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**Publication date**

2009

**Document Version**

Submitted manuscript

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Bakker, W., & Mulder, C. H. (2009). *Exploring living arrangements of divorced families in the Netherlands*. Paper presented at 7th conference of the European Network for the sociological and demographic Study of Divorce.

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# Exploring living arrangements of divorced families in the Netherlands

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Paper prepared for the Seventh Meeting of the European Network for the Sociological and Demographic Study of Divorce, Antwerp, June 25-26 2009

## **Abstract**

*We aim to gain more insight into the characteristics of divorced families with different types of post-divorce living arrangements, and in particular with co-parenting arrangements in which the child alternates between the parents' residences. Empirical evidence comes from a mixed-method research, based on survey data from The Netherlands Kinship Panel Study and from Divorce in the Netherlands 1998 and on in-depth interviews with divorced parents. We find that the distance between the places of residence of both ex-partners is particularly important to the type of living arrangement. Parents who have dual careers, are highly educated and have high incomes are more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than others. Findings on gender differences are in line with the idea that co-parenting is a sign of increased father involvement but decreased mother involvement compared with the most common arrangement: a weekend-father arrangement. For men, time constraints seem to lead to a smaller likelihood of co-parenting, whereas the opposite is true for women.*

## **Introduction**

Most parents and their children live together, but the number of children growing up with divorced parents is substantial. In the Netherlands, for example, each year fifty to sixty thousand children are involved in the divorce of their parents (De Graaf, 2005; Spruijt, 2007). All divorced parents face the challenge to decide where and with whom their children will

live, because there is no longer a shared household or residence. Despite the dissolution of the disrupted relationship, parents have to decide what is best for them and their children. But what is best is not always sparkling clear and will differ per household, per situation and even per child.

In western countries, the most common arrangement is one in which the children live with their mother and have contact with their father on a regular basis (Smyth, 2004 for Australia; Kelly, 2007 for the United States; Spruijt, 2007 for the Netherlands). Beside these traditional arrangements, nowadays new residential arrangements emerge in which the father plays a greater role in childrearing after divorce. Recent research shows that the number of non-residential fathers who have no contact at all with their children is declining and the visiting frequency of non-residential parents (most often fathers) is increasing (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Seltzer, 1991, 1998; Kalmijn & De Graaf, 2000; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Smyth, 2004). There is also a slowly growing group of co-parents who equally divide the childcare of their children in terms of both the residential arrangement and the division of responsibility and finance (De Graaf, 2005; Spruijt, 2007 for the Netherlands; Willen & Richards, 2006 for Sweden). In the Netherlands co-parenting has been estimated to be the living arrangement of fifteen percent of the divorced families (De Graaf, 2005).

Despite the growing prevalence of co-parenting arrangements, they have hardly been the subject of scientific research. Most existing studies focus on the consequences of divorce for children's well-being and their relationship with their (non-residential) parents (Amato, 2000; King, 1994; Ahrons, 2006; Spruijt, 2007). Children of divorce are exposed to a greater risk of psychological and behavioral adjustment, academic and social problems, compared with those of intact families (Simons et al, 1999; Amato, 2000; Kelly, 2000; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Spruijt, 2007). Some studies have examined the relationship between contact with non-residential fathers and children's well-being. It is the quality of the parent-child relationship, and not the frequency of contact in itself, which appears to be important to the well-being of children of divorce (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Pryor & Rogers, 2001; Stewart, 2003). Involvement in daily activities with a routinous character strongly improves the quality and sustainability of the parent-child relationship. Recent studies conclude that, for the child's best interest, living arrangements should enable supportive fathers to be actively involved in their children's daily lives, including overnight stays, school-related and leisure time on a weekly basis (Cashmore et al, 2007; Kelly, 2007; Smyth, 2004).

It should be clear that there is not a one-size-fits-all arrangement which is best for everyone. On paper a co-parenting arrangement seems to be the most desirable arrangement or as Smyth (2004, p.19) states it: the Rolls-Royce model of post-divorce parenting. But to maintain a co-parenting arrangement requires a lot from ex-partners, their children and their residential choice.

It is important to know which family characteristics and which circumstances influence the choice for a specific post-divorce living arrangement. Little is known, however, about the families who opt for co-parenting arrangements. For Australia, Smyth (2004) explored different types of post-divorce living arrangements. Adequate to high socio-economic resources, physical distance between the households, primary school aged children and a single status of the parents were found to be important factors which are associated with a co parenting arrangement. Arrangements with a residential father and a non-residential mother were excluded from this study.

The aim of this paper is to gain more insight into the characteristics of divorced families with different types of post-divorce living arrangements, and in particular with co-parenting arrangements. The central question to be addressed is which socio-economic, socio-demographic and residential characteristics of the parents are associated with co-parenting arrangements. Empirical evidence comes from mixed-methods research. Survey data from the *Netherlands Kinship Panel Study* (NKPS) and from *Divorce in the Netherlands 1998* (SIN) are used to explore the relation between the socio-economic, socio-demographic and residential characteristics of the ex-families and different types of arrangements. Data from in-depth interviews with 38 divorced parents selected from the NKPS survey are used to provide some contextual understanding of the associations found in the survey data.

## **Theoretical framework**

### *Post-divorce living arrangements*

In the past few decades the nature of family life in western countries has been changing. The increase of women's labour participation and men's participation in household and parenting tasks (SCP & CBS, 2009, for the Netherlands) leads to the fading of traditional gender roles in modern families. Along with family life the post-divorce family arrangements are also changing. While the most common arrangement is still the traditional weekend arrangement, in which the mother is the residential parent and the father the visiting parent, arrangements

in which both parents strive for a more equal division of tasks are emerging. This results in the existence of a great diversity of alternative arrangements in which (in contrast with the so called *Disneyland dads*) the father plays a greater role in raising the child(ren) in terms of responsibility taking, decision making, supporting school related activities and spending leisure time.

Several studies have tried to capture the different post-divorce family arrangements in some kind of typology. Smyth (2004) uses a typology in which five types of arrangements are distinguished based on the presence or absence of overnight stays and the frequency of contact. The first is a co-parenting arrangement whereby both parents share the care of their children. These arrangements are characterized by an equal division between both parents of time spent with the children, both for overnight stays and for daytime contact. Usually the children have to move to the other parent every week or every two or three days. Sometimes the parents move while the children stay at the same place. Secondly there is the standard (weekend) arrangement in which the children live with one parent and stay with their non-residential parent on a regular basis, usually one weekend every two weeks (including at least one overnight stay) and half of the holidays. The third type is the daytime-only arrangement, whereby the children live with one parent and have contact with their non-residential parent on a regular basis, but only during daytime. Fourth is the holiday-only arrangement and fifth the little or no contact arrangements, which both imply that there is no contact on a regular basis with the non-residential parent, only during holidays, very sporadically or not at all.

Owing to the small number of observations in our data, the typology used in this research had to be less extended. This less extended typology is based on the frequency of overnight stays. Overnight stays not only create the opportunity for the non-residential parent to engage in more routine activities which positively affect the relation of the child with both parents (Smyth, 2004; Cashmore et al, 2007) but also make the arrangement more stable and sustainable than arrangements based on daytime-only visits (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). This leads to a distinction between a co-parenting arrangement whereby the number of nights is (almost) equally shared between both parents, a weekend arrangement whereby the child stay at least 2 (up to 11) nights per month with the non-residential parent and a less than weekend arrangement in which the child stay at most one night in the month with the non-residential parent. This last type also contains arrangements whereby the children have no contact at all with the non-residential parent. It should be clear that a living arrangement is

not necessarily static, but can change during the years, especially in the first years after the divorce when the parents are trying to find the right arrangement.

Most existing studies are concerned with the non-residential fathers only (not focusing on the residential mother) or with post-divorce arrangements with a residential mother and a non-residential father (see for example Smyth, 2004; Cooksey & Craig, 1998). We expect that a weekend arrangement with a visiting father differs from a weekend arrangement with a visiting mother and that the characteristics of the families opting for these arrangements will also differ. We therefore distinguish between families with a non-residential father and a non-residential mother. The question that arises is which factors or characteristics of the ex-partners and the former family are associated with the choice for a specific arrangement. It is important to underline that no claims are made about the direction of the causality between the individual and residential characteristics and the choice for a specific arrangement.

#### *The residential context*

A consequence of divorce is the residential relocation of one or both of the ex-partners. After the move which has to be made in order to get separated, divorced persons are still more likely to move than persons in their first relationship (Feijten & van Ham, 2007), often into lower quality housing and over short distances (Feijten & Mulder, forthcoming). Especially divorced fathers are found to move mainly over short distances. An explanation for this can be found in the fact that the further ex-partners move away from each other, the more planning, time and financial resources it will take to maintain contact on a regular basis between the non-residential parents and their children (Arditti and Keith, 1993; Seltzer et al, 1989, Stephen et al, 1993; Cooksey & Craik, 1998; Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002), especially when young children are involved. This makes co-parenting arrangements likely to be most sustainable when the distance between the parents is small. We expect that ex-partners who live close to each other are more likely to maintain a co-parenting arrangement than those living farther away from each other. The causality is this might run both ways. On the one hand, the choice for a co-parenting arrangement might lead to the choice to live close by each other. On the other hand, ex-couples who already live close might be more inclined to opt for a co-parenting arrangement than ex-couples living further away from each other.

Large cities, with high housing density and a high concentration of social rental housing and affordable dwellings, may provide more opportunities to create a co-parenting arrangement. The availability of jobs is also greater in strongly urbanised areas than elsewhere. Furthermore, couples living in highly urbanised areas tend to have more symmetric household arrangements, in which the tasks are equally divided, than couples living in suburbanised areas (De Meester et al, 2007; Droogleever Fortuijn, 1993). It seems to be likely that couples with a symmetric household arrangement will also choose a symmetric arrangement after their divorce. We therefore hypothesize that divorced parents who live in strongly urbanised areas are more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than those living in less urbanised areas. At the same time, it can be complicated to find two suitable dwellings nearby each other in a tight housing market, as is the case in most large cities in the Netherlands. This might make it more difficult to arrange a co-parenting arrangement in a large city. It is not obvious beforehand which effect is likely to prevail.

#### *Socio-economic characteristics*

Most of the time, getting divorced means a decrease in economic well-being, in particular for women (Duncan and Hoffman, 1985; Smock, 1993, 1994; Poortman, 2000; Uunk, 2004). Rearranging one household into two households often implies a transition from a dual to a single income and a doubling of the residential costs. Each post-divorce living arrangement brings with it different financial costs. For example the inclusion of overnight stays in the arrangement implies that there have to be two suitable dwellings with enough room for the child(ren). A co-parenting arrangement is even more expensive. This implies not only the costs of two suitable dwellings, but also of furniture, clothes, toys and the like, which have to be present in both dwellings and have to be bought twice. The availability of sufficient economic resources makes it easier to finance the costs of a co-parenting arrangement. We therefore expect parents with higher incomes to be more likely to choose and maintain a co-parenting arrangement. Smyth's study (2004), based on Australian data, indicates that co-mothers indeed are more likely to have a high income, while for co-fathers this seems not to be the case.

Couples with a high education level are more likely to have a high income. Besides this highly educated people are characterized by a more equal division of paid and unpaid work (De Meester et al, 2007), which fits best with a symmetrical post-divorce living arrangement, such as a co-parenting arrangement. Furthermore, the higher a woman is

educated the more time she spends on paid work (De Meester et al, 2007). It can be expected that after the divorce most highly educated women still want to participate on the labour market and do not want to be a fulltime mother. In general men work fulltime. For highly educated parents who both want to participate on the labour market, a co-parenting arrangement seems to be preferable. We therefore expect highly educated people to be more likely in a co-parenting arrangement than less highly educated persons. We also expect parents with part-time jobs more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than parents with no job or a fulltime job.

Of course the causality in this might run both ways. On the one hand, the choice for a weekend arrangement or a less than weekend arrangement might make it harder for the residential parent to participate on the labour market because of the time constraints imposed by the children or the high childcare costs (Holden and Smock, 1991; Smock, 1994). On the other hand, the choice for a co-parenting arrangement might make it necessary to participate on the labour market to finance the arrangement.

#### *Other characteristics*

The choice for a co-parenting arrangement can be seen as a choice for an equal division of responsibility, childcare, parenting tasks and financial costs for the children. We expect that ex-couples with a high degree of symmetry when they were still together are more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement.

In studies investigating the contact between children and their non-residential fathers some characteristics can be found which influence the contact frequency, and along with this the type of post-divorce living arrangement. The remarriage of one of the ex-partners seems to diminish the contact frequency between the non-residential father and his child(ren) (Seltzer et al, 1989; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Cooksey & Craik, 1998). So remarried parents might be less likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than non-remarried parents.

Because of the increasing involvement of non-residential fathers in recent years (Seltzer, 1998; Smyth, 2004; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002) couples who got divorced more recently are expected to be more likely to be in a co-parenting relationship. This association might be particularly strong in the Netherlands, because since 1998 the Dutch law gives preference to joint custody. In the Netherlands joint custody is now the outcome in nine out of ten cases (Spruijt, 2007). Of course joint custody is not the same as a co-parenting arrangement, but it obliges parents to



share the care of their children, at least in a non-physical, administrative way. We also took the age of the youngest child, the age of the parent and the number of children into account.

## **Data and methods**

### *Survey data*

The survey data are based on a combination of two datasets. The first dataset is the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS; Dykstra et al., 2005; 2007), of which we use the two waves currently available. The first wave, containing information about 8161 inhabitants of the Netherlands, was conducted in 2002-2003 and is a representative sample of the Dutch population aged between 18 and 79 and not living in institutions. The second wave was conducted in 2006-2007 and was based on follow-up interviews with 6670 respondents from wave one. For the analyses we included only those respondents who were included in both wave one and wave two, because only wave two includes information about the number of nights the children stay at the place of residence of the mother and the father. This information is necessary to identify the type of post-divorce living arrangement of the family.

We selected those respondents from wave two who got divorced and had at least one child with an ex-partner, whereby at least one of these children was aged 18 or younger and lived with one or both of his/her parents, the ex-partner was still alive and information about the division of the overnight stays of the child(ren) between both parents was known. This selection resulted in a sample of 338 respondents (see Table 1).

In both wave one and wave two, men are under-represented by about 7 percentage points (Dykstra et al., 2007). Furthermore, both men and women living alone are under-represented in both wave one and two, as are single parents. This indicates divorced parents are likely to be underrepresented. The distribution in the sample indicates that men in a co-parenting arrangement are over-presented and women in such an arrangement are under-represented. This can be explained by the fact that father's and mother's reports of father's involvement with the child(ren) after divorce differ significantly. Fathers report a greater father involvement than mothers do (Mikelson, 2008).

The second dataset is the survey Divorce in the Netherlands 1998 (SIN; Kalmijn, De Graaf & Uunk, 2000). This database consists of 2346 persons who were in their first marriage or had divorced once. For the selection of respondents the same criteria were used as for the selection of respondents out of the NKPS data. This selection resulted in a sample of 426

respondents. In this dataset men were also under-represented. The total number of respondents is 764. Unfortunately, the two datasets include only very little information on the ex-partners of the respondents.

### *Variables*

The dependent variable is the post-divorce living arrangement of the respondent at the moment the survey took place. The distinction was based on the number of nights which the child(ren) spend with their mother and with their father and with whom the child lived most of the time. Four arrangement types were distinguished. First, we distinguished between a less than weekend arrangement, a weekend arrangement and a co-parenting arrangement. In a less than weekend arrangement the children stay with the non-residential parent for less than two nights per month. In a weekend arrangement the children stay with the non-residential parent at least two nights and less than nine nights per month. These two groups were further distinguished into arrangements in which the child spent most nights with the father and arrangements in which they spent most nights with the mother. Less than weekend arrangements with absent fathers and weekend arrangements with non-residential fathers were retained as separate categories. Because of the small number of absent and weekend mothers, these categories have been combined into one category. In a co-parenting arrangement the children stay with each parent alternately for at least twelve nights per month. Arrangements in which the children stay nine to eleven nights per month with their non-residential parent were classified as a co-parenting arrangement or a weekend arrangement based on the respondents' reports about whether they were or were not in a co-parenting arrangement. When there were children with different arrangements in one ex-family, the arrangement with the highest contact frequency with the non-residential parent was taken. So a co-parenting arrangement was chosen over a weekend arrangement, which was chosen over a less than weekend arrangement.

As independent variables the distance to the ex-partners and the degree of urbanisation of the place of residence were included to explore the residential context of the living arrangements. The distance variable in NKPS was measured by using the x and y coordinates of the place of residence of the respondent and the ex-partner to calculate the distance in kilometers along a straight line. In SIN, distance was measured by using the respondent's report about the commuting time between both residences. To achieve a similar measure of distance we calculated quartiles for each dataset. Individual income, educational

attainment and labour market participation were included to measure the relationship between the socio-economic characteristics and the type of living arrangement. Income was measured as the annual income of the respondent. The annual income in the SIN data was corrected for inflation for the years between 1998 and 2006. We calculated three equal percentile groups. Level of education was measured in three categories: low (up to lower vocational and lower secondary), middle (middle or higher secondary or middle vocational) and high (higher vocational and university). Labour market participation was divided into four categories: respondents with no job, respondents with a job up to 32 hours per week, respondents working more than 32 hours a week and respondents with a missing value on this variable.

The level of symmetry during the relationship, the presence of a new partner, the year of divorce and the age of the youngest child were also taken into account. The level of symmetry was indicated by a newly created variable in which five variables were combined. The division of tasks after five years of living together, regarding to cooking dinner, doing the laundry, cleaning the house, doing small jobs in the household and doing the financial administration of the household. These variables were all measured on a scale from one (respondent did a particular task far more often than ex-partner) to five (ex-partner did a particular task far more often than respondent). The average of the scores on these variables was taken as the score on the new variable. Scores from 1 to 2 (score < 2) and from 4 to 5 (score >= 4) were defined as asymmetrical and scores from 2 to 4 as symmetrical task divisions. This information was only available in SIN.

### *Interview data*

In addition to the survey data, in-depth interviews were conducted with 38 respondents, selected out of the NKPS dataset. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling (Mason, 1996; Patton, 1990). Besides the selection criteria that were also used for the selection of respondents in the survey data, only respondents were selected with whom the children lived at least half of the time. Within the selection we aimed for a wide range of variation on gender, place of residence and level of education of the respondent, the number of children and the age of the children. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on the definition, experience and evaluation of the current post-divorce living arrangement. They lasted between sixty and a hundred minutes and were recorded and fully transcribed.

Sixty respondents classified as having a weekend or a co-parenting arrangement were asked to participate (see Table 1). The non-response was 36.7 percent and was higher among

respondents with a weekend arrangement than among respondents with a co-parenting arrangement. In the initial research design the respondents with a less than weekend arrangement were left out, because the focus was more on dual location households than on single parent families. During the interviews we found three respondents who were registered as weekend respondents in the survey data, but whose children no longer had any contact with the non-residential parent. So the respondents with a less than weekend arrangement were found ‘by accident’ and there are no non-response data available for this category.

**Table 1 Overview of selected respondents**

	Divorce in the Netherlands				Netherlands Kinship Panel Study				Interviews	
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men	Women
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Total selected respondents	145	100	281	100	108	100	230	100	8	30
Co-family	6	4,1	20	7,1	27	25	25	10,8	7	8
Family with weekend father	82	56,6	127	45,4	42	38,9	95	41,3		20
Family with absent father	33	22,8	123	43,9	22	20,3	93	40,4		2
Family with weekend/ absent mother	24	16,6	11	3,9	17	15,8	17	7,4	1	

### *Methods*

First bivariate cross-tabulations are presented. The cross-tabulations shed light on the associations between the characteristics of the parents and the type of arrangement. A chi square test is performed to find out which associations are statistically significant.

To examine whether the associations are also significant in each others’ presence, a multivariate analysis has been performed in which the type of arrangement is the dependent variable and a selection of variables significantly associated with the type of arrangement were included as independent variables. Because the dependent variable is nominal and unordered, a multinomial logistic regression was used. Separate analyses for men and women were performed. It is important to note that these men and women were separate respondents, not matched partners of ex-couples. It should also be noted that we use our regression models as a convenient way to describe multivariate associations, rather than as causal models: they should be seen as sophisticated descriptive statistics (compare Aassve, Mazzucco & Mencarini, 2003).

The interview data were coded and classified. For the analysis a top-down approach was used, whereby relevant themes from the literature study and the statistical data analysis were taken to analyze the interview data. These themes included the residential context, the

working schedule, economic resources, the pre- and post-divorce relationship and other aspects which possibly play a role in the choice for a specific arrangement. The interview data provide contextual understanding of the relationships found in the survey data.

### **Results from the survey data**

The distribution of the respondents over the living arrangements (see Table 1) confirms that the post-divorce living arrangement with a residential mother and a weekend father is most common, followed by the arrangement with a residential mother and an absent father. In the SIN data the co-parenting arrangement is hardly found, in contrast to the NKPS survey. Part of the explanation could be the changing of the Dutch law in 1998, in favour of co-parenting arrangements. SIN was conducted in 1998 and the NKPS survey after 1998.

The cross-tabulations of all other variables by type of arrangement are presented in Table 2. For those variables for which it seems relevant to expect a different pattern for women and men, separate cross-tabulations by gender are presented. The odds ratios of the multinomial logistic regression models are presented in Table 3 for men and Table 4 for women.

#### *The residential context*

The type of post-divorce living arrangement is found to be strongly associated with the distance between the places of residence of both ex-partners, both in the cross-tabulation and in the multinomial logistic regression models. As expected, respondents who live within a distance of 1.5 kilometers or 10 minutes traveling from their ex-partner are more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than respondents living further away from their ex-partner (see Table 2). Mothers living further away than 20 kilometers or 30 minutes travel time from their ex-partner are estimated to be only one fifth times as likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement as mothers living at the closest distance to their ex-partners, all else equal (see Table 4). Fathers living more than 20 kilometers or 30 minutes away are even estimated to be only 0.03 times as likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement as fathers living close (see Table 3). Living further away from each other also makes it more likely for mothers to be in an arrangement with an absent father rather than an arrangement with a weekend father.

We did not find an association between the type of post-divorce arrangement and the degree of urbanization of the place of residence.

#### *Socio-economic characteristics*

As expected, the type of post-divorce living arrangement is associated with the socio-economic characteristics of both men and women. Men and women who have a higher income are more frequently in a co-parenting arrangement. The regression analysis finds women with a high income 4 times more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than woman with a low income. Men with a moderate income are even 11 times more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than men with a low income. Both men and women who have a high or a moderate income are less likely to be in an arrangement with an absent father than parents with a low income. These findings may indicate that a co-parenting arrangement indeed is an expensive arrangement compared to other post-divorce living arrangements.

As expected, highly educated parents are more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than less highly educated parents. Compared with other mothers, mothers with an intermediate level of education are more likely to be a weekend or an absent mother. This pattern is not found for highly educated mothers.

The cross tabulation indicates that part-time working fathers more frequently maintain a co-parenting arrangement than other fathers. An explanation for this might be that part-time working fathers have more time to take care for the children than fulltime working fathers. Unemployed fathers seem to be particularly likely to be an absent father. It is possible that unemployed fathers also have other problems, such as financial problems, which makes it harder to have contact with the children on a regular basis. In the multinomial logistic regression analysis for men, however, the association between type of post-divorce living arrangement and labour market participation is partly reversed, and overruled by strong associations with level of education and income. It seems to be the fulltime working mothers who more frequently maintain a co-parenting arrangement than other mothers (see Table 2). Women who work fulltime have less time left to take care for the children than other mothers, which might be an explanation for their choice to be in a co-parenting arrangement instead of a common arrangement with a residential mother. This association is also found in the regression model, but it does not reach statistical significance.

#### *Other characteristics*

Women seem to be more likely to opt for a co-parenting arrangement when they reported that the pre-divorce division of household tasks with the ex-partner was symmetrical (although this association is not statistically significant).

Men who have a new partner are less likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than their single counterparts. Surprisingly, however, women are more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement when they have a new partner than single women. This different pattern for men and women can possibly be explained by the fact that having a new partner imposes new time constraints. For women, being in a co-parenting arrangement instead of in the most common arrangement decreases the time spent with the children, which makes it easier to spend time with a new partner. For men, being in a co-parenting instead of the most common arrangement increases the time spent with the children, which makes it more difficult to spend time with a new partner.

As expected, the bivariate results indicate that parents who got divorced after 1998 are more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than parents who got divorced before 1998. In the multinomial logistic regression analysis this association is found for men, but it is not statistically significant. Surprisingly, women who got divorced after 1998 seem to be less likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than those who got divorced earlier, all else equal. These findings seem to suggest that the changes through time in the prevalence of co-parenting arrangements should be ascribed to changes in women's level of education, labour-market participation and income rather than to the change in the Dutch law. Being divorced in 1990-1998 or after 1998 makes it more likely for both men and women to be in an arrangement with a weekend or absent mother than for those being divorced before the 1990s. Part of the explanation might be that nowadays alternative arrangements are more socially accepted than before 1990. This might make the choice to be a residential father or a non-residential mother less complicated.

Fathers whose youngest child is aged 10 or older are estimated to be 14 times more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than fathers whose youngest child is aged younger than 4. In contrast, mothers whose youngest child aged 10 years or older are five times more likely to be a weekend or absent mother than other mothers. It seems that mothers are more involved in the care of their children when they are young, whereas fathers get more involved in childcare when the children are older. Finally, the type of post-divorce living arrangement does not seem to be associated with the age of the respondent and the number of children.

## **Results from the interview data**

### *The residential context*

In the interviews, respondents stressed the crucial role of distance to their post-divorce living arrangement. The respondents' reports strongly suggest that the causality in the relationship between the type of living arrangement and the distance between the places of residence of both ex-parents indeed runs both ways. Most of the co-parents had chosen consciously to live close to each other to maintain a co-parenting arrangement. Other respondents had chosen to be in a weekend arrangement rather than a co-parenting arrangement because of the long distance between both places of residence. There was also a respondent living close to her ex-partner who initially had chosen to be in a weekend arrangement, but who was slowly moving towards a co-parenting arrangement because the children had the possibility to visit the non-residential father very often.

*'This co-arrangement is the reason why I still live in this town, so that the boys can easily come over when they want to and things like that.'* (co-father, living within 3 km from his ex-partner).

*'It is all about the distance. It is not feasible to let my daughter stay there [with her father] every week. Financially we [she and her ex-partner] both cannot afford it to bring or get her every week, or even every two weeks. So we said: "one weekend per three weeks is enough".'* (mother, arrangement with weekend father, living 180 km from her ex-partner).

*'I think, because we live in the same city now, it is easier for the children to have contact with their father. Because they can go there by bicycle to spend some time together. So the arrangement has become more flexible now and they see their father more and more.'* (mother, arrangement with weekend father, living 3 km from her ex-partner).

Living close to each other seems to be important for all co-parents. School, friends and sport or hobby clubs have to be in reach of both places of residence. Most of the co-parents had agreed on living close to each other and wrote this down in a parenting agreement. Parenting agreements contain all the practical and financial arrangements regarding the children, made by parents who are divorced. Since March 2009 a parenting agreement is



obliged by Dutch law; before that time the agreement was made by many parents on a voluntary basis.

*This arrangement is only successful when you offer the children one social network, one crèche, one school, one group of friends, in the same neighborhood. So first my ex-wife lived three minutes that way and now she lives three minutes this way [respondent points in two different directions]. Until the children have finished school we have to live close to each other, after that we both can go our own way. (co-father, living less than 1 km from his ex-partner).*

*We included this in our parenting agreement, that, as long as the children are young, we do not move further away from each other. Because that would make it impossible to maintain a co-parenting arrangement (co-mother, living 0.5 km from her ex-partner).*

None of the interviewed parents had the idea that it would make any difference to the choice for a specific arrangement whether they lived in a small town or a big city.

#### *Socio-economic characteristics*

Level of education, or a wish to have a career fitting that level, was never mentioned by the respondents. Neither were there any respondents who wanted to be in a co-parenting arrangement but who could not afford it. The co-parents did mention the extra furniture, clothes and toys which had been bought to maintain the arrangement, the time it takes to bring and pick up the children when they are young and the costs that come along with arranging two suitable dwellings close to each other. It is possible that respondents do not mention arrangements that are out of reach financially, just because it has never occurred to them they might consider such arrangements. It is also possible that educational attainment and the level of income are not directly associated with the choice for a specific arrangement, but indirectly through labour market participation and lifestyle. Co-parenting arrangements seem to be associated with a lifestyle adopted by highly educated persons with a high income level.

Labour market participation was mentioned frequently to explain the choice for a specific arrangement. Not the number of working hours or whether working part-time or fulltime

seemed to influence the type of arrangement, but whether being a single-career or a dual-career (ex-) couple. In practice, labour market participation and the level of symmetry in performing household and care tasks seem to be closely related to each other. When both partners work part-time they seem to be more likely to be in a relationship with an equal division of tasks. It seems that dual career ex-couples are more likely to have a high level of symmetry during marriage and therefore are more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement. Not only the co-parents took into account their labour market participation when they chose an arrangement, also parents with a weekend arrangement frequently mentioned labour market participation to explain their choice.

*Well, the children were really young and we both had a job. I always had a job, so for practical reasons... their father had a part-time job at that moment, so for both of us a co-parenting arrangement was the most practical solution. We didn't want to be dependent on childcare all the time. That's how we decided.'* (co-mother).

*'My ex-partner is a truck driver, so he leaves early in the morning and arrives late at night or sometimes he is away a whole week. So it is not an option for my daughter to stay at her father's place throughout the week.'* (mother in an arrangement with a weekend father).

There were also parents who changed their working schedule to maintain a specific arrangement, which clearly shows that there is not a one-way direction of causality in this association.

*'Of course you have to rearrange your schedule. One week I am taking care of the children, trying to get the children at school on time, driving very fast to my job, making a short working day, driving home, getting the kids, cooking dinner and so on. And the other week I work long hours at my job to catch up with my work.'* (co-father).

#### *Other characteristics*

Most ex-partners who opted for a co-parenting arrangement mentioned that they already had a symmetrical division of tasks and working hours when they were still together. Getting divorced did not change that task division.

*'I took half of the care for the children when we were married... and from the beginning of the divorce it was clear that this would be continued... yes continued, because I already did... and Karin wanted to make a step forward in her career.'* (co-father).

*'In our marriage I took care of the children most of the time. So the most logical solution was that they would live with me and go to their father in the weekends.'* (mother in an arrangement with a weekend father).

Parents with very young children usually were in an arrangement with a weekend father, for example because they felt the children should be with their mother as long as they were young.

*'First I was very careful, because it scared me a bit... the kids were so young, so small. So we first tested one weekend in the month. The children were really young, a baby and a toddler.'* (mother in an arrangement with a weekend father).

When the children grew older most of them got a voice in the choice for an arrangement. Some children were fine with the existing arrangement, others decided to have less contact with one of the parents or more contact with the non-residential parent. For many interviewed parents, the arrangement had changed after the moment their child(ren) got a voice.

*'My son visited his father every other weekend. Until last year. He was almost fifteen, it was a few days before his birthday, and he decided that it was enough. He came home from his dad and said he did not want to go there anymore. He is old enough, so what can I say? Since that day my youngest daughter goes alone to her dad. I guess, when she is a little bit older, she will decide for herself too.'* (mother in an arrangement with a weekend father).

## **Conclusion and discussion**

In this paper, we explored the characteristics of divorced parents who opt for different types of post-divorce living arrangements and in particular co-parenting arrangements. We used a

combination of NKPS and SIN survey data and information from in-depth interviews with NKPS respondents.

A marked, but certainly not unexpected finding was the crucial role of distance in maintaining a co-parenting arrangement. The association with distance was strong, and several parents reported a close distance to be a precondition for maintaining their co-parenting arrangement. Furthermore, parents who have dual careers, are highly educated and have a high income are more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than other parents. The interview data suggested that the causality in all these associations can run both ways and that the relationships between these variables are sometimes indirect.

An important feature in our analysis was the distinction we made between male and female respondents. Maintaining a co-parenting arrangement seems to have a different meaning for men and women. Compared to the common arrangement with a residential mother and a visiting father, a co-parenting arrangement implies an increase of father-child contact but a diminishing of mother-child contact. We think this distinction is capable of explaining many of the gender differences found in our analysis.

Part-time working fathers more frequently maintain a co-parenting arrangement than other fathers, which can be explained by the extra time fathers have to spend with their children compared with weekend or absent fathers. In contrast, fulltime working mothers more frequently maintain a co-parenting arrangement than other mothers, which can be explained by the decrease in time spent with the children.

Fathers whose youngest child is aged 10 or older are more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement than fathers whose youngest child is aged younger than four. In contrast, mothers with a child who is aged 10 or older are more likely to be an absent or a weekend mother than other mothers. It seems that fathers of children aged 10 or older are likely to be more involved with their children and therefore more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement. Mothers who have children who are aged 10 or older seem to be more likely to be less involved with their children than other mothers and therefore also more likely to be an absent or a weekend mother.

Having a new partner seems to make a man less likely but a woman more likely to be in a co-parenting arrangement. This finding suggests that re-partnering leads to a decrease in time spent with the children for the particular ex-partner who re-partners but an increase for the other ex-partner. It should be noted that this finding is partly in contrast with earlier studies (Seltzer et al, 1989; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Cooksey & Craik, 1998) which

found that the remarriage of either parent seemed to diminish the contact frequency between the non-residential father and his children.

All these differences between men and women confirm the importance of paying attention to gender differences in studies on divorced parents and their post-divorce living arrangements.

The combination of survey data and data from in-depth interviews in this study was helpful in gaining complementary insights. The associations of level of education and income with the type of post-divorce living arrangement, for example, could only be detected from the survey data, whereas the information from the interviews helped interpret other associations. Furthermore, the fact that we could select interviewees from NKPS survey respondents made it possible to select divorced parents with an adequate variation in post-divorce living arrangements and a selection of other characteristics.

Unfortunately the survey data did not include information about matched pairs of ex-couples. Neither did the agreement on the collection of interview data from NKPS respondents allow interviewing ex-partners. Information on matched pairs would be highly instructive in gaining further insight into which combinations of characteristics of ex-partners lead to specific post-divorce living arrangements and into how pairs of ex-partners reach their decision to choose their arrangements.

Another limitation of this study is the small number of absent mothers in the survey data. Such mothers are quite unique and they have hardly been the subject of scientific research. Based on this study little can be said about the factors which are associated with the choice for an arrangement with a non-residential (either weekend or absent) mother. Divorced mothers who have an intermediate educational attainment, who live far away from their ex-partner, whose children are aged 10 years or older, have no job and are divorced after 1998 seem to be more likely to be an absent mother than other mothers. More research into this type of arrangement is necessary.

It seems that co-parents are a typically modern category of divorced parents. They are not only modern because their arrangement is relatively new, but also because of the modern values of this category. Co-parenting arrangements seem to be associated with a lifestyle adopted by highly educated, dual career ex-couples with a high income level who were used to a symmetrical division of labour during their partnerships. As long as the labour market participation of women will keep growing, it is likely that this category of divorced families will also be growing.

## **Acknowledgement**

The research for this paper was made possible by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), under grant 400-07-149. The Netherlands Kinship Panel Study is funded by grant 480-10-009 from the Major Investments Fund of NWO, and by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI), Utrecht University, the University of Amsterdam and Tilburg University. The Divorce in the Netherlands 1998 dataset is deposited with DANS- Easy Archiving System [urn:nbn:nl:ui:13-mfg-m73].

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Table 2. Cross-tabulations of characteristics of respondents and ex-couples by type of arrangement

	N in sample	Co- parenting	Weekend father	Absent father	Weekend/ absent mother	Sig.	Co- parenting	Weekend father	Absent father	Weekend/ absent mother	Sig.
	male						female				
	N	%	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	
<b>Distance<sup>1</sup></b>						***					
missing	158	14.6	36.1	39.9	9.5						
< 1,5 km / < 10min )	144	20.1	47.9	21.5	10.4						
1,5 - 5 km / 10 - 15 min	158	10.1	53.8	27.2	8.9						
5 - 20 km / 15 - 30 min	143	4.9	40.6	44.8	9.8						
> 20 km/ > 30 min	161	1.9	47.8	43.5	6.8						
<b>Degree of urbanisation<sup>1</sup></b>											
hardly urbanised	249	9.2	47.8	33.7	9.2						
moderately urbanised	122	7.4	49.2	33.6	9.8						
strongly urbanised	393	11.7	42.5	37.2	8.7						
<b>Annual income (in euros )<sup>2</sup></b>						***					***
missing	122	2.9	50	35.3	11.8		5.7	48.9	39.8	5.7	
< 11242	228	12.9	32.3	38.7	16.1		3.0	40.6	51.8	4.6	
11242 - 20500	248	10.6	43.5	22.4	23.5		12.9	44.8	35.0	7.4	
> 20500		18.4	58.3	11.7	11.7		20.6	41.3	34.9	3.2	
<b>Educational attainment<sup>2</sup></b>						***					***
up to lower secondary	254	4.2	45.1	29.6	21.1		4.9	41.5	48.6	4.9	
middle secondary to middle vocational	204	7.4	52.9	22.1	17.6		5.1	46.3	37.5	11.0	
higher vocational or university	296	21.5	48.6	17.8	12.1		14.8	43.3	39.7	2.1	
<b>Labour market participation<sup>2</sup></b>						*					***
no job	182	10.8	32.4	40.5	16.2		2,8	39,3	52,4	5,5	
part-time job	290	18.2	39.4	21.2	21.2		8,9	47,5	37,4	6,2	
fulltime job	282	13.1	54.0	18.2	14.8		17,0	39,6	39,6	3,8	
<b>Pre-divorce task division<sup>3</sup></b>											
symmetrical	246	3.3	58.7	22.3	15.7		11.2	45.6	39.2	4.0	
asymmetrical	173	9.5	52.4	23.8	14.3		3.9	44.7	47.4	3.9	
<b>New partner<sup>2</sup></b>						***					**
yes	264	6.4	61.7	20.2	11.7		13.5	45.9	34.1	6.5	

no	500	17	41.5	22.6	18.9	***	6.5	42.2	46.3	5.0	**
<b>Year of divorce<sup>2</sup></b>											
before 1990	158	6.1	57.1	30.6	6.1		9.6	42.2	46.8	0.9	
1990 to 1998	387	9.9	48.2	24.8	17		5.3	42.7	44.7	7.3	
> 1998	219	25.4	44.4	7.9	22.2		13.5	45.5	35.3	5.8	
<b>Age youngest child<sup>2</sup></b>											**
younger than 4	65	6.5	64.5	22.6	6.5		14.7	29.4	55.9	0.0	
4 to 10 years old	287	11.5	55.2	20.7	12.6		9.5	50.0	37.5	3.0	
older than 10	411	15.7	41	22.4	20.9		7.6	40.4	44.0	7.9	
<b>Age<sup>2</sup></b>											
40 or younger	291	7.8	50.6	23.4	18.2		7.5	46.7	42.5	3.3	
older than 40	473	15.3	48.3	21	15.3		9.8	41.1	42.1	7.1	
<b>Number of children<sup>2</sup></b>											
1 child	160	13.6	50	18.2	18.2		6.9	43.1	47.4	2.6	
2 child	358	14.7	48.8	21.7	14.7		11.4	44.5	37.6	6.6	
>2 children	246	10	48.8	23.8	17.5		6.6	42.2	45.2	6	

\*\*\* p < .01; \*\* p < .05; \* p < .10 (chi-square)

<sup>1</sup> males and females together, NKPS and Divorce in the Netherlands 1998; <sup>2</sup> NKPS and Divorce in the Netherlands 1998; <sup>3</sup> Divorce in the Netherlands only

Table 3. Multinomial logistic regression of post-divorce living arrangement for men; odds ratios. Reference: arrangement with weekend father

	Co-parenting		Absent father		Weekend/ absent mother	
	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.
<b>Distance between respondent and ex-partner</b>						
<i>(ref = &lt; 1,5 km / &lt; 10min )</i>						
missing	0.66		1.41		0.74	
1,5 - 5 km / 10 - 15 min	0.21	**	0.58		0.69	
5 - 20 km / 15 - 30 min	0.16	**	1.55		0.92	
> 20 km/ > 30 min	0.03	***	0.89		0.23	*
<b>Annual income respondent in euros</b>						
<i>(ref = &lt;11424)</i>						
missing	0.56		0.67		0.95	
11424 - 20500	11.32	*	0.54		2.81	
> 20500	9.46	*	0.23	*	1.01	
<b>Educational attainment</b>						
<i>(ref = up to lower secondary)</i>						
middle secondary to middle vocational	2.46		0.73		1.12	
higher vocational to university	7.87	***	0.80		0.79	
<b>Labour market participation</b>						
<i>(ref = no job)</i>						
part-time job	0.08	*	0.67		0.45	
fulltime job	0.11	*	0.64		0.34	
<b>New partner</b>	0.22	**	0.77		0.53	
<b>Year of divorce</b>						
<i>(ref = before 1990)</i>						
> 1998	4.38		0.36		5.75	**
1990 to 1998	1.16		1.12		2.71	
<b>Age youngest child</b>						
<i>(ref = younger than 4)</i>						
4 to 10 years old	3.11		0.80		1.41	
older than 10	14.62	**	1.13		3.95	
N	253					
Missing	15					
Intercept Only -2 Log Likelihood	537.26					
Final -2 Log Likelihood	428.56					
Chi-Square (df = 48)	108.70					
Significance	0.00					
Nagelkerke R-squared	0.40					

Table 4. Multinomial logistic regression of post-divorce living arrangement for women; odds ratios. Reference: arrangement with weekend father

	Co-parenting		Absent father		Weekend/ absent mother	
	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.
<b>Distance between respondent and ex-partner</b>						
<i>(ref = &lt; 1,5 km / &lt; 10min )</i>						
missing	1.17		5.48	***	2.55	
1,5 - 5 km / 10 - 15 min	0.70		1.48		0.86	
5 - 20 km / 15 - 30 min	0.37		3.83	***	1.18	
> 20 km/ > 30 min	0.21	*	2.87	***	2.48	
<b>Annual income respondent in euros</b>						
<i>(ref = &lt;11424)</i>						
missing	2.33		0.46	**	0.84	
11424 - 20500	3.39	**	0.59	*	1.93	
> 20500	4.11	*	0.58		2.09	
<b>Educational attainment</b>						
<i>(ref = up to lower secondary)</i>						
middle secondary to middle vocational	0.64		0.78		2.47	*
higher vocational to university	1.48		0.98		0.42	
<b>Labour market participation</b>						
<i>(ref = no job)</i>						
part-time job	1.42		0.67		0.59	
fulltime job	2.12		1.07		0.30	
<b>New partner</b>	2.27	**	0.52	***	1.83	
<b>Year of divorce</b>						
<i>(ref = before 1990)</i>						
> 1998	0.73		0.35	***	9.81	*
1990 to 1998	0.51		0.83		10.44	**
<b>Age youngest child</b>						
<i>(ref = younger than 10)</i>						
10 to older	0.81		1.10		4.92	***
N	511					
Missing	6					
Intercept Only -2 Log Likelihood	973.46					
Final -2 Log Likelihood	825.38					
Chi-Square (df = 45)	148.08					
Significance	0.00					
Nagelkerke R-squared	0.29					