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**THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL DIVORCE, FAMILY
RECONSTITUTION, AND FAMILY CONFLICT ON NEST-LEAVING
IN SWEDEN**

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MICHAEL GÄHLER AND EVA BERNHARDT

INTRODUCTION

It is not obvious how one should view early nest-leaving. On the one hand, forming a household of one's own could be viewed as a sign of maturity and independence from the parents. Leaving home is one aspect of the transition to adulthood. On the other hand, it is costly to build a household. It may force the individual to interrupt education and begin gainful employment early in life causing a less beneficial socio-economic development and a smaller possibility to fulfil other wishes in life. Some researchers, for example Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1999), argue that early nest-leaving mostly is a result of "push factors", i.e. negative circumstances in the parental home which force young people to leave early. Therefore, early nest-leaving should be viewed as something problematic. Other researchers consider the extremely late ages of nest-leaving, in particular for young men, which are increasingly common in some Southern European countries as a problem, which one ought to be concerned about. The consequences of leaving home are, of course, dependent on the social and economic context, which may vary between countries. Young adults in Sweden leave home relatively early compared to adolescents in many other European countries, especially those in the Mediterranean countries. However, young adults in Sweden have not always left home this early. Swedish census figures show that in 1960 about two-thirds of men aged 20-24 were still living at home with their parents. This proportion declined considerably from 1960 to 1990, when less than 40 percent were still living at home (Bernhardt and Duvander, forthcoming). Thus there has been a trend toward earlier nest-leaving over the past decades - a trend which seems to have been interrupted in the 1990s (Ministry of Social Affairs 2000).

One may hypothesize that a contributing factor influencing earlier nest-leaving in contemporary Sweden is the relatively high rate of marital (and non-

marital) breakups. The purpose of this paper is to look more closely, and at an individual level, at the relationship between childhood family structure and nest-leaving age in the Swedish context, which to our knowledge never has been done before. During the 20th century the family structure in Sweden, as in other Western, industrialized countries, has changed dramatically. One of the most important changes is the increased family instability. During the first half of the last century it was uncommon for individuals to experience a parental divorce (Gähler 1994); today only approximately two-thirds of all children aged 17 live with both their biological parents (Statistics Sweden 2000).

Individuals who have experience of a parental divorce deviate from individuals who lack this experience on a number of dimensions. Several negative outcomes in children have been linked to parental divorce. For example, family dissolution negatively affects the children's psychological well-being, cognitive development, social adjustment, relations to parents (both present and absent), physical health, and school achievement (Amato & Keith 1991b; Demo & Acock 1988; Jonsson & Gähler 1997; Seltzer 1994). Some of these effects appear to be enduring and extend into adolescence and adulthood. Moreover, individuals who grew up in disrupted families are more likely to divorce or separate themselves, they have a lower material quality of life, and they exhibit a lower social well-being (Amato & Keith 1991a).

In addition to analyzing the possible association between parental split-up during adolescence and the nest-leaving age in Sweden, we will study the effect of growing up with a stepparent and whether the individual has experienced family dissension, and, if so, type of conflict (between parents, between the respondent and others, and other types of dissension).

PARENTAL DIVORCE AND NEST-LEAVING – A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Since there is, as far as we know¹, no previous Swedish study on the association between family type during childhood/adolescence and age for leaving home, we will mostly have to rely on international discussions and findings in the following theoretical background.

¹ We would appreciate suggestions on such studies if available.

Parental Divorce

A number of previous American and British studies have found a negative correlation between parental divorce and age at which the individual leaves the home, i.e. respondents whose parents are divorced leave home at a significantly younger age in general than respondents from an intact family background (Aquilino 1991; Cherlin et al. 1995; Kiernan 1992). In addition, both adults and children in single-mother families and stepfamilies expect premarital residential independence on behalf of the children to a larger extent than in intact families (Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1989). Why do adolescents of divorce form their own household earlier in life than other young adults? Research in the field offers some possible explanations.

Economic resources. One possible factor behind the association between family type of origin and nest-leaving age is the difference in economic conditions between one-parent and two-parent households. Although this difference is relatively small in Sweden compared to other countries, due to, for example, differences in levels of gainful employment among women and social and family policy programs, the absolute difference is still substantial, to the disadvantage of single-parent households. In the early 1980s and 1990s it was estimated that single and divorced mothers had an adjusted disposable income that corresponded to only about 85 percent of the income for two-parent families (Gähler 1998; Wong et al. 1993).

The economic conditions of the household can affect the point in time for the adolescent's nest-leaving in different ways. On the one hand, setting up an independent residence is expensive. Rent and other fixed costs must be paid and furniture and other kinds of equipment must be purchased. This should indicate that young adults from more affluent backgrounds have a possibility to leave home at an earlier age, i.e. we would expect a negative association between the economic resources in the family of origin and the adolescent's nest-leaving age. On the other hand, economic difficulties can be a stress factor, which directly affects the psychological well-being of children and adults (Duncan et al. 1994; McLeod & Shanahan 1993; Voydanoff 1990). In addition, the lack of material and economic resources can also affect parents' behavior toward their children in a negative way (McLeod & Shanahan 1993). It is also more difficult for a single parent to provide for the family and smaller economic circumstances generate

less advantageous housing conditions (cf. Gähler 1997). For example, children from less affluent homes may have to share room with siblings. In fact, a British study shows that adolescents from single-mother families and stepfamilies are more likely to leave home because of poor accommodation than are adolescents in intact families (Kiernan 1992). Given that dissolved families' economic conditions are less advantageous than average for intact families, all these factors should imply that individuals from the former family type are likely to leave home relatively early.

Family structure. A second reason why parental divorce would affect the nest-leaving age is the obvious difference in family structure between one-parent and two-parent families. A divorce, by definition, implies that one of the parents leaves the child's household. This fact may have two effects on the parent-child relationship. First, in most cases, the frequency of contact with the non-custodial parent is reduced or may even cease entirely (Statistics Sweden 1995). Second, the custodial parent, usually the mother, must often increase the time spent in gainful employment to compensate for the economic loss mentioned above. She (or he) also must perform a greater share of the household tasks. This 'task overload' (Weiss 1979) and the reduction in time spent together by child and parents may lead to reduced emotional support, attention, supervision, the lack of a parental "role model" (Amato 1993; Amato & Keith 1991b; Thomson et al. 1992), and a decreased "social control" (Raschke 1987). In short, the changed family structure is supposed to lead to a decrease in the quantity and quality of contact with both parents. This may cause a decrease in the attractiveness of staying in the home of origin and may also mean that children from one-parent families exhibit a greater independence from their parent(s), at an earlier point in time, than children from two-parent families. To put it in other words, "it may be that family disruption hastens the development of adolescents' sense of self as separate from family, thus making it easier for children to initiate the transition to independence" (Aquilino 1991:1009).

Interparental and other types of conflict. Finally, the presence of interparental and other types of conflict is likely to exert influence on the young individual's nest-leaving age. Family conflict has been shown to have both short-term and long-term impact on the psychological well-being of children and adults (see Amato and Keith 1991a and 1991b for meta-analyses). Serious dissension between family members is likely to reduce the attractiveness of the home

environment and increase the attractiveness of forming a household of one's own. Conflict between parents and other family members may appear in all family types, dissolved as well as intact. However, since at least interparental conflict is more common in the former family type, we can assume that individuals who have experienced a parental divorce during childhood are more likely to have experienced family conflict (Gähler 1998). Previous studies have shown that those, whose parents divorced, are more likely to have left home because of friction (Cherlin et al. 1995; Kiernan 1992).

The Impact of a Stepparent

After a parental divorce, children sometimes experience that the custodial parent starts living with a new partner. In many cases this stepparent is an important resource to the family and the child, emotionally as well as economically. Stepparents may also help monitoring and supervising the child and perform household tasks (see above). Despite these facts, living with a stepparent can be problematic for many children. According to Cherlin (1978:642) there is “a lack of institutional guidelines” for couples in remarriages after divorce. For example, it is difficult for stepparents to determine “their proper disciplinary relationship to stepchildren” (p. 645). In addition, Öberg and Öberg (1991) claims three possible reasons to why children often express an aversion to have a “new” parent. First, having a stepparent would mean the final deathblow to the reunion of the biological parents. Second, the children can be afraid of new conflict, between the custodial parent and the stepparent. Third, a new adult in the family is a threat to the parent-child relation.

Accordingly, Kiernan (1992) shows that young men and women in stepfamilies are more likely than their brothers and sisters in single-mother families to leave home because of friction. It has also been shown that individuals living with stepparents leave home earlier than those from intact and single-parent families respectively (Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1999).

Gender Differences

Studies from a number of countries have shown that women, in general, leave their parental home earlier in life than men do (Kiernan 1992; White 1994). This finding is also valid in Sweden (Nilsson & Strandh 1999). The question here,

however, is whether the nest-leaving of women and men is affected in different ways by a parental divorce. To put this question in other words, does the relative difference in nest-leaving age between different family types differ between men and women?

Some previous studies indicate that parental divorce affects boys' psychological adjustment more severely than that of girls (see e.g. Block et al. 1986; Cherlin et al. 1991; Hetherington et al. 1978, 1979). Hetherington (1981) suggests a number of possible reasons for this gender difference. Boys are believed to be exposed to parental conflict more often and for longer periods than are girls; boys are more often confronted with inconsistent parenting, negative sanctions, and opposition from parents; boys more often stay with the parent of the opposite sex, and therefore lack an adult role-model of the same sex; and finally, during the period immediately following the divorce, boys receive less positive support and are viewed more negatively by their surrounding than are girls. Given that this gender difference is an empirical fact, and given that the atmosphere in the home environment (family conflict, inconsistent parenting etc.) has an impact on the nest-leaving age, we, accordingly, would expect that parental divorce affects the nest-leaving age more for boys than for girls.

The empirical evidence for gender differences in reaction to parental divorce is inconclusive, however. According to a review by Demo & Acock (1988:622) "most of the evidence suggests that adjustment problems are more severe and last for longer periods of time among boys" (see also the review by Shaw 1991 and the study by Morrison & Cherlin 1995). In their meta-analyses of the effect of parental divorce on psychological adjustment Amato and Keith reach another conclusion. They do not find that boys are more negatively affected than girls, neither with regard to short-term (1991b) or long-term effects (1991a), and they conclude "that when a large number of studies are considered, including studies that are infrequently cited, sex differences are not as pronounced as one might think" (1991b:33; see also the studies by Allison & Furstenberg 1989; Baydar 1988; Gähler 1998; Mechanic & Hansell 1989).

Boys and girls may also be affected in different ways depending on the family situation *following* family dissolution. For example, the implications of having a stepparent may vary by children's sex (Amato 1993). According to Hetherington (1987, cited in Aquilino 1991), girls adjust better to living in a single-parent family than boys do. Whereas daughters, in general, have positive

relationships with their mothers, mother-son relationships are often problematic. On the other hand, boys adapt well to, even benefit from, having a stepparent whereas girls are negatively affected and exhibit problematic relations with parents.

In accordance, Aquilino (1991) shows that living with a stepparent raises the likelihood of early home-leaving significantly, and that this effect is substantially stronger for women than for men. He does not find, however, that living in a single-parent family affects the nest-leaving age of women and men in different ways.

In the empirical part of this paper, separate analyses for women and men will be conducted to study whether they are affected in different ways.

Age Differences

Given that parents' divorce affects the home-leaving age, does it matter at what point in time in a young person's life it occurs? There are reasons to believe that any effect of parental divorce should be stronger the younger the child is when the parents divorce, the reason being that the child is exposed to a single-parent family for a longer period of time (cf. Krein & Beller 1988). In addition, Emery (1982) argues that younger children are more affected by marital conflict since they are more dependent on their parents and therefore more susceptible. On the other hand, older children are "more sensitive to emotion and may feel pressure to become involved in interparental conflict" (p. 317). Further, the crisis theory, which assumes a direct effect of parental divorce on the child's well-being (Rutter 1979), would postulate that the closer in time the parental divorce is to decisions on transitions in early adult life, the greater the impact on these decisions. Hence, it seems as if children who are relatively young and old respectively at their parents' divorce are the most influenced by this event.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In short, then, the following questions and hypotheses are formulated in this paper:

1. Is family dissolution during childhood and adolescence associated with a lower age for leaving the parental home? Yes, this is what we would expect from the theoretical background above. The strength of the

association should diminish when we control for economic conditions, parental education, and other variables.

2. Is there an impact of family conflict and/or type of family conflict on nest-leaving age? Yes, again this is what we would expect. Independent of family type we would expect that those who have experienced family conflict leave their parental home at a younger age than individuals from the corresponding family type who have not experienced family conflict.
3. Which factor has the greatest impact on the nest-leaving age, parental divorce or family conflict? The answer to this question is not clear from the theoretical background above. If the impact of parental divorce is greater we would expect individuals who have experienced family dissolution but no serious dissension to leave home earlier in life than individuals who have experienced family conflict but no parental divorce. If the impact of family conflict is larger we would expect the opposite relationship. We would expect that respondents who have experienced neither parental divorce nor family conflict leave home later than other categories. It is more complicated to predict the nest-leaving age of those who have experienced both parental divorce and family conflict. The reason is that the parental divorce may indicate that the serious dissension between the parents has come to an end.
4. Given family conflict, does type of conflict have an impact on nest-leaving age? The theoretical background does not give any guidance on this issue but it could be expected that being personally involved in the conflict has the strongest impact on the nest-leaving age of the individual.
5. Given experience of family dissolution, is there an association between the respondent's age at parental divorce and nest-leaving age? According to the arguments presented above we would expect a \cap -shaped association, i.e. that individuals who were relatively young or relative old when their parents divorced leave home earlier than others.
6. What is the impact of having stepparents on the age for leaving the parental home? We would expect that those, who have themselves or whose custodial parent has been involved in conflicts with the stepparent, leave home relatively early. Those who have no experience of conflict with their stepparent are believed to leave home at approximately the

same age, or even later, as other individuals from dissolved families who have not lived with a stepparent.

7. Does family type and conflict during childhood and adolescence influence the nest-leaving age for women and men in different ways? The evidence on this issue is inconclusive but, if anything, we would expect that boys are more strongly affected by parental divorce than girls. On the other hand, living with a stepparent is assumed to have a stronger impact on the nest-leaving age for women.

DATA SET, VARIABLES, AND METHODS

Data Set

At our disposal we have a data set, *Family and Working Life in the 21st Century*, funded by the Swedish Social Science Research Council. This data set is based on a postal questionnaire distributed in the spring of 1999 to approximately 3,500 randomly selected Swedish women and men, aged 22, 26, and 30 years respectively. The response rate was 67 percent and the questions include information on conditions during adolescence, such as family type (including parental divorce and experience of living with a stepparent), family dissension, childhood place of residence, parental education, and economic conditions. The respondents were born in Sweden, to Swedish-born parents². For this category, it is a nationally representative sample. The main purpose of the survey was to find out about plans, attitudes and expectations of young adults with regard to family and working life. The intention is that this will be the first round of a panel study, that is, information will be collected again from the same respondents in 4-5 years.

Variables

The dependent variable, *nest-leaving age*, is formed by the answer to the question: “At what age did you leave your parental home?” The answers are given in years and the variable is metric. Out of a total of 2284 respondents, 14

² There was also a smaller sample of second-generation young adults, more precisely about 500 men and women, born in Sweden, but with one or both parents born either in Poland or in Turkey. Their home-leaving patterns will be analysed in a later extension of this paper.

were deleted either because there was missing information on nest-leaving age (12), or because they reported to have moved away from the parental home before age 14 (2). A total of 170 respondents were still living at home, while the remaining 2100 reported to have left their parental home. Of the 22-year olds 11,7 percent were still living at home, but only 2,4 percent of the 26-year olds and 1,1 percent of the 30-year olds. The median nest-leaving age is about 18 for girls, but 19,5 for boys. The observation period was started at age 14 (their 14th birthday), and the duration variable calculated as years since age 13. The 22-year olds were censored at their 22nd birthday, the 26-year olds at their 26th birthday and the 30-year olds at their 30th birthday.³

A number of independent variables are used in the analysis. There are two different *family type* variables. The first distinguishes between intact families and non-intact families. The latter category includes both respondents who have experienced a divorce before their 16th birthday, and those who never lived with both their biological parents.⁴ The second family type variable brings in information about whether the respondent has experienced *conflict* (“fights or serious discord”) in the family when s/he was growing up.⁵ Thus, there are four categories: 1) intact, no conflict, 2) intact, conflict, 3) non-intact, no conflict, and 4) non-intact, conflict.

We also have a variable which takes account of *type of conflict*, where we distinguish between 1) only conflict between parents, 2) only conflict between respondent and parent(s), 3) both conflict between parents and conflict between respondent and parent(s), and finally 4) other types of conflict in the family. There is also a variable, which takes account of whether respondents in non-intact families have ever lived with a *stepparent*. This variable is combined with the conflict dimension, with three categories: 1) divorced, no stepparent, 2)

³ The age of the respondents is as of the end of 1998, i.e. the 22-year olds were born in 1976 etc. Since the data were collected in the spring of 1999 (April-June), with this “conservative” method we are unfortunately not using the home-leaving information of those respondents who left home between their 22nd, 26th or 30th birthday, respectively, and the date of the survey. Estimating their home-leaving age as 22.5, 26.5 or 30.5, respectively, would introduce a slight error (overestimate). However, we plan to test whether the results are robust, when we count these respondents as movers as well.

⁴ For practical reasons we define this category as having experienced a parental divorce throughout the paper. A number of 44 respondents whose mother or father (or both) died before their 16th birthday are excluded from the analysis. In addition, there were 15 respondents who did not live with both their biological parents “for other reasons”. They were also excluded.

⁵ Respondents could answer “yes”, “perhaps” and “no”. In this analysis, respondents answering “yes” and “perhaps” have been grouped together (and contrasted with those answering “no”).

stepparent, no conflict, and 3) stepparent, conflict.

In addition to controlling for *sex* and *birthyear* (1968, 1972, and 1976), we have added three socio-economic variables, namely *parents' education*, *economic conditions during childhood* and *childhood residence*.⁶ The first of these variables is based on the mean of the two parents' educational level and contains three categories: 1) Compulsory and vocational education, 2) Secondary school, and 3) University education. The second variable is formed by the answer to the question "How would you describe your family's economic situation while you were growing up?" Four response possibilities were given: 1) Very good, 2) Fairly good, 3) Rather bad, and 4) Do not know. The last variable is divided into three categories: 1) Metropolitan areas (Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö), 2) Non-metro, non-rural, and 3) Rural areas. Finally, in a separate analysis on respondents whose parents divorced, we use *age at parents' divorce*, divided into three categories (0-6, 7-12, and 13-16 years), as an independent variable.

Methods

We have studied nest-leaving by means of Cox proportional hazards regression, with years since age 13 as the duration variable. The analysis is performed using the Cox regression command (*stcox*) in STATA, with no time-varying covariates. The effects of the various independent variables (fixed covariates) are expressed as hazard ratios or relative risks. Most of our covariates are categorical variables. In this case the relative risks can be interpreted as "overrisks" or "underrisks" relative to the baseline (omitted) category, holding all the other covariates constant. Since almost all (95 percent) of the respondents have moved away from their parental home, the relative risks mostly capture timing effects. That is, a relative risk less than 1.00 means slower (later) nest-leaving than the baseline category, while a relative risk of more than 1.00 means faster (earlier) nest-leaving.

The analyses are presented in the following way. In the first step, we present the findings for *all* respondents in two different models. The first model only shows the bivariate association between the independent and dependent variables. In the second model controls are added. This multivariate analysis aims at

⁶ Due to a large number of missing cases on the question on parental occupation we have not included any variable on parental class. In future analyses it may be possible to study the impact of parental class including only those who do not lack this information.

studying whether the association mentioned above is spurious and, in fact, an effect of other conditions. In the second step, corresponding analyses are presented but now divided by gender, to study whether the impact of different conditions vary or are identical between men and women.

FINDINGS

The Impact of Family Type on Nest-leaving Age

Do individuals from dissolved families leave their parental home at an earlier age than individuals from intact families? The answer to that question undoubtedly seems to be in the affirmative. Table 1 (Model 1) confirms that individuals whose parents divorce or separate during their adolescence move from their home of origin at a significantly younger age than those who grow up in an intact family. At any given age, children of divorce are 1.30 times more likely to have moved out from their family of origin than are those from an intact family background (the reference category). This pattern remains unaltered also after controls are added for different conditions (Model 2). This means that the increased risk for nest-leaving among individuals from dissolved families, compared to individuals from intact families, is not an effect of differences between the two groups in economic circumstances, parental education or any other condition controlled for. It is interesting to note, however, that some of these conditions in themselves have an impact on the age at which individuals leave their parental home. At any given age, older cohorts leave home to a higher extent than younger cohorts and, which is a common finding not only in Swedish studies, women leave home at an earlier age than men do. Further, young adults who have grown up in a metropolitan area (Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö) move away from their parental home at a later age than those growing up in a rural area, or in a non-metropolitan, non-rural area. Difficult economic conditions in the parental home also tend to speed up the nest-leaving process. The parents' educational level has no impact on the nest-leaving age among the offspring.

[Table 1 around here]

Are there any gender differences? Does family type during childhood influence women and men in different ways? In general, the pattern is similar for

women and men. In fact, the interaction term between family type and gender was tested in the analysis of all but was not statistically significant (not shown). This finding is underlined in the separate analyses for men and women; there are only marginal differences in the impact of family type on home-leaving age between the two genders.

A question that arises from these analyses is whether young individuals leave their home of origin as a consequence of the parental divorce per se or whether it is rather an effect of the climate within the family. In other words, which factor contributes the most to “push” adolescents out of the nest, parental divorce or conflict within the family? In Table 2, results from analyses in which family type is divided by whether the respondent has experienced conflict in the household or not are revealed. At any given age, individuals who have experienced a conflict-free divorce and individuals from intact homes who have experienced severe conflict are more likely to leave home than individuals from intact homes who have not experienced severe conflict. The increased risk is statistically significant on the 10 percent level (Model 1). After controlling for different conditions in Model 2, however, the estimate for the divorce+no conflict category is reinforced whereas it weakens for the intact family+conflict category. The latter estimate even turns statistically insignificant, indicating that of these two factors (divorce and conflict respectively) there is only a unique contribution of parental divorce on home-leaving age. The strongest impact on the nest-leaving age, however, has the combination of parental divorce and severe dissension. This condition during childhood/adolescence increases the risk to leave the parental home by 42 percent, an estimate that remains basically unaltered in Model 2.

[Table 2 around here]

Again, there are only small differences between men and women. The interaction between family type and gender is not statistically significant (not shown). It seems, however, as if men who have experienced only parental divorce are more affected by this event than women. After controlling for economic conditions, parental education, childhood residence etc. (see Model 2), however, the picture changes somewhat. Whereas differences between women expand, the opposite is true for men.

We have now shown that family conflict, at least in combination with parental divorce, has an effect on the age at which adolescents and young adults leave home. This indicates that a bad climate within the family pushes the individual out of the parental home. But does it matter who is involved in the dissension? Does the individual have to be involved him- or herself or is the impact larger if the parents fight? Table 3 (Model 1) reveals an analysis in which individuals are divided according to whether they have experienced severe discord, and, if so, type of conflict. The group of respondents who claim that there has been no conflict serves as reference category whereas the other categories contain those whose (i) parents had serious dissension, (ii) those who have themselves had serious dissension with their parent(s) but have not experienced dissension between their parents, (iii) both types of conflict, and (iv) other types of conflict. From this analysis it is obvious that the strongest impact on leaving home at an early age comes from having own personal experience of conflict with parents in combination with conflict between parents. But the contribution of the latter type of conflict (only conflict between parents) on nest-leaving age is weaker than the contribution of the conflict only between the individual and the parent(s) category. In opposition, there is no impact of other types of conflict, for example between siblings, sibling(s) and parent(s), or the respondent and sibling(s) on the individual's home-leaving age.

But is the impact of type of conflict dependent on the respondent's family type? Is it possible that the impact of type of conflict on nest-leaving age is only a spurious association and that, in fact, this relationship disappears once we control for family type? To some extent this seems to be the case, but not entirely. Once family type, among other conditions, is controlled for (Model 2) the estimates for the four conflict variables indeed change, but only marginally, which indicates that type of conflict has a unique effect on the nest-leaving age, independent on family type and other conditions.

[Table 3 around here]

Again, not much additional information is gained from separating the analyses by gender. There is a tendency that the impact of all types of conflict is larger for women. This tendency is not strong, however, which is underscored by the fact that the interaction between conflict type and gender is not statistically

significant (analysis, conducted on “all”, not shown).⁷

Is the Effect of Parental Divorce Associated with Other Background Conditions?

We have now established that parental divorce is negatively associated with the age at which young individuals leave home. But do individuals who have experienced parental divorce constitute a homogeneous group or do we find variation also within this group? In short, if we select only those, whose parents divorced, can we identify conditions that have an influence on the nest-leaving age? We will study the possible impact of three such conditions here, namely (i) the individual’s age at which the parents divorced, (ii) whether the respondent ever lived with a step-parent, and (iii) whether the step-parent was involved in any conflict with either the respondent or the biological parent.

To begin with the first question, we have divided those who have experienced a parental divorce in three categories, those who were 0-6, 7-12, and 13-16 years old respectively when their parents divorced (Table 4). In this analysis, it is obvious that the respondent’s age at the parents’ divorce, has no impact on the nest-leaving age, neither for men nor for women. Other measures, such as a metric measure of age and other ways of categorising age, were tested but do not change the conclusion drawn here. Controlling for other conditions does not influence the results either.

[Table 4 around here]

We conclude the empirical part of this paper by analyzing the impact on the nest-leaving age of growing up with a stepparent. Does a stepparent, as is often assumed, cause tension and problems in the household that more or less forces the young individual to leave home? Or does the stepparent, on the contrary, contribute to make the household a more attractive place, which, in fact, encourages the young adult to stay?

From Table 5 it is apparent that, in total, there is no strong effect of growing

⁷ A test of the interaction term between family type and conflict type, however, reveals two statistically significant results. First, having experienced personal conflict with parents has a stronger impact on the home leaving age among those whose parents divorced. Second, having experienced other types of conflict has a stronger impact on the home leaving age for individuals from intact families.

up with a stepparent on the nest-leaving age. There are tendencies that those, whose biological parents have divorced and had one of the parents “replaced” by a stepparent, do leave home earlier but this effect is not statistically significant. As with most of the analyses above this conclusion is unaltered after controls are added in Model 2.

[Table 5 around here]

When the analyses are separated by gender one important difference occurs. It seems that young men are more affected by having a stepparent than young women are, i.e. the difference in nest-leaving age, between young men from dissolved families who have grown up with a stepparent and those who have not, is larger than between the corresponding groups for women. It should be noted, however, that none of the differences between categories reaches statistical significance. In addition, the interaction term between experience of stepparent and gender is not significant (not shown).

We have previously studied the impact of the climate within the household, i.e. the effects of serious dissension on the nest-leaving age, and we will now do corresponding analyses for those who have experience of living with a stepparent. Does it matter for the nest-leaving age of the respondent whether the stepparent was involved in any serious dissension? Yes, so it seems. Respondents who have either themselves or whose biological parent(s) had serious dissension with their stepparent leave the home of origin at a lower age than other individuals from dissolved families. Those who do not report that their stepparent was involved in any serious dissension stay at home as long as other individuals from split-up family backgrounds. This pattern remains after controls are added in Model 2.

[Table 6 around here]

When it comes to gender differences we can see a strong tendency that men are more affected than women. Men who have experience of a stepparent and serious conflict do leave their parental home at a significantly younger age than other men who have experienced a parental divorce. For women there is a tendency for a resemblance of “the male pattern”. The estimate is not as strong,

though, and does not reach statistical significance.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

To conclude, then, the findings in this paper agree with most previous research in the field, showing that individuals of both genders from dissolved families leave home earlier in life than individuals from intact families. This association between family type during adolescence and nest-leaving age cannot be explained by differences in other background conditions, such as parents' education, economic conditions, and residence, at least not the way they are measured here. Can the early nest-leaving of individuals from split-up family backgrounds be explained by any other condition? The importance of family conflict has often been shown in studies of other dependent variables. For example, the association between parental divorce and a deteriorated psychological well-being often diminishes after controls for family conflict are added (Amato 1993). Is this the case also for early home leaving? Further analyses, extending present knowledge, do, indeed, show that family conflict affects the age at which young adults leave home. Individuals who have experienced severe dissension but no divorce in their family of origin leave home earlier than individuals from intact, non-conflict homes. Likewise, individuals from broken homes who have experienced conflict leave home earlier than corresponding individuals who have not experienced conflict. Still, however, there is an impact of parental divorce on nest-leaving age.

Given that parents are divorced, are individuals affected in different ways, depending on other characteristics? It has often been assumed that a parental divorce has the strongest impact on relatively young and relatively old children. The empirical evidence presented here does not support such a conclusion. In fact, this finding agrees with most studies on the impact of parental divorce on the child's psychological well-being (Amato 1993; Emery 1982).

Does the family situation *following* parents' divorce matter? What is the impact of family reconstitution? There is a tendency that having experienced living with a stepparent speeds up the home-leaving process of the individual. This tendency is weak, however, and should not be overestimated. What seems to be of importance, though, is the family climate once the "new" parent has moved in. If this situation is characterized by severe discord, then the young adult leaves the home at a relatively early age. It is not unlikely that these young adults feel

pushed out of the home.

In general, differences between men and women are small. Parental divorce seems to affect the nest-leaving age of both genders in a similar way. There are signs, however, that men are more affected by divorce per se whereas family conflict has a larger impact on women. In addition, it seems as if the impact of living with a stepparent, characterized by severe discord, has a stronger impact on men. The latter result is in opposition to results revealed in previous American research. These studies have shown that women are more affected than men by living with a stepparent. It is not clear how this difference should be interpreted. In general, the gender differences should not be overestimated since no interaction term between gender and family type is statistically significant.

To sum up, then, given parents' education, economic conditions, childhood residence, family conflict, age at divorce, experience of living with stepparent, and conflict with stepparent, a unique effect of parental divorce remains. This result indicates that something in this event per se influences young adults to leave home and form a household of their own. It is a challenge for future studies in the field to trace the exact mechanism behind this association.

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TABLE 1. THE IMPACT OF FAMILY TYPE IN CHILDHOOD ON NEST-LEAVING AGE
(COX REGRESSION ANALYSIS)

Model	<i>All</i>		<i>Men</i>		<i>Women</i>	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
<i>Family Type in Childhood</i>						
Intact family	1	1	1	1	1	1
Parents divorced	1.30**	1.31**	1.38**	1.33**	1.25**	1.34**
<i>Gender</i>						
Men		1				
Women		1.81**				
<i>Childhood Residence</i>						
Metropolitan area		1		1		1
Non-metropolitan, non-rural area		1.32**		1.39**		1.26**
Rural area		1.53**		1.38**		1.66**
<i>Economic Conditions in Childhood</i>						
Very good		1		1		1
Fairly good		1.11†		1.18†		1.06
Rather bad		1.20*		1.19		1.19
Do not know		1.04		0.83		1.18
<i>Parents' Education</i>						
Compulsory and vocational education		1		1		1
Upper secondary school		0.94		1.12		0.81**
University education		1.02		1.15		0.92
<i>Birth Year</i>						
1968		1		1		1
1972		0.88*		0.86†		0.89
1976		0.74**		0.83*		0.71**
Number of Observations	1,972		917		1,055	

*** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$; † $p \leq 0.10$.

TABLE 2. THE IMPACT OF FAMILY TYPE AND CONFLICT IN CHILDHOOD ON NEST-LEAVING AGE
(COX REGRESSION ANALYSIS)

Model	<i>All</i>		<i>Men</i>		<i>Women</i>	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
<i>Family Type and Conflict in Childhood</i>						
Intact family+no conflict	1	1	1	1	1	1
Intact family+conflict	1.11†	1.09	1.07	1.06	1.09	1.12
Divorce+no conflict	1.20†	1.21*	1.34*	1.28†	1.09	1.10
Divorce+conflict	1.42**	1.45**	1.45**	1.40**	1.40**	1.55**
<i>Gender</i>						
Men		1				
Women		1.80**				
<i>Childhood Residence</i>						
Metropolitan area		1		1		1
Non-metropolitan, non-rural area		1.33**		1.40**		1.29**
Rural area		1.54**		1.39**		1.71**
<i>Economic Conditions in Childhood</i>						
Very good		1		1		1
Fairly good		1.10		1.17		1.06
Rather bad		1.16†		1.16		1.14
Do not know		1.02		0.81		1.16
<i>Parents' Education</i>						
Compulsory and vocational education		1		1		1
Upper secondary school		0.94		1.12		0.81**
University education		1.01		1.14		0.92
<i>Birth Year</i>						
1968		1		1		1
1972		0.87*		0.86†		0.90
1976		0.74**		0.84*		0.70**
Number of Observations	1,972		917		1,055	

*** p ≤ 0.001; ** p ≤ 0.01; * p ≤ 0.05; † p ≤ 0.10.

TABLE 3. THE IMPACT OF TYPE OF CONFLICT IN CHILDHOOD ON NEST-LEAVING AGE
(COX REGRESSION ANALYSIS)

Model	<i>All</i>		<i>Men</i>		<i>Women</i>	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
<i>Type of Conflict in Childhood</i>						
No conflict	1	1	1	1	1	1
Only conflict parents	1.10†	1.04	1.10	1.00	1.10	1.09
Only conflict respondent/parent(s)	1.26*	1.20†	1.26	1.21	1.16	1.25†
Conflict parents <u>and</u>	1.30**	1.21*	1.21	1.13	1.26*	1.27*
Only other types of conflict	1.08	1.01	0.95	0.81	1.14	1.14
<i>Family Type in Childhood</i>						
Intact family		1		1		1
Parents divorced		1.29**		1.33**		1.31**
<i>Gender</i>						
Men		1				
Women		1.79**				
<i>Childhood Residence</i>						
Metropolitan area		1		1		1
Non-metropolitan, non-rural area		1.34**		1.39**		1.30**
Rural area		1.55**		1.37**		1.74**
<i>Economic Conditions in Childhood</i>						
Very good		1		1		1
Fairly good		1.10		1.18†		1.06
Rather bad		1.17†		1.19		1.14
Do not know		1.03		0.81		1.16
<i>Parents' Education</i>						
Compulsory and vocational education		1		1		1
Upper secondary school		0.94		1.12		0.81**
University education		1.02		1.16		0.92
<i>Birth Year</i>						
1968		1		1		1
1972		0.87*		0.85†		0.89
1976		0.74**		0.83*		0.70**
Number of Observations	1,972		917		1,055	

*** p ≤ 0.001; ** p ≤ 0.01; * p ≤ 0.05; † p ≤ 0.10.

TABLE 4. THE IMPACT OF RESPONDENT'S AGE AT PARENTAL DIVORCE ON NEST-LEAVING AGE
(COX REGRESSION ANALYSIS)

Model	<i>All</i>		<i>Men</i>		<i>Women</i>	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
<i>Respondent's Age at Parental Divorce</i>						
0-6	1	1	1	1	1	1
7-12	1.01	1.02	0.91	0.92	1.13	1.15
13-16	1.02	0.96	1.13	1.12	0.90	0.91
<i>Gender</i>						
Men		1				
Women		1.58**				
<i>Childhood Residence</i>						
Metropolitan area		1		1		1
Non-metropolitan, non-rural area		1.43**		1.22		1.61*
Rural area		1.82**		1.14		3.41**
<i>Economic Conditions in Childhood</i>						
Very good		1		1		1
Fairly good		0.83		1.05		0.75
Rather bad		0.93		0.98		0.97
Do not know		1.01		0.51		1.65
<i>Parents' Education</i>						
Compulsory and vocational education		1		1		1
Upper secondary school		0.90		1.02		0.79
University education		0.93		1.05		0.87
<i>Birth Year</i>						
1968		1		1		1
1972		0.84		0.78		0.92
1976		0.85		0.99		0.72†
Number of Observations	380		181		199	

*** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$; † $p \leq 0.10$.

TABLE 5. THE IMPACT OF EVER HAVE LIVED WITH A STEPPARENT AFTER PARENTAL DIVORCE ON NEST-LEAVING AGE
(COX REGRESSION ANALYSIS)

Model	<i>All</i>		<i>Men</i>		<i>Women</i>	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
<i>Stepparent after Parental Divorce</i>						
No	1	1	1	1	1	1
Yes	1.14	1.12	1.26	1.23	1.03	1.11
<i>Gender</i>						
Men		1				
Women		1.63**				
<i>Childhood Residence</i>						
Metropolitan area		1		1		1
Non-metropolitan, non-rural area		1.37*		1.13		1.54*
Rural area		1.71**		1.06		2.89**
<i>Economic Conditions in Childhood</i>						
Very good		1		1		1
Fairly good		0.86		1.06		0.80
Rather bad		0.92		1.00		0.99
Do not know		1.04		0.51		1.71
<i>Parents' Education</i>						
Compulsory and vocational education		1		1		1
Upper secondary school		0.88		1.02		0.75
University education		0.89		1.00		0.85
<i>Birth Year</i>						
1968		1		1		1
1972		0.81		0.75		0.87
1976		0.83		0.98		0.70*
Number of Observations	411		196		215	

*** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$; † $p \leq 0.10$.

TABLE 6. THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT WITH STEPPARENT AFTER PARENTAL DIVORCE ON NEST-LEAVING AGE
(COX REGRESSION ANALYSIS)

Model	<i>All</i>		<i>Men</i>		<i>Women</i>	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
<i>Conflict with Stepparent</i>						
No Stepparent	1	1	1	1	1	1
Stepparent+no conflict	1.02	0.99	1.14	1.07	0.92	0.99
Stepparent+conflict	1.33†	1.34†	1.50†	1.53†	1.20	1.25
<i>Gender</i>						
Men		1				
Women		1.62**				
<i>Childhood Residence</i>						
Metropolitan area		1		1		1
Non-metropolitan, non-rural area		1.40**		1.09		1.65**
Rural area		1.72**		1.08		2.92**
<i>Economic Conditions in Childhood</i>						
Very good		1		1		1
Fairly good		0.89		1.18		0.79
Rather bad		0.91		1.00		1.03
Do not know		1.12		0.73		1.72
<i>Parents' Education</i>						
Compulsory and vocational education		1		1		1
Upper secondary school		0.98		1.22		0.81
University education		0.94		1.13		0.89
<i>Birth Year</i>						
1968		1		1		1
1972		0.90		0.79		0.96
1976		0.83		0.94		0.70*
Number of Observations	477		221		256	

*** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$; † $p \leq 0.10$.