The impact of different (step)family trajectories on the parent-child relationship.

(Work in progress – not to be quoted)

Abstract
Increasing divorce rates go hand in hand with an increasing number of children living together with a stepparent. In addition, as co-parenting is increasingly seen as the preferred parenting model following divorce, children are more and more entangled in a complex network of bi-nuclear (step)family relationships. As a consequence, the parent-child relationship may become under pressure. Most research focuses on the current family situation of the parent and the child and does not bring into account the family transitions and the duration of the different family situations the child has experienced. In this study, the relationship between the (step)family trajectories of children and the parent-child relationship are explored. Making use of the technique of sequence analysis, a typology of (step)family trajectories will be constructed. Next, the relationship between different family trajectories and the parent-child relationship will be explored. Therefore, data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study will be used.

Authors
Kim Bastaits graduated with a Master's degree in Sociology in 2007. Since September 2007 she is working as a researcher at the Research centre for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies (CELLO) in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. Her dissertation research will focus on divorce in Flanders.
Sofie Vanassche earned her Master's Degree in Sociology in 2005. Since January 2006 she has been a teaching assistant at the Centre for Sociological Research (research domain Family and Population) in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the KULeuven, Belgium. Her doctoral research examines the creation and reconfiguration of stepfamilies in Flanders.
Koen Matthijs is full professor at the Centre for Sociological Research (research domain Family and Population) in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the KULeuven, Belgium. His courses, research and academic activities are mainly situated in the field of demography and family sociology.
Christine Van Peer is a sociologist and senior researcher at the Research Centre of the Flemish Government. Her main research areas currently are below-replacement fertility, children's rights and divorce.

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1. Introduction

Consistent with the trend in Western countries, many Dutch people are these days confronted with the end of their marriage or partner relationship. De Graaf (2005) estimated that every year approximately 100.000 married or unmarried cohabitating couples end their relationship on a total population of approximately 16 million people. The end of a partner relationship often is not only the end of what once was a romantic fairy-tale for the involved adults, also many children are confronted with the divorce of their parents. Every year between 50.000 and 60.000 children are confronted with a parental divorce or separation (De Graaf, 2005). However, this does not mean that all of these children are living in a single-parent household as a consequence of parental break-up. Most of the divorced or separated singles do find a new partner in the first years following divorce, with who they often choose to cohabit rather then to remarry (Netherlands Statistics, 2001). As a consequence, many children who experienced a parental divorce or separation are living together with a stepparent a few years later. For example, estimates from the Netherlands Statistics (2001) show that approximately 40% of the children from divorced parents are confronted with a stepparent. The minimum number of stepfamilies in the Netherlands in 2007 was estimated on 149.000 (that is approximately 7% of all two-parent families[1]), involving 282.000 children (Steenhof, 2007). These family transitions and configurations have implications for all involved family members. As Kaufman and Uhlenberg (1998, p.924) stated: "because of linkages across generations, it is likely that life course transitions experienced by members of one generation will have consequences for members of the other."

Stepfamilies are surely not an new phenomena, but the origins and nature of stepfamilies and stepfamily relationships have changed enormously over time. In earlier days, many stepfamilies were formed after the death of the former partner, while today mainly divorce or separation are preceding the stepfamily formation (Levin & Trost, 2000; Villeneuve-Gokalp, 2000). This is not a surprise given the very high divorce rates of the last decades and considering the fact that the majority of the divorced people remarries or cohabits with a new partner (Matthijs, 2005). In this study, the focus will be those 'new' kind of stepfamilies which are the result of the remarriage or re-cohabitation of a divorced man or woman with children. These families are a specific kind of stepfamilies in the sense that the involved stepparents are in fact supplementary parents, rather than replacement parents. In the past, children who lived with only one of their biological parents were in most cases totally deprived of the other biological parent, who was often either dead or unknown. Today, children not living with both their parents often still have contact with both parents. As a consequence, the child often has two families who are not living under the same roof, increasing the complexity of the family configuration during childhood (Villeneuve-Gokalp, 2000).

In addition, there has been an evolution towards favouring co-parenting in recent years, based on the idea that the parental couple should survive the conjugal couple (Villeneuve-Gokalp, 2000, Lemieux, 2005; Marquet, n.d.; Marquet, 2007; Matthijs, 1990) and that the emotional bond with both biological parents should be maintained in case of parental divorce. In the Netherlands, legal joint custody is laid down in the law of the 1st of January 1998 and outlines the joint exercise of parental authority, also in case both parents do no longer live together. Exceptions on this rule can only be made in favour of the interests of the child (Spruijt, 2007). This evolution in the divorce legislation refers to a social climate in which the biological parents are seen as ultimate responsible in bringing up their children. One of the subsequent consequences is the creation of more and more complex stepfamilies in which the number and nature of different relatedness's of (step)family members increases spectacularly. Children do not only stay more in contact with both of their parents, they will also be more 'confronted' with, if any, the new partners of their mother and father and their children from previous unions, that is respectively a stepfather, a stepmother and stepsiblings.

In sum, the creation of a stepfamily can have an influence on the relationship between the ex-partners, the parent-child and sibling relationships, creates new stepchild-stepparent relationships, and possibly also new sibling relationships. The members of stepfamilies get more and more entangled in a network of complex interpersonal familial relationships, with own dynamics and a lack of a normative framework about how to fulfil their family roles. In this research, the focus will be on the (step)family trajectories of children following parental divorce and on the impact of those (step)family trajectories on the parent-child relationship.

[1] In 2007 there were approximately 2,1 million couples with children in the Netherlands (Steenhof, 2007)

2. Theoretical background

2.1 A family system perspective

Using a system approach of family functioning, the stepfamily can be seen as an interdependent emotional and relational system of family relationships (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). A family system perspective focuses on the changes in family relationships as a consequence of familial transitions (Brooks-Gunn, 1994), looking at the family as a process, in stead of as a structure (Broderick, 1990). A divorce or separation is no terminal event: people can remarry or recohabit, experience a second divorce/seperation, etc. In other words, an household is not a static fact but contains a series of events (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen, Anderson, 1989).

Stepfamilies can be formed in a variety of ways, leading to different family configurations. First of all, we can make a distinction between different types of stepfamilies based on the relationship history of both men and women establishing a new union, that is the *partner system*. Both partners can have experienced one or more divorce or separation, the death of a former partner, or never have been married or cohabiting with a partner before (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). This research focuses mainly on stepfamilies in which at least one of the partners has divorced or separated from a previous partner.

Both partners also have a unique fertility history (Stewart, 2002). Different fertility history combinations lead to different stepfamily formations with different (step)family relationships Therefore, further distinctions can be made according to the fact if one or both partners brings along a child or children from previous unions , that is *the parental system*. If both partners bring children from previous unions, this leads to the creation of stepsibling relationships within the stepfamily. If the new partners decide to have a biological child together, this can lead to the creation of half sibling relationships. These last two aspects of the family formation process are part of *the sibling system.*

Another important characteristic of post-divorce stepfamilies is the parallel existence of two parental households from the perspective of the child: one of the mother and one of the father. These two households have their own partner, parental and sibling system. Both households can vary from a single-person household to a complex stepfamily configuration containing children from the previous union(s) of both partners, as well as children born within the new partner relationship. This parallel existence of a household of respectively the mother and father is also referred to as 'binuclear families' (Ahrons & Perlmutter, 1982). These binuclear families are the foundation of the contemporary, complex network of (step)family-relationships by residence and (affinal) kinship. They create a supplementary sub-system of inter-household relationships (for example between ex-partners and between previous and current partners), and are the foundation of a complex network of step-family relationships, which are mutually different with regard to kinship characteristics, economic power, custody arrangement and communication cultures. In practise, these stepfamilies are often even more complex: they can be full- or part-time, and there are different levels of residential and non-residential custody arrangements Interesting in this respect is that clinicians emphasize the phenomena of *boundary ambiguity* within stepfamilies, referring to "a situation in which family members are uncertain about who belongs to the family and who does not and what roles family members have in the system (Ganong & Coleman, 2004, p.127)". This raises the question whether the increasing incidence of joint custody of children following divorces and the subsequent increased complexity in stepfamily relationships, is associated with more children experiencing boundary ambiguity with regard to their family life (Ganong & Coleman, 2004), and within the context of our research question, with regard to the role of their biological parent(s).

Finally, most family transitions can be repeated through time which gives the stepfamily structure a temporal dimension. For example, a child can experience a parental divorce, live some years full-time in a single-parent family, followed by a remarriage of the residential parent, which results in a second divorce of that parent some years later. Before the last divorce, the stepfamily could also be transformed from a single stepfamily in a complex stepfamily after mother and stepfather had a biological child together. In other words, a child can experience lots of shifts in household membership after the parental divorce and before leaving the parental home (Brown, 2006; Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen, Anderson, 1989). Hence, it is important to take into account the complete family history of a child when studying outcomes of different family configurations. This brings us to the first goal of this study, that is the construction of a typology of (step)family trajectories from the perspective of the involved children. As a consequence, this is the first research question: *What are the (step)family trajectories of children following parental divorce?*

2.2 A normative-adaptive perspective or risk and resiliency model

A major critic that can be formulated on the existing research literature on stepfamilies concerns the fact that often the complexity and heterogeneity of stepfamilies is ignored (Kurdek, 1994). Starting from a *deficit-comparison perspective*, research often focuses only on the negative impact of stepfamily configurations and is limited to the comparison of outcomes of individuals living in stepfamilies with people living in so-called 'intact' families and single-parent households (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). This perspective is partially rooted in the nuclear family ideology which sees the stepfamily either as an incomplete institution (Cherlin, 1978), a deviant or deficit family form (Coleman & Ganong, 1997) or a re-formed or reconstituted nuclear family (Levin, 1997). All of these perspectives are in their own way responsible for several research limitations, such as ignoring the structural complexity and heterogeneity of stepfamily forms, focussing on problems and weakness' and ignoring the possibility of functional stepfamily relationships being fundamentally different from relationships within nuclear families (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

The relatively recent shift in the research literature from a pathogenic model to a perspective that emphasizes the diversity of outcomes on the one hand, and family systems and transitions on the other hand, has been an important advance in the study of stepfamilies (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). Ganong and Coleman (1994) were one of the firsts to use a more multidimensional approach when studying stepfamilies, using what they call *a normative-adaptive perspective*. An alternative name for this perspective is the *risk and resiliency model.* This perspective emphasizes the focus on both positive and negative dimensions of stepfamily life, as well as on the diversity in stepfamily forms (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

Using this normative-adaptive perspective, we will have a look at the family trajectories of children. The different family trajectories will be researched for both children who still live with at least one as for adults who have already left the parental home. After examining these trajectories, we will have a closer look at the parent-child relationship. Often the focus of research on stepfamilies is limited to the 'pure' stepfamily relationships, hence neglecting the biological parent-child relationships within a stepfamily (Solomon, 1995). However, research has shown that the biological parent-child relationships in stepfamilies are weaker than in original two-parent families (Hetherington and Jodl, 1994; Lawton, Silverstein and Bengston, 1994). For example, Seltzer (1994) reports a "small but statistically significant" (p.153) difference in the social support that parents and adult children exchange in stepfamilies compared to parents and children in intact families. One of the most determining factors with regard to the continuation of the parent-child relationship after divorce is of course the physical custody arrangement (Hetherington, 2003). However, the presence of a stepparent can be an obstacle for the continuity of the parent-child relationship (Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson & Zill, 1983), also in case of joint parental custody. This brings us to the second goal of this study, that is how the parent-child relationship is associated with the (step)family trajectory of a child. *Have different (step)family trajectories a different impact on the parent-child relationship? And does this impact still exists after the child left the parental home?* In the next paragraphs, we give a brief overview of the existing research literature about the parent-child relationship within different stepfamily formations.

3. Literature overview: the parent-child relationship within stepfamilies

3.1 Influence of family trajectories on children

From previous research, it is known that family transitions are stressful events for children (Brown, 2006, Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen, Anderson, 1989). For children who experience a lot of family transitions, this stress will even accumulate (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen, Anderson, 1989). When the family trajectory of the child is rather turbulent, this can be noxious for the child's well-being. For example, children who experienced a family transition, report a higher level of delinquency and tend to be more depressed (Brown, 2006). On the other hand, a more stable family trajectory (with fewer family transitions) leads to a higher well-being of the child (Brown, 2006). Variables that have a buffering effect on the relationship between family transitions and the child well-being are mostly parenting resources (Brown, 2006).

Also the type of family transition plays an important role. For example, children who move from a single parent family (a one-parent family) to a stepfamily (a two-parent family) show more delinquent behaviour and are less engaged in school (Brown, 2006). Similar, De Graaf and Fokkema (2007) found that remarriage has a negative effect on the contact between the parent and the adult child, especially when the mother remarries. This effect is even stronger when it concerns a remarriage with children. According to Lawton, Silverstein and Bengtson (1994) this is also true for remarriage with the father. In contrast, moving from a stepfamily to a single parent family, would have no significant implications for the child's well-being (Brown, 2006).

3.2 The parent-child relationship

In previous research, it is often stressed that a good parent-child relationship can act as a buffer for the well-being of the child after stressful family changes like a parental divorce, the formation of a stepfamily,... A good parent-child relationship can make the child feel better about itself and its environment (Hines, 1997). However, after divorce the parent-child relationship can be troubled. Children are often less close to their parents, communicate in a more negative way and have less contact with the non-residential parent. (example: Hines, 1997; Falci, 2006; Bronselaer, 2007; Emery, 1999; Braver, Shapiro & Goodman, 2006, Bronselaer, Carette et al., 2007; Peterson, 1986, Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagen, 2002; Amato & Booth, 1994; Cooksey & Craig, 1998, Shapiro & Lambert, 1999; Cooney, 1994; Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen, Anderson, 1989; Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen, Anderson, 1989; Booth & Amato, 1994). This is especially true for the father-child relationship since the father is mostly the non-residential parent (example: Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990; Arditti, 1999, Hetherington & Stanley-Hagen, 2002; Van Peer, 2003; Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1982; Henning & Walker, 1997; Bronselaer, 2007, Shapiro, 2003; De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007; Cooney, 1994). In some research this is also true for adult children, which is an indication of a long term effect of divorce on the parent-child relationship. After divorce, adult children of divorced parents who left the parental home, have been found to have fewer contact with their parents than adult children of intact families (Cooney and Uhlenberg, 1990; Shapiro, 2003, De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007; Fokkema, De Ruijter & Maas, 2003). Evenmore, due to this family transitions, the parent-child relationship on average becomes more negative, less close and more characterized by conflict (Hines, 1997). This would be even more true for the parent-child relationship in stepfamilies.

Some authors argue that stepfamilies are characterized by insufficient *parental involvement* (Pong, 1997; Keller, Cummings & Davies, 2005; Ram & Hou, 2003). A possible explanation could be that within stepfamilies, a lot of social capital (time and energy) that goes to childrearing in continuous two-parent families, is invested in the development of the new partner relationship (Pong, 1997; Fokkema, De Ruijter & Maas, 2003). In addition (or as a consequence) of uninvolved parents, children in stepfamilies can choose to disengage from their families themselves. Hetherington & Jold (1994) report to found that many children in established stepfamilies, are disengaged from their stepfamilies, spending little time at home and in family activities. In stead, they are involved with, for example, extracurricular activities, a job or peers. Moreover, children in stepfamilies tend to spent less time with their biological parents than children in other family types (De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007). This disengagement of the stepfamily does not necessarily has to have negative implications, although a complete lack of adult supervision or contacts with antisocial peers was found to be associated with substance use, low achievement, school dropout, sexual activity, and delinquency.

A critique that we pointed out in our theoretical framework is that stepfamilies are too often to been seen as a homogeneous group of families whereas this group is rather heterogeneous. There are simple as well as complex stepfamilies. A study of Henderson and Taylor (1999) overcomes this critique by examining the parent-child relationship for simple and complex stepfamilies separately. *Simple stepfamilies* refer to families in which only children from one partners' previous relationship are present, *complex stepfamilies* refer to families in which siblings vary in biological relatedness to mother and father (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994; Ganong & Coleman, 2004). The authors found that biological parents are more close to their own children in both kinds of stepfamilies than towards their stepchildren. In complex stepfamilies, biological mothers also have more conflicts with their own children than with their stepchildren. They also found that in long-term stepfamilies, the parent-child relationship resembles more to a parent-child relationship in an intact family than the parent-child relationship in an recently formed stepfamily does. So duration of a family form is, next to the complexity of the stepfamily, an important variable that should be taken into account.

Through the research literature, mutual respect, sufficient parental monitoring, a warm, understanding and supporting relationship are seen as characteristics of positive parent-child relationship (Carrette, 2007; Conger & Gordon Simons, 2007; Ackaert e.a., 2003; Felling, Gerris e.a., 2006; Braver, Shapiro & Goodman, 2006; Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1982; Van Peer, 2003). In other words, the characteristics of the parent-child relationship are important predictor of the child's well-being (Willets & Maroules, 2004). Amato (2000) even argues that the parenting quality is one of the best predictors of the child's well-being. Important in this respect is that different family transitions can also lead to stressed-out parents, with *poor-quality parenting* and negative outcomes for the children as a consequence (Hoffman & Johnson, 1998; Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen, Anderson, 1989).

3.3 Implications of previous research for the present study

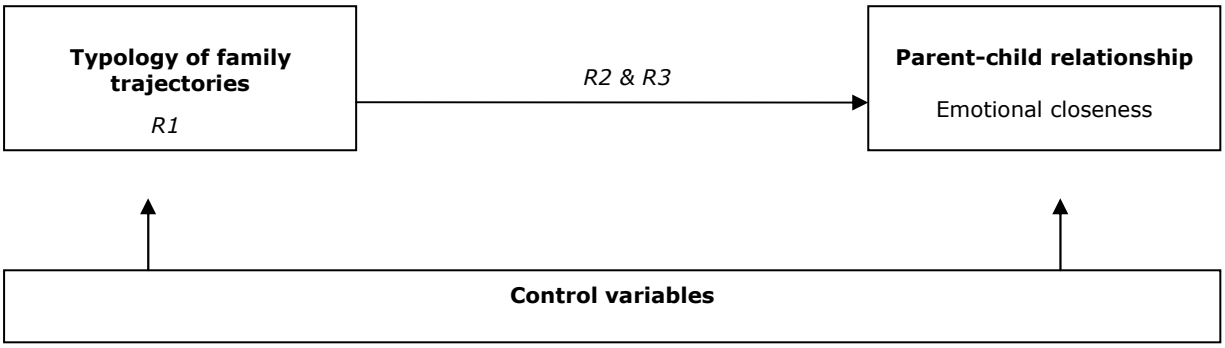
Stressful transitions, discordant relationships, low parental involvement, poor parenting quality, … : it is clear that the quality of parental relationships is an important mediator with regard to the effect of family structure on the well-being of children. Positive parent-child relationships, a low degree of conflict within and between (step)family households, high parental involvement, parental monitoring, and high quality (step)parenting are some examples of pathways to well-functioning stepfamilies with less or without negative outcomes for children. In this study, a new factor will be included, namely the family trajectories. Most research takes a look at the current living situation of the child and does not bring into account the former family transitions that the child has gone through. The temporality of the family structure, as we mentioned in the theoretical background, is ignored. Yet these family transitions itself are very stressful events for the child and can have a negative effect on the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, most research focuses on adolescent children. In this research, family transitions for children of all ages will be examined. Moreover, different family transitions are taken into account to examine the parent-child relationship of both children still living in their parental family and of children who already left their parental home. By doing so, we can examine if the effect of the family changes and the family trajectories on the parent-child relationship is a long-term effect or a short-term effect.

Previous studies shows some important control factors that have to be included in the model. A first important control factor is the sex of both parent and child. From former research we know that the parent-child relationship is better between a parent and an child of the same sex (Hines, 1997; Henderson & Taylor, 1999; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Booth & Amato, 1994). Divorce would also have more negative outcomes for the relationship between father and child than for the mother-child relationship (example: Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990; Arditti, 1999, Hetherington & Stanley-Hagen, 2002; Van Peer, 2003; Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1982; Henning & Walker, 1997; Bronselaer, 2007). The residence arrangement would be another important factor: the parent-child relationship quality is found to be better between the child and the residential parent (example: Hines, 1997; Falci, 2006; Bronselaer, 2007; Emery, 1999; Braver, Shapiro & Goodman, 2006, Bronselaer, Carette et al., 2007; Peterson, 1986, Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagen, 2002; Amato & Booth, 1994; Cooksey & Craig, 1998, Shapiro & Lambert, 1999). Amato an Booth (1994) also show that children who are parents themselves have a less close relationship with their parents. Furthermore, older children tend to be less close to their parent (Hines, 1997; Rask e.a. 2003) and in low-income families (mostly single-parent families) the parent-child relationship quality is lower (Falci, 2006; Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990; Lawton, Silverstein & Bengtson, 1994). Also, the presence and number of children (siblings of the child) and the geographic distance between parents have a negative influence on the parent-child relations (example: Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990; Cooksey & Craig, 1998, Shapiro, 2003, De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007; Fokkema, De Ruijter & Maas, 2003; Lawton, Silverstein & Bengtson, 1994; Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen, Anderson, 1989). At last, the health of the parent is also a variable that is often controlled for since parents who are less healthy are less mobile so they have fewer contact with their adult children (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990, Shapiro, 2003, De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998).

4. Present study

In the theory above, we already stated our three research questions, namely "What are the (step)family trajectories of children following parental divorce?" (R1), "Have different (step)family trajectories a different impact on the parent-child relationship?" (R2) and "Does the impact of family trajectories in the parental home during the childhood still exists after the child left the parental home?" (R3)

Figure 1: Research model



The third research question is referring to the fact that both short and long term effects of family changes on the parent-child relationship will be investigated. In order to do that, we will examine two main groups of respondents. On the one hand the family trajectories of children who did not leave their parental home will be studied. Those children can still experience some family changes in the future, they have ongoing family trajectories. On the other hand, family trajectories of adults who already left their parental home will be studied. We will come back on these two groups when describing the different research samples.

5. Method

5.1 NKPS data

To answer our research questions, detailed information is necessary on the timing of all family transitions a child went through. This information is available in the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study or NKPS. The NKPS is a large-scale, multi-actor, multi-method panel study on solidarity in family relationships. The database from the NKPS comes from two waves of a large-scale survey and contains information on more then 10,000 Dutch families. The first wave was conducted between 2002 and 2004, the second wave was conducted between 2006 and 2007. The wave 1 survey data are based on three separate samples: a main sample (N = 8161) of individuals between 18 and 79 years old residing in a private home (further called the anchor persons), an additional migrant sample (N = 1410) of the four largest ethnic groups in the Netherlands (Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean people) and a substitute sample (N = 1600) of people who refused to participate or were not able to be contacted in 2004 (Dykstra, Kalmijn, Knijn, Komter, Liefbroer, & Mulder, 2005). The information on the sample units or main respondents was collected with both face-to-face interviews and self-completion questionnaires. In addition, also information on the closest relatives was collected, some of which reside in the same household as the main respondent and others which do not: a self-completion questionnaire was mailed to the partner, a maximum of two randomly selected children aged 15 and over, a randomly selected parent, and a randomly selected sibling aged 15 and over. Only in the non-response follow-up study no information was collected on the family members. The members of the third, substitute sample had to fill in an abridged, self-completion version of the CAPI questionnaire (Dykstra, Kalmijn, Knijn, Komter, Liefbroer, & Mulder, 2005).

5.2 Research samples

For this research, only data from the first sample of the first wave of the NKPS are used. We only use data of the main respondent from the face-to-face interviews, that is to keep as much respondents as possible in our sample. However, the family trajectory and parent-child relationship of the anchor person with a random child of the anchor is analyzed. Hence, the anchor persons are used as a reference person for who the parent-child relationship is studied top-down. This means that the family trajectory of a random child of the anchor person is reconstructed, and the association of this trajectory with the current relationship of that child with the anchor person is studied. This results in fact in two distinctive research samples of family trajectories: 1) the sample of the family trajectories of a random child from the anchor persons, still living in the parental home or *research sample 1*, and 2) the sample of the family trajectories of a random child from the anchor persons, that already have left the parental home or *research sample 2*

Across the two research samples, following selection criterion was applied: the end of the relationship between the biological parents when the child still lived in the parental home can only be due to a divorce or separation of the parents, not to the death of one of the parents. As a consequence, transitions from a two parent family to an alternative family situation can only be due to (temporal or definitive) parental divorce or separation. Other selection criteria were used according to the nature of the different subsamples, which are discussed in detail below.

The total research sample entails 3360 anchor persons with their focal child. In a next step, this group is divided in children who still live in the parental home (research sample 1) and children who already left the parental home (research sample 2). As no family history is available in the data from the perspective of the child, the relationship history of the anchor person (that is the mother or father of the child) is used to reconstruct the child's family history. We make the assumption that the person with who the anchor person (or the first parent of the child) is in a relationship with when the child is born, is the second parent of that child. If this relationship ends while the child is still living in the parental home, the child makes a transition to a single parent family. If the anchor person starts a new relationship while the child is still living in the parental home, the child makes the transition to a stepfamily. In case this new partner of the parent brings along children from previous relationships or stepsiblings for the child, and/or if the parent and the new partner have children together, creating halfsibling relationships, we speak of a complex stepfamily formation. If no stepsiblings or halfsiblings are present, we speak of a

simple stepfamily. Children from previous relationships of the anchor parent that were already present in the household when the child was born, are considered as 'real' siblings, since the child knows those siblings since birth, and hence will not consider them as newcomers. The information will be based on the real situation rather than the biological situation at the time of birth of the child.

A lack in the information of the parental history is that we do not exactly know the residential arrangement of the children of the anchor persons. For the children still living in the parental home with the anchor person, we know for sure that they currently live with that parent, but not whether this was always the case. For the children of the anchor who already live on their own, we don't have information on whether they lived with their mother or father following parental divorce. Hence, for this children, we don't know whether the family trajectory based on the relationship history of the anchor person refers to the residential parent during their childhood or the non-residential parent.

Another shortcoming is that, in case of parental divorce, only information on the family transitions of the anchor parent is available. Hence, for a female anchor, the child can only make transitions between a two-parent family, a single mother family, a simple stepfather family and a complex stepfather family. For a male anchor, the child can only make transitions between a two-parent family, a single father family, a simple stepmother family and a complex stepmother family. As this transitions are constructed using information on the relationship history of the anchor parent, a transition following a two-parent family is always equal to a transition to a single parent family. Similar, a transition following a single parent family is always equal to a transition to (simple or complex) stepfamily and a transition following a (simple or complex) stepfamily is always equal to a transition to a single parent family. In addition, as the NKPS data does not provide information on whether the subsequent partner relationships of the anchor parent concerns the same or a different partner, we assume that different relationships are referring to different partners. This was also the intention of the questions that were asked in the NKPS survey. As a consequence, a child can never make the transition from an alternative family formation (single parent or stepfamily) back to a two-parent family.

5.3 Measures

5.3.1 Dependent variable

The quality of the relationship between parent and child was measured using a question on the *closeness of the relationship between parents and child.* For both our samples, the parent-child relationship is measured from the perspective of the parent.

To measure the closeness with different family members, the anchor persons was asked following question: "Taking everything together, how would you describe your relation with (…)?". The answer categories were "not great, reasonable, good, very good". For the closeness of the anchor with a random child, the frequencies in the lowest category were to low to conduct meaningful analyses. Therefore the categories 'not great' and 'reasonable' were collapsed into one category 'not good'. Hence, the variable closeness between parent and child in the analyses has 3 categories.

5.3.2 Independent variables

The construction of the variables containing the family trajectory within the parental home is discussed in the results part on the sequence analysis. Hence, this section is restricted to the discussion of the operationalisation of the current family situation of the parent and the control variables.

Health of anchor was measured with the following question "How is your health in general? Is it excellent, good, neither good nor poor, poor, very poor?" This variable refers to the health of the parent. The health-variable is included as a numeric variable ranging from 0 (very poor health) to 4 (excellent health).

Sex of the child was coded 0 for males and 1 for females.

Age of the child is expressed in years. In addition, the *age difference between the parent and child* is included in all models.

The number of (biological) siblings is included for the two research samples as a numeric variable ranging from 0 (no siblings) to 4 (4 or more siblings).

The presence of half siblings of the child is included for the two research samples as a categorical variable with value 0 if the child had no halfsiblings and value 1 if the child does have halfsiblings.

The presence of stepsiblings of the child is included for the two research samples as a categorical variable with value 0 if the child had no stepsiblings and value 1 if the child does have stepsiblings.

The educational level of the parent is included in the two models as a numeric variable ranging from 0 (did not complete elementary school) to 10 (post-graduate).

Current family situation of the parent is included in the model for research sample 2. For research sample 1, in which the children still live in the parental home, the current family situation is to a large extent expressed by the variable with the family trajectory, so no additional variable for the current situation is necessary. For the other research sample however, the family situation of the parent can have changed since the child left the parental home. Therefore, the variable current family situation of parent is included with the following categories: 1) parent is still in a relationship with the other parent of the child, 2) other parent of the child died when the parent was still in a relationship with this parent (but after the child left the parental home); 3) parents divorced/separated and the parent always stayed single after the end of this relationship; 4) parents divorced/separated, the parent has lived with a new partner meanwhile, but is currently single and 5) parents divorced/separated and parent currently has a new partner.

Parental status of the child is included in the sample where the child has left the parental home. We make a distinction between children 1) having no children of their own and 2) having children of their own.

Finally, the *living distance between parent and child* was included for research sample 2 as a numeric variable expressing the distance in kilometres in a straight line. As this information was lacking for a relatively big group of respondents, a mean imputation was done for this group and a control variable '*distance is missing'* was added with code 0 if the distance was given and code 1 if the distance was missing and the mean was imputed for the living distance.

5.4 Descriptives for the different research samples

5.4.1 Descriptives research sample 1 (N=800): residential children of anchors

Background variables for sample 1 can be found in appendix 1, Table 13 and Table 14. There are more boys (55,38%) than girls (44,62%) who still live with their parent(s). Most children have 1 biological sibling (44,88%). Very few children have halfsiblings (3%) or stepsiblings (6,63%). Taking a look at parental characteristics, we see that parents are on average 47,46 years old and that the age difference between de parent and the child is on average 28,26. The mean health of the parents is 3,06 o a scale from 0 to 4, so most parents are in good health. The mean educational level of the parent is 5,62 (on a scale of 1 to 10).

Table 1 contains the descriptives for the dependent variable. Most children tend to be very close to their father (43,33%) or mother (53,11%). Only few of them have no good relationship with their father (7,67%) or mother (6,41%). Results are presented in Table 1. Similar as for research sample 1, the relationship between mother & child seems to be slightly better then the relationship between father & child, although both relationships are in general (very) good.

Table 1: Closeness to parents sample 1

variable	***categories***	***N***	***%***
Closeness to father	**Not good**	23	7,67
	Good	147	49,00
	Very good	130	43,33
		Missings= 1	
Closeness to mother	**Not good**	32	6,41
	Good	202	40,48
	Very good	265	53,11
		Missings= 0	

5.4.2 Descriptives research sample 2 (N=2560): children of anchors who left the parental home

The distribution of the current family situation of the parents is discussed in section 6.3.2, together with the family trajectories for this research sample. In appendix 2, Table 15 and Table 16, the descriptives for the background variables of sample 2 are presented. In sample 2, there are more girls (51,33%) than boys (48,67%). Most of those children who have left the parental home, have at least one child

(51,75%). In this sample as well as in the previous samples, most children have one biological sibling (46,25%) and most of them have no halfsiblings (97,97%) or stepsiblings (90,59%). If we take a look ate the characteristics of the parents of these children, we see that the average age of the parent is 61,95 year and the age difference with the child is on average 27,23 year. This means that the average ages of the children who have left the parental home is the early thirties. The health of those parents is less good than in the previous samples, the mean is 2,83 on a scale from 0 to 4. The educational level of the parent is on average 5,10 (on a scale of 1 to 10). The distance between the home o the child and the home of the parent is on average 30,10 km.

The results for the dependent variable are presented in Table 2. Most children have a very good relationship with their father (52,82%) or mother (57,91%). Only 10,03% said that they did not have a good relationship with their father, and 8,04% reports not to have a good relationship with their mother. Again, there is a slight tendency of the mother-child relationship to be better evaluated then the father-child relationship.

Table 2: Closeness to parents sample 2

variable	***categories***	***N***	***%***
Closeness to father	**Not good**	108	10,03
	Good	400	37,14
	Very good	569	52,83
		Missings= 0	
Closeness to mother	**Not good**	119	8,04
	Good	504	34,05
	Very good	857	57,91
		Missings= 3	

5.5 Analysis technique

To answer our first research question, a typology of family trajectories is constructed. Therefore, the family sequences of the children within the parental home are explored using CHESA. CHESA is a program developed by Cees Elzinga (2007) to utilize sequence attributes and associated metrics, which is not easy with other software packages. The program allows to describe the family sequences in terms of statistics pertaining to the occurring family situations (the symbol statistics) as well as statistics applying to the sequences as unit of analysis (the string statistics). Using both types of statistics, we will look at the occurrence, ordering, timing and frequency of specific sequences of family configurations for the three research samples of this study. The symbol statistics that will be discussed in the results parts are the symbol distribution and the transition probabilities. The symbol distribution describes the distribution of the family statuses across the sequences of all respondents. Hence, if a respondent has experienced for example 2 family transitions & lived in 3 different family situations, that respondent will contribute 3 symbols or family situations to the symbol distribution. The transition probabilities express the probability of making the transition from family status 1 to family status 2, under the condition that family status 1 is followed by another family situation. The string statistics that we will discuss are the frequency distribution of the specific sequences of family situations (without duration) before leaving the parental home and the mean number of distinct symbols per sequence, the mean string length and the mean total duration of the sequence. This information on sequence-level will be used to construct a typology of specific family trajectories, clustering more similar sequences of family configuration.

For the second & third research question, that is the association between the obtained classification of family trajectories from the sequence analysis and the parent-child relationship, multinomial logistic models are estimated for the three research samples using the statistical software package SAS. The father-child and mother-child relationship were analysed separately, to make possible gender differences in the parent-child relationship visible. The middle category (having a good relationship) was used as the reference category. According to the research sample that is analysed, different control variables (described in the previous paragraph) were added to the models.

6. Results

6.1 The life sequence of a random child of the anchor persons still living in the same household (sample 1, N= 800)

6.1.1 Sequence Analysis using CHESA for sample 1

Table 3 presents the frequency of the different family situations across the sequences of all randomly selected children of the anchor respondent who still live with the anchor respondent. Of all family situations, "both parents" is the most common one, with 73%. Only 27% of all family situations consist of post-divorce family arrangements. So the variation is rather small. The most common post-divorce family situation is the one where children live only with their mother (15,7%).

Table 3: Symbol distribution research sample 1

Family situation	*N*	*%*
Both Parents	769	73,0
Single Mother	166	15,7
Single Father	31	2,9
Mother & Stepfather	16	1,5
Father & Stepmother	4	0,4
Mother & Stepfather & Step/halfsiblings	60	5,7
Father & Stepmother& Step/halfsiblings	8	0,8

Of the 800 randomly selected children of the anchor persons in the research sample, still living in the parental home, 642 still lives with both parents (80,25%). 54 or 6,8% made a single transition from living with both biological parents to living with their single mother due to parental divorce. 16 or 2% made the single transition to a single father family due to parental divorce. 24 or 3% of the children already made two family transitions, that is from living with both biological parents to a single mother family, followed by the transition to a complex stepfather family. The other 62 children or 7,8% experienced another sequence of familial transitions due to parental divorce. In this last group, 18 distinct strings or sequences of family situations can be distinguished.

The transition probabilities between different family situations are presented in Table 4. For the children of the anchors, we only know the situation for one parent (mother OR father). So, although a child who lives, for example, in a single mother family after divorce can also experience family transitions with his father, that is information we lack. So for this sample the probability of switching between mother and father family situations will always be 0 since we have no information of both parents nor on switches in the residential arrangement of the child. Hence, although in reality transitions from one parent to another are of course plausible, for this research, the plausibility is zero because of structural reasons. Bearing this in mind, we can interpret the following table. After a divorce, 83,5% of the children go to live with their mother alone, where only 16,5% of the children lives in a single father family. Children who experience another family transition after living with their single mother will have a higher change of living in a complex stepfamily with step- or halfsiblings (78,9%) then living in a simple stepfamily (21,1%). In other words, the new partner often brings children from a previous relationship into the new family or the new partners decide to have a child together. The same is true for children who experience another family transition after living in a single father family.

Table 4: Transition Probabilities between different family situations research sample 1

Family situation	**Both Parents**	**Single Mother**	**Mother & Stepfather**	**Mother & Stepfather & Step / halfsiblings**	**Single Father**	**Father & Stepmother**	**Father & Stepmother& Step / halfsiblings**
Both Parents	0	0,835	0	0	0,165	0	0
Single Mother	0	0	0,211	0,789	0	0	0
Mother & Stepfather	0	1,000	0	0	0	0	0
Mother & Stepfather & Step/halfsiblings	0	1,000	0	0	0	0	0
Single Father	0	0	0	0	0	0,333	0,667
Father & Stepmother	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Father & Stepmother & Step/halfsiblings	0	0	0	0	1,000	0	0

Table 5 contains the string statistics. You can see clearly that 80% of the respondents still lives in an intact family (with both parents) since the mean number of different family situations and the mean

number of family situations within a family sequence is almost equal to 1. Furthermore, this table shows that respondents who still live in their parental home are on average 19 years old. The standard deviation is approximately 4,5 years reflecting the fact that there were no young children (under the age of 15) included in the sample.

Table 5: String statistics research sample 1

	Mean	***Sd***	***Min***	***Max***
Number of distinct symbols	1,255	0,588	1	4
String length	1,318	0,835	1	8
Total Time	19,234	4,623	15	48

6.1.2 Typology of family trajectories sample 1

The results of the sequence analysis were used to construct an empirical meaningful typology of family trajectories. The variance in trajectories was to small to conduct for example an optimal matching analyses and hence the typology is constructed on basis of both empirical and theoretical grounds and the timing of the family transitions will be ignored. We decided to keep following distinctions within our typology of family trajectories: 1) respondent still lives with both parents (N=642); 2) mother made the single transition to a single mother family due to parental divorce/separation (N=54); 3) father made the single transition to a single father family due to parental divorce/separation (N=16); 4) mother lives or lived a certain time with a new partner (N=64); 5) father lives or lived a certain time wit a new partner (N=14); 6) other family trajectory (N=14). The last category consists of family trajectories in which the child was born within a single parent family.

6.1.3 Multinomial logistic regression for sample 1

At last, a multinomial regression for sample 1 is done. Results are presented separately for father (Table 6) and mother (Table 7). The influence of family transitions in the parental home and other parental home characteristics on closeness to the parent will be examined. First we will discuss the results for closeness to the father. In the analysis of closeness to the father, the variable "halfsiblings" was not included since none of the children where the anchor respondent was the father, had halfsiblings. Due to the very small sample size for the father-child relationship, there was a quasi-complete separation of the data points. This is also reflected in the huge standard errors for certain coefficients. Hence, the validity of the model for the relationship with the father is questionable and the results should be interpreted rather carefully.

As we see in Table 6, family transitions have no significant effect on the closeness with the father. There is only one significant effect of health of the father. Children with a not so healthy father have a higher chance of having a not so good relationship with their father instead of a good relationship.

Table 6: Multinomial logistic regression for father sample 1 (N=300)

	REF: closeness= good					
	closeness= not good			***closeness= very good***		
CLOSENESS TO FATHER	**B**	**SE**	**p**	**B**	**SE**	**p**
Intercept	-1.134	(2.328)		-1.254	(1.279)	
Family transitions (ref= living with both parents)						
Both parents → single father	0.986	(0.742)		-0.306	(0.589)	
Ever lived with stepmother	-10.070	(262.400)		0.870	(0.713)	
Other	0.180	(1326.500)		13.102	(487.900)	
Number of biological siblings	0.138	(0.253)		0.133	(0.141)	
Stepsiblings yes or no (ref= no)	-10.695	(325.100)		-0.951	(0.892)	
Sex of respondent (ref= man)	-0.525	(0.525)		0.278	(0.253)	
Age of father	0.001	(0.054)		0.005	(0.030)	
Age difference with father	-0.002	(0.068)		0.002	(0.037)	
Health of father	**-0.602**	(0.266)	*	0.128	(0.164)	
Educational level of father	0.155	(0.111)		0.014	(0.054)	

***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05; ^{t}p<0.1

Results of the regression for closeness to the mother are presented in Table 7. Here, family transitions have a significant effect. Children who experienced a divorce and ended up in a single mother family (with no other family transitions) have a higher chance of having a very good relationship with their mother instead of a good relationship. The opposite is true for children who experienced a divorce and ever lived with a stepfather. They have a higher chance of not having a good relationship with their mother instead of a good relationship. Those results are in line with the literature on parental involvement, that says that parents with a new partner after divorce, tend to invest more in the new partner relationship and less in the parent-child relationship which leads to a less closer parent-child relationship. Furthermore, girls have a higher chance than boys on a very good relationship with their mother instead of a good relationship.

Table 7: Multinomial logistic regression for mother sample 1 (N=499)

	REF: closeness= good					
	closeness= not good			***closeness= very good***		
CLOSENESS TO MOTHER	**B**	**SE**	**p**	**B**	**SE**	**p**
Intercept	-0.688	(22.175)		-0.761	(0.983)	
Family transitions (ref= living with both parents)						
Both parents → single mother	1.191	(0.657)	t	**1.100**	(0.364)	**
Ever lived with stepfather	**1.727**	(0.641)	*	0.128	(0.428)	
Other	1.215	(1.301)		1.517	(0.807)	t
Number of biological siblings	-0.132	(0.216)		-0.116	(0.101)	
Halfsiblings yes or no (ref= no)	-0.177	(0.956)		0.667	(0.593)	
Stepsiblings yes or no (ref= no)	-0.832	(0.769)		0.116	(0.415)	
Sex of respondent (ref= man)	0.030	(0.402)		**0.589**	(0.198)	*
Age of mother	-0.106	(0.068)		0.009	(0.020)	
Age difference with mother	0.146	(0.078)	t	0.005	(0.029)	
Health of mother	-0.102	(0.257)		0.131	(0.133)	
Educational level of mother	-0.035	(0.090)		-0.037	(0.045)	

***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05; tp<0.1

6.2 The life sequence of a random child of the anchor persons that left the parental household (sample 2, N= 2560)

6.2.1 Sequence Analysis using CHESA for sample 2

Table 8 presents the frequency of the different family situations across the sequences of all randomly selected children of the anchor respondent that left the parental household. Like in the previous samples, the most common family situation is the one where children live with both their parents (76%), while only 24% consists of family arrangements following parental divorce/seperation. After divorce, the most common family situation is living with a single mother (11%), followed by living with a single father (6%).

Table 8: Symbol distribution research sample 2

Family situation	***N***	***%***
Both Parents	2475	76
Single Mother	363	11
Single Father	187	6
Mother & Stepfather	44	1
Father & Stepmother	30	1
Father & Stepmother& Step/halfsiblings	60	2
Mother & Stepfather & Step/halfsiblings	108	3

Of the 2560 randomly selected children of the anchor persons in the research sample that left the parental home, 2089 or 81,6 % spend their entire childhood and youth (that is before they left the parental home) in one household with both parents. The mother of 158 or 6,2% of the children stayed single after divorce/separation until the child left the parental home. Similar, the father of 62 or 2,4% of the children stayed single after divorce/separation until the child left the parental home. The parents of the other 250 respondents or 9,8% of the children experienced another sequence of familial transitions following divorce/separation before the child left the parental home. In this last group, 31 distinct strings or sequences of family situations can be distinguished.

Table 9 shows the transition probabilities between different family situations for sample 2. This shows more or less the same results as in sample 1. Due to structural shortcomings of the data, children can not experience a transition from one parent to another. Children who's parents experience another transition following single parenthood are more likely to move to a complex family (with step- or halfsiblings) than to a simple stepfamily, meaning that the new partner of the parents often brings children of his own into the new family or both new partners get a child of both of them. This holds for both single mother and single father families.

Table 9: Transition Probabilities between different family situations research sample 2

Family situation	Both Parents	Single Mother	Mother & Stepfather	Mother & Stepfather & Step / halfsiblings	Single Father	Father & Stepmother	Father & Stepmother& Step / halfsiblings
Both Parents	0	0,670	0	0	0,330	0	0
Single Mother	0	0	0,289	0,711	0	0	0
Mother & Stepfather	0	1,000	0	0	0	0	0
Mother & Stepfather & Step/halfsiblings	0	1,000	0	0	0	0	0
Single Father	0	0	0	0	0	0,333	0,670
Father & Stepmother	0	0	0	0	1,000	0	0
Father & Stepmother & Step/halfsiblings	0	0	0	0	1,000	0	0

The string statistics are presented in Table 10. The mean number of different family situations and the mean number of family situations within a family sequence is almost equal to 1. This is what we expected since 81,6% lived their entire youth in one household with both parents. Also, we learn from this table that children where 20,9 years old when they left their parental home. This is about the same age their parents were when they left their parental homes.

Table 10: String statistics research sample 2

	Mean	*Sd*	*Min*	*Max*
Number of distinct symbols	1,238	0,57	1	4
String length	1,276	0,73	1	8
Total Time	20,971	0,34	18	25

6.2.2 Typology of family trajectories and current family situations sample 2

As for the other research sample, the variance in trajectories was to small to conduct for example an optimal matching analyses and the typology is constructed on basis of both empirical and theoretical grounds. The time the respondents spend within each family status is ignored. Similar as for research sample 1, we decided to keep following distinctions within our typology of family trajectories: 1) child lived with both parents until he or she left the parental home (N=2089 or 81,60%); 2) mother made the single transition to a single mother family due to parental divorce/separation before the child left the parental home (N=158 or 6,17%); 3) father made the single transition to a single father family due to parental divorce/separation before the child left the parental home (N=62 or 2,42%); 4) mother lives or lived a certain time with a new partner before the child left the parental home (N=135 or 5,27%); 5) father lives or lived a certain time wit a new partner before the child left the parental home (N=81 or 3,16%); 6) other family trajectory (N=35 or 1,37%). The last category consists of family trajectories in which the child was born within a single parent family.

In addition, we can have a look at the current family situation of the parents in the sample. At the time of the NKPS survey, 1696 or 66,25% of the parents of the children were still living together and in 348 or 13,59% of the cases one of both parents died while the parents of the child were still together. The remaining group is referring to children who's parents divorced or separated: 264 or 10,31% of the parents in the sample remained single, 94 or 3,67% of the parents temporarily re-partnered but did not have a new partner at the time of the survey and 158 or 6,17% of the parents had a new partner at the time of the survey.

6.2.3 Multinomial logistic regression for sample 2

At last, a multinomial regression for sample 2 is done. Results are presented in Table 11 and Table 12.

In Table 11, results for closeness to the father are presented. There are almost no effects of family transitions. The only effect is that if the child has an 'other family trajectory', he has a higher chance of having a very good relationship with the father instead of a good relationship. But since the percentage of children in this household situation is rather small, this result should be questioned. However, the current family situation of the father matters. If the father is divorced and is still single or ever had a new partner, the chance of having a not so good relationship instead of a good relationship is higher. This is in line with the literature. Furthermore, if the mother died, this has a significant effect on the relationship as well. Children have a significant higher chance on a very good relationship with their father instead of a good relationship, but they also have a significant higher effect on a not so good relationship wt their father instead of a good relationship. This seems contradictory, but it might has something to do with the way of mourning, the openness of communication and the support after the decease of the mother. If the support is high and the communication is more open, this might make their relationship better. On the other hand, if there is few support and they do not communicate in an open way, this might have a negative effect on the relationship with the father. Of course, these are assumptions that should be examined in an other study, since we lack the information on support and communication between parent and child after dead of a family member.

Also, characteristics of the father can have an effect on the relationship between the non-residential child and the father. The more healthy the father is, the better the relationship will be. If the father is healthy, children have a lower chance of having an not so good relationship with their father and a higher chance on a very good relationship with their father instead of a good relationship. This is in line with previous research. Furthermore, children who live further away from their father, have a significant lower chance on a very good relationship with their father instead of a good relationship. The opposite is true for children who's father has a high educational level.

Table 11: Multinomial logistic regression for father sample 2 (N=1066)

	REF: closeness= good					
	closeness= not good			***Closeness: very good***		
CLOSENESS TO FATHER	**B**	**SE**	**p**	**B**	**SE**	**p**
Intercept	-0.868	(1.134)		**-1.573**	(0.668)	*
Family transitions (ref= living with both parents until leaving the parental home)						
Both parents → single father	-0.243	(0.576)		-0.069	(0.461)	
Ever lived with stepmother	0.415	(0.551)		-0.763	(0.433)	t
Other	0.939	(0.762)		**-1.478**	(0.733)	*
Current family situation father (ref= parents still together)						
Mother died	**1.339**	(0.454)	**	**0.996**	(0.292)	**
Single after divorce	**1.618**	(0.505)	**	-0.150	(0.418)	
Ever had new partner after divorce, now single	**1.741**	(0.751)	*	0.096	(0.695)	
New partner after divorce	0.928	(0.619)		0.129	(0.455)	
Number of biological siblings	-0.153	(0.135)		-0.074	(0.072)	
Halfsiblings yes or no (ref= no)	0.525	(0.668)		-0.057	(0.694)	
Stepsiblings yes or no (ref= no)	0.211	(0.453)		-0.061	(0.355)	
Sex of respondent (ref= man)	0.038	(0.242)		0.233	(0.136)	t
Parental status (ref= no children)	0.255	(0.291)		0.070	(0.163)	
Age of father	0.002	(0.018)		0.007	(0.011)	
Age difference with father	-0.009	(0.031)		0.006	(0.019)	
Health of father	**-0.296**	(0.132)	*	**0.317**	(0.085)	**
Educational level of father	-0.026	(0.051)		**0.076**	(0.028)	**
Living distance between respondent and father	-0.001	(0.003)		**-0.005**	(0.002)	**
Living distance between respondent and father is missing (ref= no)	0.005	(0.387)		0.198	(0.229)	

***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05; ^{t}p<0.1

For closeness with the mother, we find similar effects, presented in Table 12. There is also no effect of family transitions of their parental home. However, we find effects of the current family situation of the mother. If the father has died, we found the same contradictory effects as for closeness with the father when the mother has died. We think the same explanation might hold but needs further research. An expected effect is that, after a divorce, if the mother has ever had a new partner but is now single, this improves the chance of having a not so good relationship with the mother instead of good relationship.. Girls also have a higher chance on having a very good relationship with their mother instead of a good relationship than boys.

If we look at characteristics of the mother, we see that children with a healthier mother and who differ more in age with their mother, have a higher chance on a very good relationship with their mother instead of a good relationship. There were no other significant effects of background variables of the mother.

Table 12: Multinomial logistic regression for mother sample 2 (N=1476)

	REF: closeness= good					
	closeness= not good			***Closeness: very good***		
CLOSENESS TO MOTHER	**B**	**SE**	**p**	**B**	**SE**	**p**
Intercept	-1.609	(0.931)	t	-0.823	(0.521)	
Family transitions (ref= living with both parents until leaving the parental home)						
Both parents → single mother	0.409	(0.467)		-0.091	(0.295)	
Ever lived with stepfather	0.225	(0.497)		-0.034	(0.319)	
Other	0.608	(0.945)		0.552	(0.615)	
Current family situation mother (ref= parents still together)						
Father died	**0.877**	(0.313)	**	**0.488**	(0.181)	**
Single after divorce	0.711	(0.444)		0.330	(0.265)	
Ever had new partner after divorce, now single	**1.418**	(0.638)	*	0.498	(0.432)	
New partner after divorce	0.987	(0.576)	t	0.415	(0.368)	
Number of biological siblings	-0.106	(0.107)		-0.066	(0.058)	
Halfsiblings yes or no (ref= no)	0.172	(0.644)		-0.393	(0.486)	
Stepsiblings yes or no (ref= no)	-0.643	(0.406)		-0.187	(0.248)	
Sex of respondent (ref= man)	-0.019	(0.210)		**0.402**	(0.115)	***
Parental status (ref= no children)	-0.317	(0.243)		-0.119	(0.136)	
Age of mother	0.015	(0.015)		-0.005	(0.009)	
Age difference with mother	-0.009	(0.026)		**0.036**	(0.015)	*
Health of mother	-0.080	(0.119)		**0.214**	(0.069)	**
Educational level of mother	-0.103	(0.053)	t	-0.009	(0.028)	
Living distance between respondent and mother	-0.001	(0.003)		-0.003	(0.001)	t
Living distance between respondent and mother is missing (ref= no)	0.440	(0.299)		0.038	(0.186)	

***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05; ^{t}p<0.1

7. Discussion

7.1 Conclusions

Before making conclusions of our analysis, it seems useful to take another look at our research questions. There were three research questions, namely "What are the (step)family trajectories of children following parental divorce?", "Have different (step)family trajectories a different impact on the parent-child relationship?" and "Does the impact of family trajectories in the parental home during the childhood still exists after the child left the parental home?"

For the first research question, we found that the most common family situation after divorce is living in a single mother family. So, in line with the expectations, there (still) appears to be a norm that following parental divorce children should be living with their mother. Furthermore, there were very few family

transitions. Most respondents lived in a two-parent family and in case of parental divorce/separation, they mostly evolve to a single parent family and experience no further transitions before leaving the parental home. At last, if the respondent experiences another transition after living in a single parent family, it is often a transition to a complex stepfamily (with half- or stepsiblings), rather than to a simple stepfamily (without half- or stepsiblings). This means that the new partner of the parent often brings along children of his/her own to the new family situation or/and that the parent and the new partner have a child or children together. This is an interesting finding as it says that if a stepfamily or 'new reconstituted family' is established, this is often a family situation with children differing in their biological relatedness to (step)mother and (step)father. As a consequence, a child making the transition to a stepfamily formation does often not only have to adapt to their new relationship to the stepparent, but also to the new relationship with the children of that stepparent from previous relationships or new children from the own parent with the stepparent. This finding offers many possibilities for further investigation.

For the second and third research question, it was clear that if the child still lives in the parental home (sample 1) there is an effect of family transitions on the relationship with the mother. If the mother is divorced and the child lives with a single mother, the relationship between the child and the mother will be better. However, if the mother re-partners, and the child makes a transition to a family with a stepfather, this has a negative effect on the relationship between the child and the mother. This supports the parental involvement theory. For fathers, we did not find such effects, but the validity of this model is rather questionable due to small sample size and the results should be interpreted carefully.

If the child has left the parental home (sample 2), there appears to be no remaining effect of the family transitions that the child has experienced during his childhood. However, the current family situation of the parent has an effect on the parent-child relationship. If the parent divorces or separates, this has a negative effect on the parent-child relationship. For the child of the anchor, re-partnering of the mother has a more negative effect on the parent-child relationship.

Al last, we found a consistent effect of the sex of the respondent. Females always tend to have a better relationship with their mother than men. This cannot be explained by the same sex hypothesis since men do not appear to have a better relationship with their father.

7.2 Limitations

Like every other research, this study has limitations. The main limitation is that the NKPS-data are not really suitable to do research on children of divorced or separated parents since there was no overrepresentation of respondents who's parents were divorced. As a consequence, the numbers of children who experienced a parental divorce in our samples is rather small, and the variance in both their family situations and transitions is rather small. Therefore, no distinction could be made by, for example, the duration of the time period they spend within different family configurations, which is not in line with the original research plan.

A second limitation is that in both our samples we lack certain information on the family history. Information on the second parent (in case of parental divorce) is missing. We only have information of family transitions with one parent, assuming that the child does not experience family transitions with the other parent. Of course, this is not in line with reality. As discussed in our theory, children can experience family transitions in the family of both mother and father. They can follow a two track family trajectory. In this research, we only have information on one of these two tracks. However, in this sample, we have information on half- and/or stepsiblings so we can distinguish in trajectories between simple and complex stepfamilies.

For further research, it would be useful to have a sample with an overrepresentation of children who have experienced a parental divorce. Also, having complete information on the two track trajectories of children (transitions in the family of the mother as well as in the family of the father) and the complexity of stepfamilies, would be useful. In a future study, we will use data from a research project called 'Divorce in Flanders'. These data will allow us to overcome these limitations.

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Appendix 1: descriptives sample 1

Table 13: Background variables sample 1 part 1

variable	*categories*	*N*	*%*
Sex	**man**	443	55,38
	woman	357	44,62
Number of biological siblings	**0**	126	15,75
	1	359	44,88
	2	217	27,13
	3	67	8,38
	> 3	31	3,88
Halfsiblings	**No**	776	97,00
	Yes	24	3,00
Stepsiblings	**No**	747	93,38
	Yes	53	6,63

Table 14: Background variables sample 1 part 2

	Mean	*Standard deviation*
Health of parent (0-4)	3,06	0,77
	Missings= 1	
Age of parent	47,46	6,03
Age difference with parent	28,26	4,62
Educational level parent (1-10)	5,62	2,30
	Missings= 1	

Appendix 2: descriptives sample 2

Table 15: Background variables sample 2 part 1

variable	*categories*	*N*	*%*
Sex	**man**	1246	48,67
	woman	1314	51,33
Parental status	**No children**	1228	48,25
	Children	1317	51,75
Number of biological siblings	**0**	358	13,98
	1	1184	46,25
	2	604	23,59
	3	253	9,88
	> 3	161	6,29
Halfsiblings	**No**	2508	97,97
	Yes	52	2,03
Stepsiblings	**No**	2319	90,59
	Yes	241	9,41

Table 16: Background variables sample 2 part 2

	Mean	*Standard deviation*
Health of parent (0-4)	2,83	0,87
	Missings= 6	
Age of parent	61,95	9,06
Age difference with parent	27,23	4,69
Educational level parent (1-10)	5,10	2,45
	Missings= 6	
Living distance between respondent and parent (km)	30,10	40,51