

Changes in the relation between parental divorce and the well-being of their adolescent children during the 1984-1999 period in the Netherlands.

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1. Introduction

To date, Dutch research on the correlations between parental divorce and the well-being of their children shows that it is not so much the divorce itself as the quarrelling that goes with divorce (both before and after) that has the greatest negative effects on the well-being of the children concerned (Bosman, 1993; Borgers, Dronkers & van Praag, 1996; Dronkers, 1996, 1997; Spruyt & de Goede, 1997; Fischer & de Graaf, 2001; for a divergent but incorrect interpretation of the research results: van Gelder, 2000). American research (Amato & Keith, 1991; Amato, 2001) mainly points in that direction too.

This Dutch research study is limited to a measurement as precise as possible of these effects and the mechanisms and processes involved. The question whether these effects vary in different cohorts cannot be answered by the greater part of these studies, because the data they contain almost always concerns only one cohort. However, the question on the different correlations between parental divorce and their children's well-being in the case of different cohorts is important for the interpretation of those correlations and for the relevance to be given them. This article attempts to establish, for the successive generations of secondary schoolchildren in the 80s and 90s of the twentieth century, how far these correlations have shifted.

The negative correlations between parental divorce and the well-being of their children can develop in two opposite directions: becoming stronger or weaker. Amato (2001: 362-365), in his meta-analysis on American research, found that a curvilinear relation existed between the effects of single-parent families on the well-being of their children and the decennium in which these effects were measured: these effects (good school results, behaviour, psychological well-being and self-image) became less significant in the course of the 70s and 80s, but increased again in the course of the 80s and 90s. Amato gives two possible explanations for this curvilinear relation: 1. A change in the nature of divorce, whereby recent divorces increasingly concern relationships wherein the de ex-partners were only marginally (instead of extremely) unhappy in their marriage. And indeed divorces with relatively little conflict between parents are particularly hard for the children to understand, which leads to more frustration and thus to a lower well-being of the children. 2. Complete families benefited more than single-parent families from the prosperity in the 90s, so that the latter are lagging increasingly further behind. Similar arguments are addressed by South (2001) for consideration in this connection on the possible contrasts in changes in the effect of working women on their divorce chances.

There are three reasons leading to the assumption that the negative correlations between parental divorce and the well-being of their children have diminished in the case of more recent cohorts in the Netherlands.

1. By comparison with the 60s and 70, the number of divorces involving children has markedly increased. Although it is true that this increase levelled off in the 80s and 90, the current number of divorces certainly shows that the phenomenon of divorce involving children has become much more common and thus easier to accept. Because of the increase in acceptance, parents divorcing seem to be less stigmatised and better able to continue functioning as parents. Moreover, children of divorced parents form much less of an exception and are better accepted by their peers and even supported by them. This

greater level of acceptance and support by peers seems to lessen the negative effects on their well-being.

2. The *de facto* juridical handling of divorce appears to have become more flexible in the course of the 80s and 90s, because divorces involving children became more common and were better accepted. This might mean that there was a lower intensity of tension and conflict between partners divorcing, and that these conflicts were not fought out so much through the children. Nowadays people divorce “more rationally” than before. This means that the children involved are less subject to tension and therefore that there are less negative consequences for their well-being. Moreover, there is nowadays a lot more mediation between divorcing parents instead of a lengthy court case in which the divorce is “threshed out”.
3. A third possible cause of the decrease in negative correlations between parental divorce and their children’s well-being is the increase in “co-parenthood”: divorced parents nowadays more frequently have joint custody over their children. In this way, the parents remain in (good) contact with each other, and the children continue to see both parents and are brought up by both of them. Moreover, upbringing by both parents becomes more effective and the well-being of the children suffers less damage.

There are, however, also three reasons leading to believe that the negative correlations between parental divorce and their children’s well-being have increased in the case of more recent cohorts.

1. In the second half of the twentieth century, the number of divorces involving children increased markedly. Taking for granted that the portion of bad marriages during the twentieth century remained more or less constant, this increase shows that nowadays the average divorce has different grounds than in the past. De Graaf & Kalmijn (2001: 25) shows that grounds for divorce in the second half of the twentieth century changed and also became less weighty. In the 50s, the grounds “sexual infidelity of the man” had a role in over 54% of divorces, in the 80s only in 38% (infidelity of the woman 35%, resp. 28%). The particularly weighty grounds for divorce, “physical violence”, were less frequently mentioned with the passing of decades. This could mean that the rare divorce cases in the 60s and 70s often brought conscious relief to the children involved because divorce led to termination of an untenable situation. The more frequent divorces in the 80s and 90s, on the other hand, more often brought lack of understanding and a state of confusion in the children, because they could not see the need for the divorce. The fact that they had more and more difficulty in understanding their parents’ divorce could have an increasingly negative influence on the children involved in more recent divorces.
2. De Graaf en Kalmijn (2001: 26) also find that women in recent divorces more often use the grounds “growing apart”, “lack of attention” and “not being able to talk to each other properly” than was the case in divorces during previous decades. Of the women who divorced in the period 1949-1972, 69% named the grounds for divorce as not being able to talk, while that percentage in more recent cases of divorced women increased to 80%. The importance for children of a good psychological relationship between their parents is certainly present, but it may have less weight than maintenance of the parental marriage, because, for children, an upbringing as undisturbed as possible is more important than a good relationship between their parents. If the number of divorces on grounds of a bad psychological relationship increases, this means that the negative effects for the children of an average divorce increase.
3. According to De Graaf & Kalmijn (2001: 27) women more and more frequently name the grounds ‘former partner spends too much time at work’ and the ‘division of housekeeping tasks’ as reasons for separation. Too much work was mentioned by 8% of women

divorcing in the 50s and 60s, compared to 28% in divorces during the 80s; and problems concerning division of tasks were mentioned by 15%, resp. 30%. It may be in the children's interest for their parents to have a more emancipated relationship, but this interest may be slighter than that their parents remain married, because for children it is more important to have an upbringing as undisturbed as possible than a more emancipated role division between their parents. If the number of divorces on grounds of too little emancipation in the division of roles increases, this could mean that the negative effects for children of the average divorce increases.

It is of course possible that no changes can be found in the well-being of children in consequence of a divorce in the 1984-1999 period. This would mean that both the above-mentioned developments balance each other out.

Given these apparently contradictory developments and the current stage of research, the main question in the context of this research study is in the first place descriptive: *have the negative correlations between certain aspects of children's well-being and parental divorce diminished during the 1984-1999 period?*

The data available allows this main question to lead to two specific sub-questions that can contribute to a better understanding of changes, or of no changes, in the negative correlations.

1. *In the 80s and 90s, did the negative effects of father families on the children's well-being increase more than the effects of mother families on the children's well-being?* Previous Dutch research (Borgers, Dronkers & van Praag, 1996; Dronkers, 1996, 1997) showed that the well-being of children in mother families was negatively influenced by divorce, while that was not the case in father families. These authors explained this phenomenon by assuming that the fathers who after divorce had full custody of the children formed a special group. Moreover, there was more social support for this category of fathers than for single mothers. However, due to a marked increase in father families during the 80s and 90s, the category of fathers taking care of their children became less selective. Less exceptional fathers took on full custody of their children so that the negative consequences of divorce on their children's well-being was no longer compensated for to such a degree by their particular capacities or by extra social support.
2. *In the 80s and 90s, were there any differences between the negative effects on the well-being of children in mother families with a higher educated mother and the well-being of children in mother families with an lower educated mother?* In previous Dutch research (Borgers, Dronkers & van Praag, 1996) no difference was found between the well-being of children in mother families with a higher educated mother and the well-being of children in mother families with a lower educated mother, while according to American research such a difference can as a rule be found. This difference in results can be explained by the fact that in the Netherlands, until the 70s, divorce was not customary, and hence it was mostly women endowed with perseverance and intelligence (Dronkers, 2002) who were in a condition to push a divorce through. For less perseverant women the threshold was much higher: divorce procedures were difficult and unfamiliar, and they preferred not to risk it. During the 80s and 90s the category of women forming mother families became less selective. Since divorce had become quite normal and divorce procedures were simpler and more common, it may be assumed that divorced mothers were no longer predominantly women endowed with perseverance and intelligence (Dronkers, 2002). This change in the composition of categories of divorced mothers from the viewpoint of perseverance and intelligence could be the reason why differences in well-being between children in mother families with a higher educated mother and children in mother families with a lower educated mother increased in the course of the

80s and 90s. The selective category of divorced women in the 70s neutralized, thanks to their greater intelligence and perseverance, the difference in resources of women with a lower and higher education by comparison with complete families. Since during the 80s and 90s the category of women forming mother families became less selective, the difference in resources of lower and higher educated divorced women was more evident, among other things in the well-being of their children.

2. Data

The article by Borgers, Dronkers en van Praag (1996) addresses the well-being of secondary schoolchildren at the start of the 90s. The School Surveys used by them were, however, put together in a more or less comparable way at different times during the 80s and 90s. For this reason, these School Surveys are suitable for the purpose of answering our questions. For the present article we have been able to use data from the 1984, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996 and 1999 NIBUD¹ School Surveys. These School Surveys can be considered to be representative of a specific year's secondary schoolchildren from all classes and types of school education. They consist of written questionnaires distributed via the school and collected during school time. The schoolchild and the type of family he/she lives in is the independent variable. The well-being of the schoolchildren is the dependent variable. We have here limited the group under study to schoolchildren of Dutch nationality in order to exclude the confusing influence of different cultures². Moreover, we have only included schoolchildren below eighteen years of age in our research population, in order to avoid distortion caused by changes in the indexes of older students. The schoolchildren were asked to give their opinion on a great number of aspects of their lives, without, however, connecting this with the divorce of their parents. All the data we used for this secondary analysis of the NIBUD data consists therefore of self-assessments by the schoolchildren questioned. Secondary schoolchildren orphaned of one parent were also removed from the analysis data, in order to avoid confusion between widowed/orphaned families and divorced families (see Borgers, Dronkers en van Praag, 1996).

From the questionnaires, we selected the questions providing an indication of the different aspects of schoolchildren's well-being. We had to limit ourselves to using those indicators of well-being that had been measured in a comparable manner during the 80s and 90s. Because of these limits, the range of our indicators of well-being is not as broad as that of Borgers, Dronkers en van Praag (1996). Since the extent of conflicts between parents was only quantified during the 90s, we could not include this control variable in our analysis. For the purpose of our investigation the omission of this control variable with regard to the extent of conflicts between parents before and after divorce means that we may overestimate the decrease in negative relations between parental divorce and their children's well-being, since we cannot take account of the presumed increase of 'rational' divorces during the 80s and 90s. However, if we do not find that these negative correlations diminished, that cannot be explained by the omission of control for the extent of conflicts between parents before and after divorce.

We can now analyse the following aspects of secondary schoolchildren's well-being:

- *Parents' financial contributions to the children.* It is frequently seen that in divorced families there is a greater degree of poverty (Hoff, Dronkers & Vrooman, 1997). That implies that children in divorced families have less money available than children in complete families. At the same time, divorced parents might (temporarily) devote less

time and attention to their children, and compensate for this with a greater financial contribution. We are using three indicators: the amount of pocket money per week; the amount of extra money per week, divided into clothing allowance and travel allowance. These sums of money have not been adjusted for inflation or price level. Due to inflation in the 80s, this could lead to an overestimation of the rise in financial contributions from parents during this period of time.

- *Schoolchild's health problems*. The tension brought by parental divorce (both before and after) can also have consequences on the state of health of the schoolchildren. Supervision by parents can also diminish during the divorce period, so that their health is threatened. The indicator is the number of times the student has been home on sick leave during the last month.

- *Undesired negative behaviour*. The tension brought by parental divorce (both before and after) can also have consequences on the degree of undesired negative behaviour manifested by the children. Supervision by parents can also diminish during the divorce period, so that there are more opportunities for undesired negative behaviour. The indicator is a scale of 10 questions to the schoolchild concerning the amount of quarrels, fights and petty criminality per year, such as vandalism and theft, etc. The Cronbach Alfa of this scale is 0.80.

- *Planning of future independence and role division*. The tension caused by parental quarrelling and divorce may lead the children to want to leave their parental home earlier and to live independently in order no longer to be disturbed by this quarrelling and tension. Parental divorce can also cause children of divorced parents to aspire to a more emancipated domestic role division in their own relationships. Moreover, following their parents' divorce, children of divorced parents more frequently see their father and/or mother fill the role of the other parent, so that the chance of a more balanced domestic role division is more realistic. There are two indicators: 1. the age the schoolchild wants to go and live independently. 2. a scale of five questions concerning the future task division in upbringing and caring for children, cooking, earning money and domestic chores, whereby we have reformulated the questions in such a way that it is mostly the traditional role division of man and women that scores the highest points in this scale. The Cronbach Alfa of this scale is 0.72.

The averages, standard deviations and numbers relating to these indicators of well-being are shown in the last two rows of Table 1. In the 1984 School Survey, the variables 'bad health', 'undesired negative behaviour' and 'future role division in upbringing and care of children' was not measured. For these indicators we can only establish a shorter trend, (1990-1999) instead of 1984-1999.

Differences in the well-being of secondary schoolchildren between single-parent and complete families and the possible changes that took place in the 1984-1999 period may also be caused by changes in background features. In fact, due to the increased number of divorces, the composition of the categories of divorced parents changed, and consequently also their characteristics in relation to the category of not divorced parents. This is why we check for the following variables: type of school the schoolchild attends (from lower to higher levels: lbo, mavo, havo, mbo and vwo); schoolchild's age; schoolchild's gender (women score higher); religious belief of the student (five dichotomous variables: Roman Catholic, Protestant, Reformed, Islam, other belief; no belief as a reference category); highest type of parental education (distinguished between mothers and fathers, from lower to higher: from primary school to university level). Table 2 shows how far the most important features of complete families, mother families and father families have shifted in the period from 1984 to 1999.

The education level of the father and mother were not measured in the 1984 School Survey. Therefore, we cannot take account of the parents' education level over the period 1984-1999. Only in the comparisons over 1990-1999 do we use the parents' education level as a control variable. Since in all comparisons relating to the period 1984-1999 the education level of the schoolchild was checked, we believe that the consequences of the lack of data on parental education level in the 1984-1999 comparisons is not disastrous for the purpose of establishing the significance of a possible trend.

Schoolchildren in mother families less often provide information on the education level of the father who left home, while children in father families often do not mention the education level of the mother who left home. In the multivariate comparisons relating to mother families we only used the education level of the mother as a control variable, while in the case of father families we only used the father's education level. Inclusion of the education level of both parents in the comparisons leads to distortion of results relating to single-parent families, since in that case we would have to take account only of the single-parent families in the comparisons, in which children have more frequent contact with the parent who left home, and hence are aware of his/her education level³.

The average type of school attended by children in mother families was only significantly lower than the type attended by children from complete families in the years 1992 and 1994. In the years 1984 and 1990, although it was lower than was the case for children in complete families and in the years 1996 and 1999 equivalent or even higher, the differences are not significant. The average type of school attended by children in father families was of a significantly lower level in the years 1994 and 1996 than was the case for children in complete families. In the years 1984, 1992 and 1999, although the level was lower than for children in complete families (and in 1990 higher), these differences are not significant. In general, the average type of school attended by children from both mother families and father families is of a significantly lower level than the average type of school attended by children in complete families.

The average education level of fathers in father families was significantly higher in the years 1990 and 1999 than the average education level of fathers in complete families. In the other years (with the exception of 1994) the average education level of fathers in father families was in fact higher than that of fathers in complete families, but these differences are not significant. In general, the average education level of fathers in father families was significantly higher than the average education level of fathers in complete families. The average education level of mothers in mother families was, in the years ranging from 1990 through 1996, significantly higher than the average education level of mothers in complete families. This also goes for the year 1999, but this difference is not significant. In general the average education level of mothers in mother families was significantly higher than the average education level of mothers in complete families.

Children in single-parent families are less often members of a Catholic or Protestant church than children in complete families. This was, however, less evident in the 80s than in the 90s, and less evident with regard to children in father families than to children in mother families.

These results in Table 2 clearly show that taking account of changed background features of the categories of divorced and not divorced parents can be important for a correct assessment of the changed effects of single-parent families on the well-being of their children.

3. Differences in well-being between schoolchildren from complete and divorced families

Table 1 shows the differences for each year in the well-being of schoolchildren in complete and divorced families. In this way we obtain a first answer to our main question.

Mothers in mother families give significantly more pocket money to their children compared to parents in complete families. In 1984 children in mother families received *f*6.55 more (*f*53.10-*f*46.55), in 1999 the difference was *f*7.44 (*f*58.72-*f*50.98). No clear trend can be established in the course of years, but it can be concluded that by comparison with 1984 this difference in the amount of pocket money only increased in 1999. With regard to fathers in father families the result in the course of years concerning pocket money was somewhat more inconsistent, but in this category too, albeit to a lesser degree, it can be seen that a significantly higher amount of pocket money was given to the children. Here too no clear trend can be established, the differences in amount show great fluctuations in the different years.

Concerning the amount of clothing allowance and travel allowance no significant differences were found between complete families and mother and father families.

The average age when a schoolchild in a mother family wants to live independently was significantly different in the years ranging from 1990 to 1996 than was the case for schoolchildren in complete families (0.63 year in 1990 and 0.27 year in 1996). This desire to leave the family earlier was, according to previous research, actually fulfilled: children in divorced families left home at a younger age than children in complete families. This difference in age between children in mother families and children in complete families decreased from 1990 to 1996, indicating a trend specific for that time. For children in father families the same significant difference can be seen in the age the child considered leaving home during the years 1990 through 1996, with the exception of the year 1992 (1.00 year in 1990 en 1.33 years in 1996). However, no trend can be established between these differences through the years as it can be for children in mother families compared with children in complete families. The 1999 data show a deviating image with regard to the data of previous years, and this goes for all types of family. In this year no significant differences between types of family could be found.

Children in mother families saw a significantly more emancipated future role division than children in complete families during the years 1992, 1994 and 1999. Children in father families did not see a significantly more emancipated future role division than children in complete families.

Children in mother families were significantly more often home on sick leave than children in complete families. The difference amounted to 0.32 in 1990 and 0.35 in 1999, and no clear increase or decrease was found in the differences in the course of years. For children in father families the same significant difference applies only in the year 1992 (difference: 0.34) in the frequency of staying at home on sick leave during the last month.

Children in mother families also manifested a significantly greater degree of undesired negative behaviour than children in complete families (difference 0.25 in 1990 and 0.09 in 1996), with the exception of the year 1999 during which data show a deviating image. It is clear that the difference in undesired negative behaviour between children in mother families and children in complete families diminished from 1990 through 1996. In 1999 children in mother families manifested a lesser degree of undesired negative behaviour than children in complete families. No significant difference was found with regard to children in father families.

In general, we did not find a much lower degree of significant differences in the late 90s between children in single-parent families and children in complete families by comparison with the 80s or early 90s, but the year 1999 does appear at times to form an exception. That would make the answer to our main question negative: the negative correlations between

certain aspects of the well-being of children and parental divorce appear to have hardly diminished during the period 1984-1999, with the sole positive exception of undesired negative behaviour.

However, changes in background features, such as those shown partially in Table 2, may play a role, since they neutralize any possible decrease of negative effects. We shall look at this in the following paragraphs with the help of multivariate regression. We shall do this first for the indicators of well-being over the whole 1984-1999 period, and then separately for mother and father families. Next, we will look at all the indicators of well-being over the 1990-1999 period, and here we can also check the education level of parents. Finally, we will check whether in the 1990-1999 period the differences in well-being between children with higher educated divorced mothers and children with lower educated divorced mothers increased.

4. Trends in the 1984-1999 period

In de multivariate regression analyses shown in Table 3, the variables ‘type of family’ (mother and father family) and ‘year of investigation’ are taken up regardless of whether they have a significant effect or not. The other variables are shown according to the ‘stepwise’ method, that is, only the variables with significant effects are shown. Finally, the variable on the interaction ‘type of family*year’ gives an indication of whether there is a significant increase or decrease in the course of successive years⁴. The interaction variable is also only shown if it is relevant.

4.1. Mother families in the 1984-1999 period

Children in mother families receive significantly more pocket money than children in complete families, as shown in Table 3. In the course of successive years the amount of pocket money received by all children regardless of the type of family increases; in 1999 children received more pocket money than in 1984, but this can be explained by the inflation during the 80s. There is, however, no significant interaction effect, that is, there is no significant increase or decrease in the effect of mother families in the course of successive years on the variable ‘pocket money’.

Children in mother families received significantly more clothing allowance than children in complete families. The amount of clothing allowance received increased significantly too for all children in the course of successive years. There is, however, no significant increase or decrease in the effect of mother families in successive cohorts on the variable ‘clothing allowance’.

Children in mother families did not receive significantly less travel allowance than children in complete families. In successive years all children received significantly more travel allowance. There is no significant interaction effect of the effect of mother families during successive years in the variable ‘travel allowance’.

Children in mother families wanted to leave home earlier than their peers in complete families. During the 90s all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, wanted to leave home earlier than children during the 80s.⁵ There is, however, no significant increase or decrease to be seen in the effect of mother families in the course of successive years on the variable ‘age of leaving home’.

There were, therefore, no significant differences in the late 90s between children in mother families and children in complete families by comparison with the 80s, if we take account of the available background features.

4.2. Father families in the 1984-1999 period

Children in father families received significantly more pocket money than children in complete families, as shown in Table 3. In the course of successive years the amount of pocket money increased significantly; all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, received more pocket money in 1999 than in 1984. There was, however, no significant interaction effect, that is, there was no significant increase or decrease in the effect of father families in successive years on the variable 'pocket money'.

Children in father families received significantly more clothing allowance than children in complete families. The amount of clothing allowance too increased significantly for all children in the course of successive years. There was no significant increase or decrease in the effect of father families in successive cohorts on the variable 'clothing allowance'.

Children in father families did not receive significantly less travel allowance than children in complete families. In the course of years all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, received significantly more travel allowance. There was no significant interaction effect on the variable 'travel allowance'.

Children in father families wanted to leave home earlier than their peers in complete families. Regardless of the type of family they belonged to, all children in the 90s wanted to leave home earlier than children in the 80s. There was, however, no significant increase or decrease in the effect of father families in the course of years on the variable 'home-leaving age'.

There were, therefore, no significant differences in the late 90s between children in father families and children in complete families by comparison with the early 80s, if we take account of the available background features.

5. Trends in the 1990-1999 period

In the multivariate regression analyses shown in Tables 4 and 5 the family type variable (mother family and father family) and year-of-investigation variable are shown, regardless of whether they have a significant effect or not. The other variables are shown according to the 'stepwise' method, that is, only the variables with significant effects are shown. Besides the interaction variable 'type of family * year', the interaction terms 'mother family *mother's education level'⁶ and 'mother family*mother's education level *year appear, if they are significant'⁷. The second interaction term indicates whether there is a significant difference in well-being between children in mother families with a mother having a higher or lower level of education other than the normal difference in well-being between children with parents with a higher and lower education level. The third interaction term indicates whether this difference in well-being between children in mother families having a mother with a higher or lower level of education in successive years significantly increases or decreases. These three interaction variables are only shown if they are significant.

5.1. Mother families in the 1990-1999 period

Children in mother families receive significantly more pocket money than children in complete families, as shown in Table 4. The increase in pocket money received from 1990 to 1999 by all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, is not significant, as opposed to the 1984-1999 period. The effect of mother families on the pocket money variable, however, diminishes significantly in the course of successive years, as opposed to the 1984-1999 period. That means in this case that children in mother families between 1990 and 1999 received less and less pocket money by comparison with children in complete families, so that the difference in the amount of pocket money received between children in mother families and children in complete families diminished.

In mother families, children did not receive significantly more clothing allowance than children in complete families. In the course of successive years, the amount of clothing allowance received by all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, diminished, as opposed to the 1984-1999 period. There was no significant increase or decrease in the effect of mother families in the course of successive years on the clothing allowance variable.

There was no difference in the amount of travel allowance received by children in mother families and children in complete families. In the course of successive years the amount of travel allowance received by all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, did not increase significantly, as opposed to the 1984-1999 period. There is no significant interaction effect between year and mother family.

Children in mother families considered leaving home earlier than their peers in complete families. There is, however, in the course of successive years, no significant difference to be found in the age at which all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, considered leaving home. In 1999 children considered leaving home at a younger age than children in 1990. There is no significant interaction effect between year and mother family.

In mother families, children were faced with a significantly less traditional role division than their peers in complete families. In the course of successive years, however, all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, saw their future role division in a more and more traditional way. There was no significant interaction effect between year and mother family.

Children in mother families seem to have been more frequently at home on sick leave by comparison with children in complete families. In the course of successive years there was no significant increase in the number of times that all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, stayed home on sick leave. There was no significant interaction effect between year and mother family.

Children in mother families manifested significantly more undesired negative behaviour than children in complete families. The amount of undesired negative behaviour manifested by all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, increased significantly in 1999, by comparison with 1990. There was no significant interaction effect between year and mother family.

In general, we do not find a much less significant difference in the late 90s between children in mother families and children in complete families by comparison with the early 90s, if we take account of the available background features. And in this way the answer to our main question is in the negative: the negative correlations between certain aspects of the well-being of children and parental divorce appear, during the period 1990-199, to have hardly diminished, with the positive exception of the amount of pocket money.

Nor have we found any significant difference in the well-being of children in mother families having a mother with a higher or lower education level, and hence no significant increase or decrease in that effect in the 1990-1999 period.

5.2. Father families in the 1990-1999 period

Children in father families did not receive significantly less pocket money by comparison with children in complete families, as shown in Table 5. In the course of successive years all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, received a comparable amount of pocket money. However, in the course of successive years, the effect of father families on pocket money variable did increase significantly. That is, children in father families during the 90s received more and more pocket money by comparison with children in complete families. That shows a difference by comparison with the results for the 1984-1999 period.

Children in father families, by comparison with children in complete families, did not receive significantly more clothing allowance. Children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, received significantly less clothing allowance in the late 90s by comparison with the early 90s. There was no significant increase or decrease in the effect of father families in the course of successive years on the clothing allowance variable.

Children in father families did not receive significantly less travel allowance than children in complete families. The increase in the amount of travel allowance received by all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, did not increase significantly in the course of successive years. There was also no interaction effect between year and father family.

Children in father families considered leaving home at a significantly earlier age than children in complete families. All children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, considered leaving home significantly earlier by comparison with what they thought in the early 90s. There was no increase in the effect of father families in the course of successive years on the age when children considered leaving home. That means that children in father families in the course of the 90s wanted to leave home at an increasingly later age. However, if we do not take account of the level of education of the fathers (see Table 3), we then find no increase in the age at which children wanted to leave the father family.

Children in father families did not see for their own future a significantly less traditional role division than children in complete families. In the course of successive years, all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, saw a more and more traditional future role division for themselves. There was no significant increase or decrease of the effect of father families in the course of successive years on the variable 'future role division'.

Children in father families were significantly more frequently at home on sick leave than their peers in complete families. All children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, were more frequently home on sick leave during the 90s. There was no significant interaction effect between year and father family.

Children in father families manifested significantly more undesired negative behaviour than children in complete families. In the course of successive years the degree of undesired negative behaviour in all children, regardless of the type of family they belonged to, increased significantly. There was no significant increase or decrease in the effect of father families in the course of the 90s on the undesired negative behaviour variable.

In general, we did not find significantly less difference in the late 90s between children in father families and children in complete families by comparison with the early 90s, if we take account of the available background features. In this way the answer to our main question is in the negative: the negative correlations between certain aspects of the well-being of children and parental divorce seem hardly to have diminished in the 1990-1999 period, with the positive exception of the amount of pocket money and the age at which children want to leave home.

6. Conclusion and discussion

What do the above results now mean in the context of our investigation?

In the first place, it is apparent that, in general, the assumption that the negative correlations between parental divorce and the well-being of their children have diminished during the 1984-1999 period cannot be confirmed. In order to establish differences in the degree of well-being between children in single-parent families and children in complete families in the 1984-1999 period, we have had to confine ourselves to the sole well-being in terms of *financial maintenance* and the *age at which schoolchildren considered leaving home*. No significant effects were found on the basis of these indicators on the well-being of secondary schoolchildren in either mother families or father families in the course of successive years. There was no difference between the well-being of children in single-parent families and the well-being of children in complete families in the late 90s by comparison with the 80s.

Measuring the shorter trend, that is, 1990-1999, the negative correlations between parental divorce and the well-being of their children change not at all or hardly. There are, however, two indicators of well-being showing changes between the early and late 90s. The effect of mother families on the pocket money variable diminished significantly during this period. Children in mother families received, in the course of successive years, less and less pocket money by comparison with children in complete families, so that the original difference in the amount of pocket money received between children in single-parent families and children in complete families diminished. This could point to a decrease in 'buy-off behaviour' in mother families, caused by their paying less attention to their children and/or to compensate for the more negative family situation. Mother families became more common during the 90s, because of this possible decrease in 'buy-off behaviour', and in this sense became more similar to complete families.

The effect of father families did instead increase significantly during this period, which means that children in father families in the course of successive years received more and more pocket money by comparison with children in complete families. This points to an increase in 'buy-off behaviour' in father families, which came about because fathers with custody became less exceptional in the course of the 90s. In this sense, father families became more and more comparable to the old-fashioned mother families, where children received more pocket money than those in complete families. In father families there was, moreover, an increased effect in the course of successive years on the age at which children considered leaving home. This means that children in father families during the 90s considered leaving home at an increasingly later age than children in complete families. This could mean that children in father families find life in a single-parent family more positive and therefore want to continue living at home for a longer period of time.

In the introduction we also posed two specific sub-questions. The assumption that in the 80s and 90s the negative effects of father families on the well-being of their children seem to have increased to a greater degree than the negative effects of mother families on their children cannot be confirmed. There were no more significant negative effects in the course of successive years for children in father families than for those in mother families. The category of fathers forming father families probably did not become more selective. We see that the average education level of fathers in father families in 1999 was significantly higher than that of fathers in complete families, just as it was significantly higher in 1990.

The assumption that in the 80s and 90s differences the negative effects of divorce on the well-being of children were smaller the mother had a high level of education and children in mother families can also not be confirmed. The negative marks of divorce do not depend, apparently, on the amount of available educational resources of divorced mothers.

The conclusion to this research study is that the negative consequences of divorce and life in a single-parent family during the late 90s hardly diminished by comparison with the 80s and early 90s. However, this does not necessarily mean that the trend commonly assumed does not play a role. The time span of fifteen and/or nine years may be too short to be able to set such a trend. It would be preferable if analyses could be made over a greater number of years in order to be able to establish trends over a longer period of time. In our research, we made use of all School Surveys carried out in a more or less similar way during the 80s and 90s. There are, however, no similar Dutch research data available covering longer periods of time. Moreover, the different indicators of well-being in the various School Surveys were not measured in a comparable way. This makes it harder to make comparisons over longer periods of time. Therefore, we are of the opinion that, despite these methodical restrictions, the measuring of possible changed effects of single-parent families, addressed in this article, for the moment cannot be carried out better in the Netherlands.

The conclusion that the negative consequences of divorce and life in a single-parent family during the late 90s hardly diminished by comparison with the 80s and early 90s has consequences in two opposing directions. In the first place, it does not support the notion that divorce can become a normal and harmless feature of a modern and enlightened society, such as was hoped during the 70s and 80s. In the second place, however, this conclusion does not support the notion that the increased number of divorces might be responsible for the rapid increase in undesired features of modern society (for example, increase in violence in young people), as the neo-conservatives now assert. The effects of divorce and the growth in the number of divorces with children are too slight for this to be feasible (see Table 2, first two rows). Above all, our analyses show that the increase in undesired behaviour in young people during the 90s (more negative behaviour, more often sick, more traditional views on role division) appeared in all children regardless of the type of family they belonged to at the time.

No scapegoats or cheap and fast solutions exist for undesired features of societies, and neither can classical institutions like marriage and family be changed at will or denied without damage being caused.

Table 1: Average scores of schoolchildren in complete families, mother families and father families on the various indicators for well-being for the years 1984, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996 en 1999 (in brackets the standard deviations).

Average amount of pocket money per month

	1984	1990	1992	1994	1996	1999	Total	N
Complete family	46.55 (34.54)	62.03 (56.12)	49.52 (45.54)	50.34 (42.21)	49.81 (51.29)	48.19 (41.87)	50.98 (45.61)	59061
Single-parent family, mother	53.10 ** (42.16)	75.45** (69.11)	59.31** (54.88)	56.15** (47.14)	50.97 (35.87)	55.63** (53.13)	58.72 (52.55)	4961
Single-parent family, father	55.01 ** (34.36)	70.87* (56.86)	66.10** (70.30)	63.48* (52.72)	57.52 (37.09)	56.08* (47.72)	62.10 (54.61)	882
Total	47.11 (35.16)	63.22 (57.34)	50.61 (47.01)	50.93 (42.77)	49.92 (50.33)	48.88 (42.93)	51.72 (46.37)	64904
N	9830	10041	12360	13953	7803	10917	64904	

Average amount of clothing allowance per month

	1984	1990	1992	1994	1996	1999	Total	N
Complete family	83.60 (43.04)	113.32 (62.06)	118.45 (64.81)	113.84 (55.91)	98.23 (42.21)	100.74 (51.72)	107.16 (56.74)	19330
Single-parent family, mother	85.19 (44.63)	120.36* (68.74)	122.54 (76.22)	113.03 (58.26)	102.03 (55.52)	107.82 (67.19)	111.55 (65.23)	2226
Single-parent family, father	88.82 (46.59)	119.89 (74.36)	122.74 (75.40)	130.33 (65.05)	90.94 (31.90)	101.88 (56.61)	112.26 (65.95)	386
Total	83.84 (43.24)	114.20 (63.11)	118.96 (66.32)	113.92 (56.29)	98.56 (43.65)	101.43 (53.50)	107.70 (57.85)	21942
N	2668	4018	4502	4924	2547	3283	21942	

Average amount of travel allowance per month

	1984	1990	1992	1994	1996	1999	Total	N
Complete family	54.10 (49.86)	65.07 (70.76)	49.04 (41.14)	63.89 (58.13)	46.72 (46.75)	52.13 (48.41)	57.57 (56.85)	8492
Single-parent family, mother	49.11 (43.74)	61.78 (56.20)	46.90 (37.49)	60.14 (46.00)	41.82 (30.67)	61.07 (52.12)	55.34 (47.50)	957
Single-parent family, father	50.74 (52.73)	53.16* (40.76)	45.17 (40.37)	65.48 (66.87)	41.20 (18.36)	62.50 (71.76)	54.40 (53.15)	181
Total	53.66 (49.47)	64.50 (68.99)	48.70 (40.69)	63.47 (56.96)	46.20 (45.28)	53.40 (49.81)	57.29 (55.93)	9630
N	2180	2560	1392	1915	596	987	9630	

Average age at which the schoolchild wishes to leave home

	1984	1990	1992	1994	1996	1999	Total	N
Complete family	20.76 (2.06)	20.05 (3.33)	20.32 (2.84)	20.55 (2.81)	20.15 (2.31)	17.50 (8.92)	19.85 (4.73)	62876
Single-parent family, mother	20.63 (2.19)	19.42** (4.19)	20.03** (2.84)	20.25** (2.75)	19.88** (2.03)	17.55 (8.52)	19.62 (4.58)	5683
Single-parent family, father	20.48 (2.19)	19.05** (4.83)	20.27 (2.49)	19.85** (2.53)	18.82** (1.83)	17.56 (7.76)	19.18 (5.12)	981
Total	20.74 (2.08)	19.98 (3.44)	20.29 (2.83)	20.51 (2.80)	20.12 (2.29)	17.50 (8.87)	19.82 (4.73)	69540
N	10598	11052	13275	15413	6132	13070	69540	

Average scale scores on future role division as seen by the schoolchild

	1984	1990	1992	1994	1996	1999	Total	N
Complete family		8.81 (1.32)	8.69 (1.45)	8.62 (1.51)	8.55 (1.49)	8.69 (1.66)	8.67 (1.50)	54107
Single-parent family, mother		8.74 (1.13)	8.53** (1.27)	8.54* (1.33)	8.45 (1.20)	8.55* (1.52)	8.56 (1.31)	4867
Single-parent family, father		8.78 (1.31)	8.71 (1.31)	8.50 (1.29)	8.65 (1.60)	8.61 (1.57)	8.66 (1.41)	820
Total		8.80 (1.31)	8.67 (1.43)	8.61 (1.50)	8.54 (1.47)	8.68 (1.65)	8.66 (1.48)	59794
N		9730	14063	15976	8148	11877	59794	

Average number of times at home on sick leave during the last month

	1984	1990	1992	1994	1996	1999	Total	N
Complete family		1.60 (1.04)	0.68 (1.98)	0.86 (2.16)	1.07 (2.32)	1.43 (5.56)	1.09 (3.04)	53743
Single-parent family, mother		1.92** (1.27)	1.11** (2.71)	1.34** (2.38)	1.54** (2.70)	1.78* (4.43)	1.48 (2.85)	4897
Single-parent family, father		1.77 (1.20)	1.02* (2.51)	0.93 (2.04)	1.54 (2.37)	1.61 (3.03)	1.38 (2.43)	819
Total		1.63 (1.07)	0.73 (2.07)	0.91 (2.18)	1.10 (2.35)	1.46 (5.44)	1.13 (3.02)	59459
N		10193	13704	15305	8572	11685	59459	

Average scale scores on undesired negative behaviour manifested by the schoolchild

	1984	1990	1992	1994	1996	1999	Total	N
Complete family		0.62 (1.75)	0.61 (2.03)	0.53 (1.57)	0.45 (0.96)	0.93 (4.51)	0.63 (2.48)	44632
Single-parent family, mother		0.88** (2.26)	0.77* (2.12)	0.68** (1.87)	0.54* (1.06)	0.87 (2.30)	0.75 (2.01)	4058
Single-parent family, father		0.76 (1.55)	0.74 (2.08)	0.70 (1.49)	0.84 (1.90)	1.01 (2.56)	0.83 (2.07)	641
Total		0.64 (1.79)	0.62 (2.04)	0.55 (1.60)	0.45 (0.97)	0.93 (4.35)	0.64 (2.44)	60247
N		10916	13295	15716	8735	11585	60247	

* = $p < 0.01$; ** = $p < 0.05$ (t-test of comparison with complete family)

Table 2: The most relevant background features of complete families, mother families and father families during the years 1984, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996 and 1999 (in brackets the standard deviations).

	1984	1990	1992	1994	1996	1999	Total
% mother families	7.1	8.0	8.7	9.2	7.4	7.6	8.1
% father families	1.3	1.7	1.6	0.7	0.5	2.2	1.4
Average type of school Complete families	2.96 (1.33)	2.89 (1.36)	3.06 (1.26)	3.00 (1.35)	3.20 (1.41)	3.47 (1.35)	3.07 (1.35)
Average type of school Mother families	2.88 (1.33)	2.88 (1.41)	2.95** (1.29)	2.85** (1.32)	3.24 (1.43)	3.47 (1.32)	3.01** (1.36)
Average type of school Father families	2.92 (1.40)	3.00 (1.36)	2.92 (1.27)	2.38** (1.18)	2.44** (1.31)	3.31 (1.38)	2.94** (1.35)
Average education level of father in complete families		2.74 (1.44)	3.01 (1.54)	3.08 (1.41)	3.29 (1.48)	3.24 (1.45)	3.05 (1.48)
Average education level of father in father families		3.10** (1.68)	3.13 (1.60)	3.07 (1.68)	3.50 (1.69)	3.55** (1.43)	3.25** (1.59)
Average education level of mother in complete families		2.20 (.96)	2.46 (1.17)	2.83 (1.15)	2.97 (1.25)	3.00 (1.23)	2.69 (1.19)
Average education level of mother in mother families		2.29* (1.16)	2.66** (1.37)	2.95** (1.22)	3.22** (1.34)	3.04 (1.31)	2.81** (1.31)
% Roman Cath. complete fam.	38	35	29	30	28	21	30
% Roman Cath. mother families	36	25**	24**	24**	21**	18**	24**
% Roman Cath. father families	37	24**	24*	16**	33	16	23**
% Protestant complete families	18	21	19	18	18	17	18
% Protestant mother families	12**	15**	11**	10**	9**	7**	10**
% Protestant father families	8**	19	13*	19	15	7**	13**

* = $p < 0.01$; ** = $p < 0.05$ (t-test or χ^2 by comparison with complete family)

Table 3: effects of mother families and father families (both by comparison with complete families) on the various indicators for well-being checked for different background features, in the 1984-1999 period.

	Mother families				Father families			
	Pocket money	Clothing allowance	Travel allowance	Age of leaving home	Pocket money	Clothing allowance	Travel money	Age of leaving home
Mother family	0.04**	0.01*	-0.01	-0.02**	0.03**	0.02*	-0.02	-0.02**
Year	0.09**	0.10**	0.07**	-0.11**	0.09**	0.10**	0.06**	-0.12**
Gender	-0.07**	-0.03**		-0.09**	-0.08**	-0.03**		-0.09**
Age	0.25**	0.06**	0.13**	0.11**	0.25**	0.06**	0.13**	0.11**
Type of school	-0.08**	-0.09**	-0.18**	-0.08**	-0.08**	-0.08**	-0.19**	-0.09**
Roman Catholic				0.06**				0.05**
Protestant	-0.08**	-0.07**		0.05**	-0.08**	-0.08**		0.05**
Islam	0.04**	0.03**		0.02**	0.04**	0.03**		0.02**
Other belief	-0.01**			0.01**	-0.01**			
Mother family*yr.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-	-	-	-
Father family*yr.	-	-	-	-	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Adjusted R2	0.08	0.02	0.05	0.05	0.08	0.02	0.05	0.05

* = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$.

Table 4: effects of mother families (by comparison with complete families) on the various indicators for well-being checked for different background features in the 1990-1999 period.

	Pocket money	Clothing allowance	Travel allowance	Age of leaving home	Future role division	At home on sick leave	Negative behaviour
Mother family	0.09**	0.01	-0.00	-0.02**	-0.04**	0.03**	0.02**
Year	0.01	-0.07**	0.01	-0.08**	0.05**	0.02**	0.02**
Gender	-0.08**			-0.09**		0.03**	-0.09**
Age	0.23**	0.06**	0.13**	0.09**	-0.08**	0.02**	-0.04**
Type of school	-0.08**	-0.08**	-0.19**	-0.09**	-0.08**	-0.05**	-0.06**
Mother's education		0.03**		-0.02**	-0.06**	0.01*	0.02**
Roman Catholic				0.05**	0.03**	-0.02**	-0.04**
Protestant	-0.08**	-0.09**		0.05**	0.09**	-0.02**	-0.05**
Islam	0.02**	0.03**		0.01*	0.01**	0.05**	0.03**
Other belief				0.01*		0.03**	0.01*
Mother family*year	-0.06**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Mother family*mother's education	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Mother family*mother's education*year	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Adjusted R2	0.08	0.02	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.01	0.02

* = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$.

Table 5: effects of father families (by comparison with complete families) on the various indicators of well-being checked for different background features.

	Pocket money	Clothing allowance	Travel allowance	Age of leaving home	Future role division	At home on sick leave	Negative behaviour
Father family	-0.01	0.02	-0.02	-0.06**	-0.01	0.01*	0.01*
Year	0.00	-0.07**	0.03	-0.09**	0.02**	0.02**	0.03**
Gender	-0.07**	-0.02*		-0.09**	-0.02**	0.02**	-0.09**
Age	0.24**	0.05**	0.14**	0.09**	-0.08**	0.02**	-0.04**
Type of school	-0.08**	-0.09**	-0.20**	-0.08**	-0.07**	-0.05**	-0.06**
Father's education		0.05**	0.04*	-0.06**	-0.06**		0.02**
Roman Catholic				0.04**	0.03**	-0.03**	-0.04**
Protestant	-0.08**	-0.09**		0.04**	0.09**	-0.03**	-0.06**
Islam	0.03**				0.01*	0.06**	0.03**
Other belief						0.02**	0.01*
Interaction father family* year	0.04*	n.s.	n.s.	0.05**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Adjusted R2	0.08	0.03	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.01	0.02

* = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$.

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Abstract

Changes in the relation between parental divorce and the well-being of their adolescent children during the 1984-1999 period in the Netherlands.

In this paper we address the question: 'are the negative correlations between particular aspects of the well-being of children and the parental divorce changed during the 1984-1999 period in the Netherlands?' We used the NIBUD school-surveys of 1984, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996 and 1999 to compare for every year (aspects of) the well-being of adolescents living in complete families with that of their peers living in mother-families or father-families. The results indicate that there are no significant differences in the late 90s between single-parent families and complete families compared to the situation in the 80s. A comparison of the early 90s and the late 90s between single-parent families and complete families also show hardly any significant differences, except the amount of money children get of their parents in single-parent families (gets less in mother families and more in father families) and the expected age children think to leave their parental home in father-families (at a higher age in the 90s, so approximating the situation in complete families).

Notes

¹ Data available at NIWI in Amsterdam under catalogue numbers P1446, P1447, P1448, P1449, P1450 and P1495.

² That does not, however, mean that changes in correlations between single-parent family, ethnical origin and well-being of secondary schoolchildren is not interesting or important. It does, however, require a separate study, that would go beyond the scope of this article.

³ Analyses not appearing in this article show that the variances within the dependent variables are smaller in the case of single-parent families whereby schoolchildren are aware of the education level of both parents.

⁴ This interaction term is 0 in the case of a complete family, 1 in the case of a mother family in the year 1984 and 15 in the case of a mother family in the year 1999.

⁵ This result seems contradictory to the tendency in the 80s and 90s, when adolescents in fact lived longer in the parental home. What is meant is not actual behaviour but an expectancy. The decreasing age at which these schoolchildren expect to leave their parental home expresses rather their greater independence within the parental household.

⁶ This interaction term is 0 in the case of a complete family and increases with the education level of the mother in a mother family.

⁷ This interaction term is 0 in the case of a complete family and increases with the education level of the mother in a mother family and with the year of investigation.