trend. An important advantage with our study compared to these previous studies is that it is based on large-scale population data, which means that even very small changes over time would have been identified in our data. In fact, however, the interaction estimates for parental divorce by birth year in our models hover closely around 0.

This stability over time may come as a surprise given the numerous arguments for decreasing differences in living conditions between individuals from intact and non-intact family backgrounds. As parental divorce has become a more common experience for children it should imply that social stigma surrounding this event has decreased. Moreover, parents may be more aware than they used to be of the (negative) effects of divorce on children and their needs following divorce, contact frequency between children and non-resident parent has increased, and severe divorce motives (e.g. domestic violence) are likely to be less common than they used to be. Still, then, the strength in the parent-offspring divorce link has not decreased. How should this finding be interpreted? One possibility is of course that these changes did not affect the relative difference in divorce risk between individuals from different family backgrounds. Another possibility is that these changes were neutralized by other changes that appeared simultaneously. Previous research has shown that children of divorce are less committed to their own marriages and express more liberal attitudes toward divorce and that this, in turn, contributes to their higher divorce risk. It could be argued that these differences have increased further. As noted above, divorce motives have become less severe over time and children of divorce are less likely to experience family conflict today than previously. Studies show that low-conflict parental divorce has a stronger effect on offspring marital instability than high-conflict parental divorce (Amato and DeBoer 2001). Parents leaving a low-conflict marriage indicate to their children that divorce is an acceptable option also for marriages that do not function well, and that marital commitment is negotiable. Thus, in relation to individuals from an intact family background, it is reasonable to assume

that individuals from a non-intact family background have become even less negative regarding their attitudes toward divorce.

There has also been an increasing negative social selection into divorce over time. Whereas divorce was previously reserved for higher socio-economic strata of society, divorce is now more common among the low educated from lower social classes (Gähler and Palmtag 2014; Sandström 2012 [Sweden]; de Graaf and Kalmijn 2006a [the Netherlands]; McLanahan 2004 [USA]; Härkönen and Dronkers 2006 [seventeen countries]). Thus, young adults from a non-intact family background are now more likely than previously to enter a co-residential relationship with scant economic resources, which increases their risk for union dissolution (Amato 1996). These changes speak in favor of an *increasing* difference in divorce risks over time between individuals from intact and non-intact family backgrounds and could, thus, serve to counterbalance the changes referred to above, pointing to decreasing differences. In our study, however, we controlled for parental education, thus ruling out at least one possible counterbalancing factor. Whether other such factors can explain the surprising stability is left for future research.

To conclude, by using Swedish population data we have added highly reliable knowledge for a European country to the research field of intergenerational transmission of union dissolution and its possible change over time. Still, further studies, for other countries, based on large-scale data, would be most valuable. An important challenge for these studies would be to identify the mechanisms governing any trend found.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1.Descriptive statistics for variables used in the analyses

		Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Divorce		0.273	0.445	0	1
Family dissolution		0.343	0.475	0	1
Marriage duration (months)		194.49	120.43	0	479
Union duration (years)		12.96	9.75	0	40
Parental separation		0.152	0.358	0	1
Mother's education	Lowest/miss.	0.604	0.489	0	1
	Vocational	0.242	0.428	0	1
	High school	0.037	0.189	0	1
	Lower tert.	0.059	0.343	0	1
	University	0.058	0.232	0	1
Father's education	Lowest/miss.	0.564	0.496	0	1
	Vocational	0.190	0.392	0	1
	High school	0.120	0.324	0	1
	Lower tert.	0.045	0.207	0	1
	University	0.082	0.274	0	1
Age at marriage		28.71	6.01	15	57
Age at family formation		27.50	5.08	14	57
Birth year	1950	0.169	0.375	0	1
	1955	0.159	0.366	0	1
	1960	0.154	0.361	0	1
	1965	0.187	0.390	0	1
	1970	0.164	0.373	0	1
	1975	0.161	0.368	0	1

Table 2. Divorces and family dissolutions after 10 years of start of union by parental separation and birth cohort (%). Kaplan-Meier estimates.

	Divorce		Family dissolution	
	Parents not separated	Parents separated	Parents not separated	Parents separated
Cohort 1950	15	26	21	36
Cohort 1955	16	30	23	41
Cohort 1960	17	30	24	41
Cohort 1965	19	32	26	43
Cohort 1970	18	30	26	41
Cohort 1975	20	33	31	47

Table 3. Cohort patterns in the intergenerational transmission of divorce, log-logistic hazard regressions (standard errors in parentheses). β-coefficients

	All	Men	Women
Parental separation	0.59 **	0.49 **	0.69 **
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)
*Born 1955 (Ref 1950)	0.03	0.07	-0.00
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
*Born 1960	-0.04	-0.06	-0.05
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.05)
*Born 1965	-0.06	0.01	-0.13*
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.05)
*Born 1970	-0.04	-0.02	-0.08
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.05)
*Born 1975	0.03	0.10	-0.05
	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.07)
Log likelihood	-194,769.72	-89,554.697	-105,108.09
LR test (df) against model without interact's	11.35 (5)	8.22 (5)	11.04 (5)
N cases	250,480	118,056	132,424
Months at risk	45,829,758	20,745,415	25,084,343
N events	66,604	30,525	36,079

Notes: Additional control variables (not shown): Year of birth, Age at marriage, Age at marriage squared, Mother's education, Father's education.
** $p<0.001$, * $p<0.01$

Table 4. Cohort patterns in the intergenerational transmission of family dissolution, log-logistic hazard regressions (standard errors in parentheses). β-coefficients

	All	Men	Women
Parental separation	0.65 **	0.53 **	0.76 **
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)
*Born 1955 (Ref 1950)	0.05	0.09	0.00
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
*Born 1960	-0.03	-0.05	-0.03
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
*Born 1965	-0.04	0.01	-0.10
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
*Born 1970	-0.07	0.04	-0.12
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.05)
*Born 1975	-0.01	0.00	0.05
	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Log likelihood	-224,999.47	-103,981.06	-120,913.08
LR test (df) against model without interacts.	11.36 (5)	8.39 (5)	10.77 (5)
N cases	244,283	115,293	128,990
Years at risk	3,678,634	1,673,912	2,004,722
N events	78,102	36,206	41,896

Notes: Additional control variables (not shown): Year of birth, Age at start of coresidential union with common children, Age at start of union squared, Mother's education, Father's education.
** $p<0.001$, * $p<0.01$

Figure 1. Experienced parental separation by age 15, by year of birth (base: Swedish-born children, born into a family with two biological parents and not experiencing the death of either or both parents during their childhood)
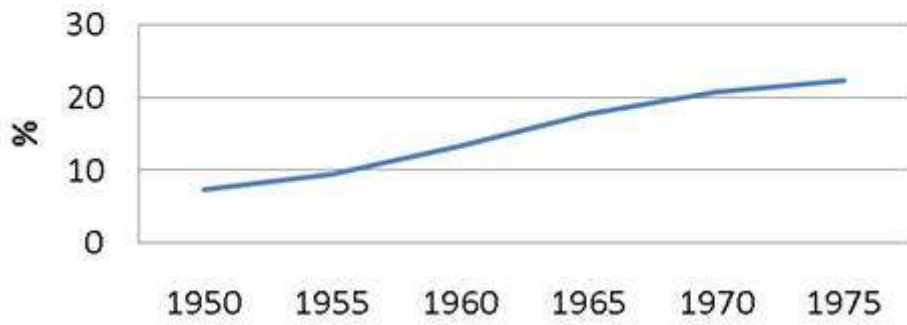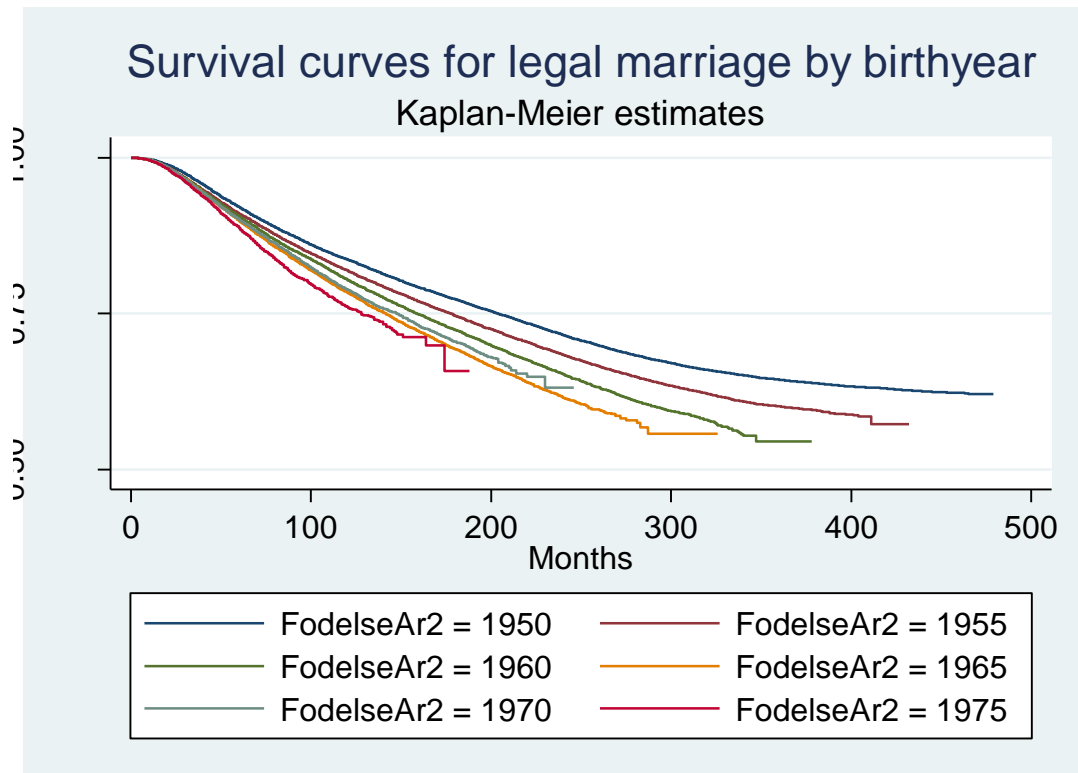
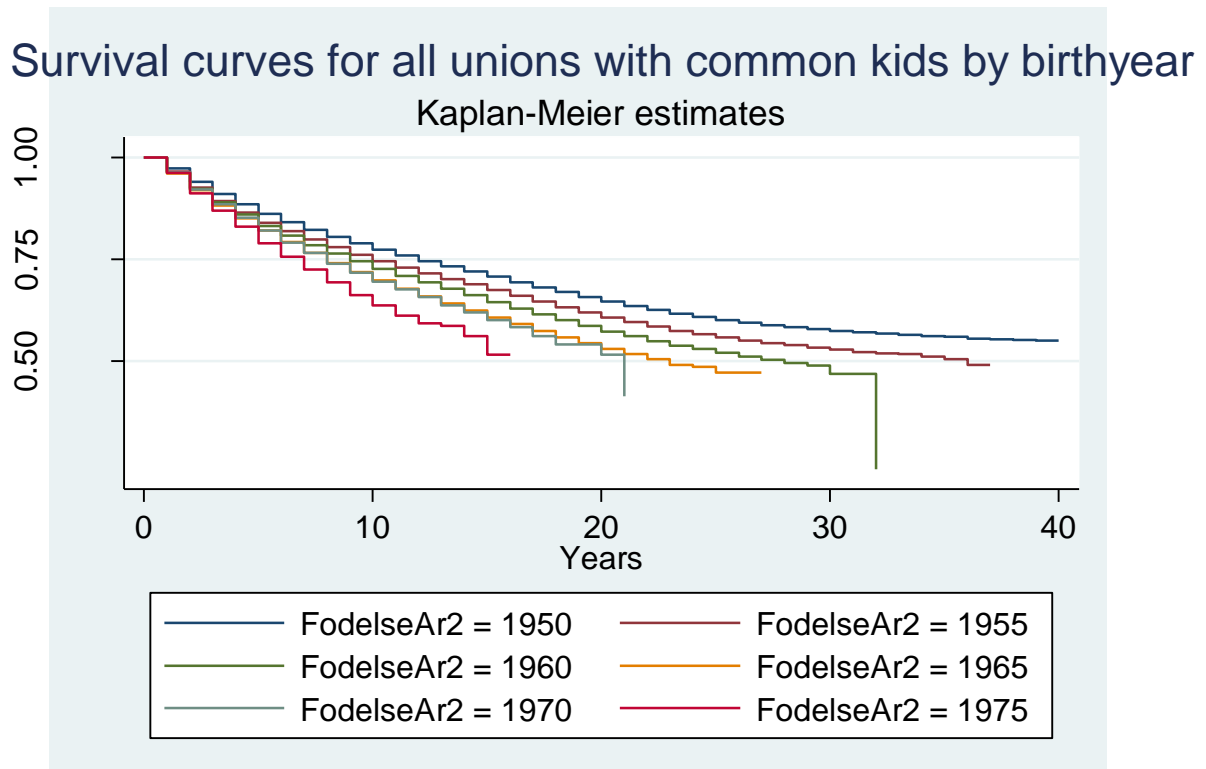*Figure 2. Kaplan-Meier survival curves for legal marriages of birth cohorts 1950 to 1975.*

Figure 3. Kaplan-Meier survival curves for all unions with common children of birth cohorts 1950 to 1975.

Appendix: Construction of the Childhood Family Type variable

In this appendix we describe the construction of the family type variable in greater detail. The population censuses in Sweden were conducted in 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, and 1990. Since birth cohorts 1950, 1955, 1960, 1965, 1970 and 1975 are analyzed in this paper, individuals' childhood family structure are measured at age 10 and 15 for birth cohort 1950, at age 5, 10, and 15 for birth cohort 1955, and at birth, age 5, 10, and 15 for birth cohorts 1960 and beyond. For the purpose of this paper two family types were distinguished: i) *intact family*, i.e. individuals who lived with both biological parents throughout childhood (at least up to age 15) and ii) *parents divorced or separated*, i.e. individuals who were born into a family with both biological parents and later experienced a parental divorce or separation. Thus, individuals who were born into a single-parent family or whose parents or themselves deceased or emigrated during their childhood were excluded from the analyses.

Through the multigenerational register we were able to link children to their biological parents. From census data we know with whom an individual resided at the end of the year. Thus, by matching information from these two registers, using a non-identifiable key based on each individual's unique social security number (*personnummer*), we were able to create a variable indicating whether child and parent(s) were living in the same household each of the census years. For most individuals, then, the family situation, i.e. whether child and parent(s) were actually living together, was measured at four occasions. For birth cohorts 1950 and 1955, however, we lack information for the situation at birth (1955) and at birth and age 5 (1950) respectively. Moreover, we obviously lack information for the situation between censuses for all birth cohorts.

The childhood family type *intact family* contains six subgroups (see Table A1). Above the dominant group, individuals who lived with both their biological parents at each (available) measuring point up to age 15 (subgroup 1a in Table A1), we also included five other (small) subgroups in this family type. First, we include children whose parents were not living together at the child's birth but who were living together at later measuring points, up to child being aged 15 (1b). The rationale behind this decision is that some parents may only (be able to) move together after the child is born (Thomson and Eriksson 2013). Since children could be observed at birth only from 1960 onwards, this category is used only for cohorts born this year or later. We also include minor categories where parents have lived consecutively with each other but where the child occasionally was living somewhere else (1c), where either child or parents emigrated (1d) or were institutionalized (or missing) (1e)

for a period and then returned to the family and, finally, where the child and both biological parents were living together when the child was up to 10 years old but where one family member was institutionalized when the child was aged 15 (1f). We find it reasonable to include these subgroups in the intact family type as these children have been living with both their biological parents throughout their childhood, except for limited periods of time, and we have no indication that this is due to parental divorce or separation. In total, based on all birth cohorts, the intact childhood family type includes 399,444 individuals, which corresponds to 73.4 percent of the population.

The childhood family type *parents divorced or separated* also contains six subgroups and is based on the remaining population. All individuals in this family type (are likely to have) started out living with both their biological parents. Between birth and age 15 indications are strong, however, that parents divorced or separated. For cohorts born in 1960 or later, the dominant category (2a) includes individuals who were born into a family with both biological parents but lived with only one parent at age 15. The absent parent is still alive and living in Sweden (according to the death and migration registers) and, thus, we conclude that parents have divorced or separated at some point between child's age 0-15. For the two earlier cohorts, we have two dominant groups: first, the child did not live with both parents at age 5 (Cohort 1955) or age 10 (Cohort 1950), and either or both parents were divorced or separated at this time point (2b), and second, the child lived with both parents at the first available Census but the parents were living apart when the child was 15 years old (2c). Regarding the first group, childbearing within cohabitational unions was still uncommon during the 1950s, and we believe divorced/separated civil status together with parents living apart strongly signifies that the parents had lived together (and had been married) earlier. The remaining groups in this category are small, identifying if the parents had lived apart at some point even if they lived together when the child was 15 years old (2d), one parent had emigrated (information on emigration available from 1961 onwards) (2e), one parent was missing (but not dead or emigrated) (2f), and one parent was in an institution when the child was 15, but parents were together earlier (2g). In total, the parents divorced or separated childhood family type includes 73,275 individuals or 13.5 percent of the population.

These two family types, then, cover 86.9 percent of the population. The remaining 13.1 percent of the population contains individuals who were born into a single-parent family (3a-c), whose parents died or emigrated or who died or emigrated themselves (4a-b and 5a-c) (based on information from death and migration registers) and individuals whom we were not

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able to classify according to childhood family type due to insufficient information (6-8). None of these individuals are included in the analyses performed here.

Looking at the figures, the largest potential misclassification corresponds to the groups "never together" and "death" for the two oldest cohorts. The latter is smaller than in the younger cohorts, which does not correspond to other available information. It is possible that particularly group 3b, which includes those who never lived with one of the parents, who could also not be identified, includes several children whose parent had died but had lived with the other parent and the child at an earlier stage.

Table A1. Construction of Childhood Family Type Variable, Percentage of Total, and Total N

Childhood Family Type	Subgroups	Cohorts 1960-75		Cohort 1955		Cohort 1950	
		Total percent	Total N	Total percent	Total N	Total percent	Total N
1. Intact family	a) Child always lived with both parents at each observation (Cohorts 1960-75: ages 0, 5, 10, and 15; Cohort 1955: ages 5, 10, 15; Cohort 1950: ages 10, 15).	65.1	237,871	77.5	67,328	78.2	72,147
	b) Parents not living together at birth, but lived together with child at later observations (Cohorts 1960-75)	2.5	9,240				
	c) At some observation, the child did not live with both parents (or missing), but parents always lived together	0.1	504	0.2	176	0.2	167
	d) Either child or parent(s) emigrated at some point in time and then immigrated; parents and child living together at age 15.	0.4	1,622	0.2	153		
	e) Other intact at age 15 (often one family member institutionalized or missing earlier; almost all parents married at 15)	0.7	2,542	2.4	2,318	2.0	1,882
	f) At least one family member institutionalized at age 15, parents and child living together at age 10	0.9	3,138			0.4	355
Total intact		*69.9*	*254,917*	*81.0*	*69,976*	*80.8*	*74,551*
2. Parents divorced or separated	a) Child lived with only one parent at age 15 but has previously lived with both parents (Cohorts 1960-75)	14.6	53,216				
	b) Child never observed with both parents, and either or both parents divorced or separated at 5 (Coh 1955) or 10 (Coh 1950)			3.0	2,589	4.5	4,137
	c) Child with both parents at age 5 (Coh 1955) or age 10 (1950), but not with both parents at age 15			5.3	4,582	2.1	1,904
	d) Parents did not live together at some observation after age 0 (for Cohs 1960-), but together at age 15	0.5	1,958	0.3	270		
	e) Child lived with both parents at birth, but one parent emigrated later but child did not	0.2	615	0.0	53		
	f) Child lived with both parents at birth, but later either parent missing (but not dead or migrated), Cohs 1960-	0.4	1,447				
	g) Parents separated at age 10, someone institutionalized at age 15 (Cohs 1960-)	0.2	637				

Total separated/divorced		*16.4*	*59,748*	*8.6*	*7,486*	*6.6*	*6,041*
3. Parents never lived together	a) For 1960+ cohorts: Parents never observed together.	6.9	25,270				
	b) For 1950 and 1955 cohorts: Dad or mum missing (no ID), and never observed living together			3.8	3,287	6.9	6,334
	c) For 1950 and 1955 cohorts: Parents observed, but never living together. Both parents are unmarried when child is 5 (birth cohort 1955) and 10 (birth cohort 1950) years of age respectively, i.e. in the 1960 census.			1.7	1,457	0.9	846
Total never together		*6.9*	*25,270*	*5.5*	*4,744*	*7.8*	*7,180*
4. Parent(s) and/or child emigrated[5]	a) Both parents (but not child) observed emigrated by time child is 15 years old.	0.0	162	0.1	68	0.1	60
	b) Child observed emigrated by age 15.	2.1	7,793	0.3	241	0.1	47
Total emigration		*2.2*	*7,955*	*0.4*	*309*	*0.1*	*102*
5. Parent(s) and/or child deceased[6]	a) At least one parent's death observed in registers	3.7	13,472	3.5	3,000	2.1	1,951
	b) Parent missing at age 5 (cohort 1955) or 10 (cohort 1950) and other parent widow(er)			0.0	7	0.0	6
	c) Child's death observed in register.	0.6	2,072	0.3	240	0.2	135
Total deaths		*4.3*	*15,544*	*3.8*	*3,247*	*2.3*	*2,092*
6. Unclassifiable	For 1950 and 1955 cohorts: Child has always lived with a single parent, either parent missing or living in another household. Many married or widow(er)s, uncertain if child ever lived with both parents or not.			0.8	654	2.2	1,996
7. Other	Other leftover individuals, mainly institutionalized.	0.4	1,453	0.6	532		
8. Missing	Missing values.					0.3	257
Total		**100.0**	**365,256**	**100.0**	**86,398**	**100.0**	**92,220**

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[5] Emigration registers from 1961, so for the 1950 and 55 birth cohorts deaths can be observed from when child is 6 and 11 years old.
[6] Deaths registered from 1961 onwards

Table A2. Cohort patterns in family forms (%), 1950-75

	Intact	Separated	Never together	Emigrated	Death	Unclass/ Missing
1950	80.8	6.6	7.8	0.1	2.3	2.5
1955	81.0	8.6	5.5	0.4	3.8	1.4
1960	76.0	12.0	5.4	1.3	5.0	0.3
1965	70.2	15.6	7.2	2.0	4.8	0.3
1970	67.2	18.2	7.4	3.0	3.9	0.4
1975	66.4	19.5	7.6	2.4	3.3	0.7