

**Entangled in a complex network of family relations.**  
**The quality of the stepparent-stepchild relation within different**  
**custody arrangements**

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## **Abstract**

Joint custody arrangements following divorce and stepparent-stepchild relationships are interrelated in a complex way. Closer relationships with both biological parents, the presence of multiple parental and partner figures, and part-time versus fulltime co-residence create specific circumstances for the development of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Using data from the research project Divorce in Flanders (DiF) we study how the custody arrangement following divorce is associated with the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Applying a family system perspective, we test the importance of fulltime and parttime co-residence, a limited childrearing role by the stepparent, and spillover effects of good parent-child and partner relationships. We compare the results for the reported relationship quality by respectively stepparent and stepchild. This multi-actor perspective has both theoretical and methodological advantages.

## **1. Introduction**

The preference for joint physical custody within the Belgian divorce law has led to an increasing amount of children living part-time with mother and part-time with father following parental divorce. This bilocation of children created a new context in which stepparent-stepchild relationships develop: step relationships are now increasingly established and maintained within a context of binuclear households (Ahrons & Perlmutter 1982). These binuclear families are the foundation of an extended network of (step)family relations with mutually differences regarding kinships and power, communication and socialisation culture.

Joint physical custody and stepparent-stepchild relationships are interrelated in complex ways. On the one hand, both biological parents remain more frequently physically and emotionally present within the life of children following divorce. On the other hand, children in joint custody mathematically have a higher chance to live together with at least one new partner of mother or father than when they are in sole custody, thus creating step relationships. This stochastic relationship is even reinforced by the fact joint custody has created more time and space for a new partner relationship, especially for mothers (Vanassche, Sodermans & Matthijs 2011). Children in bilocation more often have a (partime) residential mother and stepmother, a (part-time) residential father and stepfather, or both. While co-residence with both parents must allow the maintenance of a good relationship with mother and father, children often have to establish a relationship with new partners of this parents. Children may see these new partners or stepparents as intruders, disturbing the relationship with their parent (Vischer & Vischer 1996).

Children in joint physical custody are not only living more frequently in a stepfamily configuration, they do so in a very specific way. These arrangements create part-time residential and part-time non-residential relationships. In the research literature, there are almost no studies that give attention to the specific nature of these relationships. Although there is an extended research literature on the association between custody arrangements following divorce and the quality of the parent-child relationship (e.g. Amato & Gilbreth 1999; Gunnoe & Braver 2001; Schapiro & Lampert, 2009), and on predictors of a good stepparent-stepchild relationship (e.g. Fine & Kurdek 1995; King 2006, 2007, 2009; Marsiglio 1992) few studies distinguish between fulltime or parttime stepparenthood, a bridging topic between these two research issues.

Most studies even do not discuss the criteria that are used to distinguish between custody arrangements or to determine co-residence, assuming a strict dichotomy in custody arrangements. The few studies that we found on the relationship between joint custody and step relationships are suggesting a positive influence of secured family ties and less loyalty conflicts (Crosbie-Burnett 1991; Greif & Simring 1982). We found however no recent studies dealing with this topic. A recent review article of Sweeney (2010) stresses nevertheless the importance of attention for diverse stepfamily structures, and especially for stepfamily relationships than span multiple households or involve part-time household membership.

The major aim of this research is to explore how variations in the residential arrangements of children following parental divorce are related to the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Applying a family system perspective, we are explicitly interested in how the quality of the relationship between stepparent and stepchild is interrelated with other family relationships within the family system. We focus on the relationships between children and their biological parents, between mother and father and between the parents and new partners. First, we consider whether these relationships are experienced differently within different custody types. Secondly, we study how different custody arrangements and family relationships are associated with the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship reported by stepchildren and stepparents. Finally, we analyse whether the association of different family relations with the stepparent-stepchild relation varies across custody arrangements.

## **2. Joint physical custody and stepfamily configurations from a family system perspective**

From a system-theoretic perspective, a stepfamily can be seen as an emotional system of interdependent family relationships (Hetherington & Jodl 1994). As stated by Cox & Paley (1997, p.246): “individual family members are necessarily interdependent, exerting a continuous and reciprocal influence on one another”. The mutual interdependency of different family relations within and between different subsystems are very important in this regard, together with the bi-directionality of relationships (O’Connor, Hetherington & Clingempeel 1997). The implications of this approach for this research is that we expect the relationship between stepparent and stepchild to be strongly interrelated with the relationships with and between the other members of the family system (Adamsons & Pasley 2006).

System theory sees the family as a hierarchically organized system, composed of different subsystems, e.g. the parental system, the partner system and the siblings system (Cox & Paley 1997). These subsystems mutually influence each other (Minuchin 1985). The whole family system, the family relationships and functioning of the different subsystems and family members are altered in stepfamily formation (Heterington 1999). These changes may induce boundary ambiguity or questions about membership of the family and the position and role of old and new family members (Van Bavel 1995). As stated by Brand & Clingempeel (1987, p. 140): ““Remarriage of a residential parent requires a reallocation of the personal resources of family members, a reassignment of roles, and a redistribution of parent-child boundaries.””

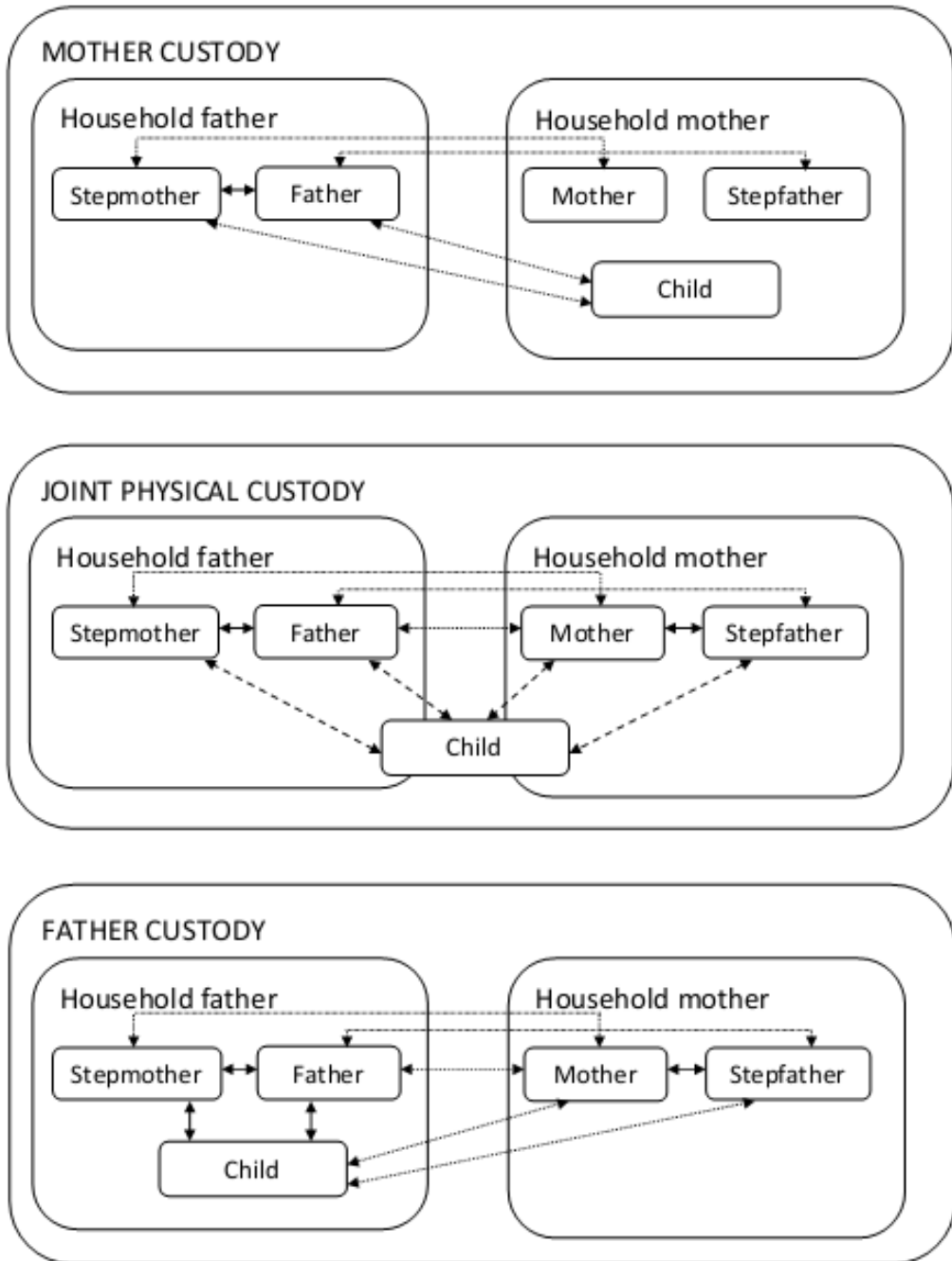
Relationships within stepfamilies may also have different meaning as compared with families with biological parents only. Cox & Paley (1997) report in this regard the example of the association between marital relationships and parent-child relationships. In never-divorced families, these two relationships are clearly positively linked, but there are indications that this works reverse stepfamilies (Brand & Clingempeel, 1987). Some argue that the subsystems are more encapsulated and independent in stepfamilies (Bray & Berger 1993), others reversely suggest a higher permeability between certain subsystems within stepfamilies (Fine & Kurdek 1994).

From a child-centred approach, post-divorce family implies the co-existence of two parental households: one of the mother and one of the father. We explicitly choose to talk about households because we are referring to the factual living situation and not to the family system as defined by the child. These two parental households have both their own within-household partner system, parent-child system, stepparent-stepchild system 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. Furthermore, an additional subsystem of within-household relationships is created, for example between the ex-partners, between parent and child and between old and new partners.

The family relationships in a post-divorce stepfamily system are visualized in Figure 1. According to the custody arrangement of the child, these relationships are fulltime or parttime within- or between-household relationships. The new partner relationships are fulltime within-household relationships, the relationship between the ex-partners and between the new partner and ex-partner fulltime between-household relationships. This holds by definition for all custody types. On the other hand, the parent-child and stepparent-child relationship can be either a within-household relationship or a between-household relationship, parttime or fulltime, depending on where the child lives (Ahrons & Perlmutter 1982). In strict mother or father custody, the relationship of the child with the residential parent and his/her partner is a within-household relationship, the relationship with the non-residential parent and his/her parent a between-household relationship. In joint physical custody, things are more complex: both relationships are situated parttime within and parttime between households, depending on where the child resides.

In general, we expect a stronger association between the relationships of an actor with members within the same household (*within-household relationship dyads*) than with members from different households (*between-household relationship dyads*). For example, from stepfather perspective, we expect a stronger association between the relation with mother and the relation with children living with mother than with children living with father. For example, from child perspective, we expect a stronger association of the relation with stepmother with the relationship with father than with the relationship with mother. Within joint custody, the continuous transition of the child between the two parental households might however create a stronger interrelation of both parental family systems compared to sole custody. We therefore expect a stronger association between the relationships in between-household relationship dyads for children in joint physical custody compared to children living fulltime with one parent (*Differential interrelatedness hypothesis*).

**Figure 1: Within- and between-household relationships between (step)parents and (step)children in mother custody, joint physical custody and father custody**



- ←————→ Fulltime within-household relationship
- ←-----→ Fulltime between-household relationship
- ←-----→ Parttime within-household relationship, parttime between-household relationship

## **2.1 The relationship between (step)parents and (step)children**

In general, children have a less close relationship with stepparents than with biological parents, also in established stepfamilies (Bray & Berger 1993; Hetherington & Jodl 1994; Hobart 1987). Frequent explanations are the biological predisposition to defend the needs of genetic relatives (Popenoe 1994) and the specific attachment bonds towards their primary caregivers in early life (Bowlby 1979). Nevertheless, many stepparents and stepchildren develop a close bond over time. An important condition for both relationships is living together with the child, the so-called *residence hypothesis*. The daily interaction involved in living together under one roof can help to create and maintain a good relationship between (step)parent and (step)child (Hetherington 2003; King 2006, 2007). The custody arrangement following divorce is in other words closely connected with the quality of both the parent-child and stepparent-stepchild relationship (King, 2007). We therefore expect that the quality of the relationship with a residential stepparent/stepchild is better than the quality of the relationship with a non-residential stepparent/stepchild, the so-called residence hypothesis.

Parents function as gatekeepers and can both facilitate or impede the development of the stepparental role (Ganong & Coleman 2004; Giles-Sims 1984). On the one hand, a good relationship with mother and father can positively affect the stepparent-stepchild relationship (King 2007), the so-called spillover hypothesis. Different studies report a strong, positive association between the relationships of the child with the parent and stepparent within the same household (Buchanan, Maccoby, Dornbusch 1996; King 2007; Marsiglio 1992). We therefore expect a positive association between the relationship of the child with the parent and with the stepparent within the same household.

Parents can also prefer to maintain the primary caregivers themselves (Brag & Kelley 1998), and refuse to stimulate a close stepparent-stepchild relationship or to co-parent with the stepparent. Especially non-residential parents may be less inclined to stimulate a good stepparent-stepchild relationship. King (2006) discusses three mechanisms via which the association between the relationship between father and stepfather may be negative. First, non-resident fathers may interfere with the stepfamily. Secondly, children may feel caught between father and stepfather, experiencing loyalty conflict or not willing to accept the step parental authority. Finally,



stepfathers may be less inclined or willing to become actively involved in the life of the child. Some studies find indeed a negative association between the relationship with the non-residential parent and stepparent (MacDonald & DeMarris 2002). Most however found no association between the relationship with father and stepfather or between the relation with mother and stepmother (Buchanan, Maccoby, Dornbusch 1996; King 2007; Vogt Yuan & Hamilon 2006; White & Gilbreth 2001). The relationship with the stepparent would develop relatively independently from the relationship with the non-resident parent (Sweeney, 2010). We therefore expect no relationship between the parent-child and stepparent-stepchild relationship within different households in case of joint custody. The latter may be different within joint physical custody, as there is no fulltime non-residential parent. In line with the interrelatedness hypothesis, we expect the relationship with the parttime non-residential parent to be more strongly associated with the stepparent-stepchild relationship than in case of fulltime mother or father custody. Crosbie-Burnett (1991) argues that ‘if children and nonresidential parents have the security of the legal tie of joint custody, children may feel freer to accept new stepparents into their families’. Within joint custody arrangements, children experience less loyalty conflicts between parents and stepparents, leading to better relationships with stepparents (Greif & Simring, 1982). Marsiglio & Hinosja (2007) use the concept of ‘father allies’ to describe the process in which stepfathers help a stepchild to develop or maintain a good relationship with the father. A similar process may be at work the other way around, with a good parent-child relationship facilitating a good stepparent-stepchild relationship. We therefore expect the relationship between the child and the other parent to be positively related to the relationship between the child and the stepparent within joint custody arrangements. As co-residence with mother and father is associated with a good relationship with mother and father, joint custody may be expected to be a beneficial arrangement for the stepparent-stepchild relationship by positive spillover from the mother-child and father-child relationship.

In addition, we might expect joint custody to be a beneficial context for the stepparent-stepchild relationship by limiting the step parental role. A recurrent finding in studies on the development of positive stepparent-stepchild relationships is that in early stages of step-family formation, affinity-seeking seems to be the pathway to positive responses by stepchildren. Investing (too) early in the child-rearing role can have the opposite effect. Step relationships are more likely to

be valued positively when stepparents first try to develop a friendship relationship with their stepchild(ren), instead of immediately taking the position of a new disciplinarian (Bray & Berger 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Visher & Visher 1996). We might expect that the continuity in (co)parenting by both biological parents reduces the importance of a child-rearing role by the stepparent: stepparents will be more frequently additional parents instead of replacement parents in joint custody compared to sole custody (Clingempeel, Brand & Ievoli 1984; Clingempeel & Segal 1986 Ganong & Coleman 2004). Joint custody therefore creates a context for more pleasant interactions with stepchildren (Crosbie-Burnett 1989). In sum, we expect a smaller child-rearing role for parttime residential stepparents compared to fulltime residential stepparents, all other things being equal, resulting in better relationships with parttime residential stepparents compared to fulltime residential stepparents (*limited stepchild-rearing role hypothesis*).

## **2.2 The relationships between parents and stepparents**

Several studies show that a strong couple bond in stepfamilies is very important for the well-being of both the members of the stepfamily as the stepfamily as a whole (Cherlin & Furstenberg 1994; Papernow, 1993). Marital or relationship problems are expect to extend to other parts of the family systems (Vandervalk et al. 2007). The meta-analytic review of Erel & Bruman (1995) reports clear evidence for conflicts within the marital or partner dyad to negatively affect parent-child relationship, indicating spillover effects between the two systems. Fine & Kurdek (1994) report empirical evidence for their hypothesis that the boundary between the marital subsystem and the stepchild-stepparent subsystem is even more permeable than those between the marital and parent-child subsystem. They argue that the relationship of stepparents with both their partner and the stepchild are affectively linked because they develop simultaneously. There are however also studies suggesting a reverse association within stepfamilies (Brand & Clingempeel 1987), others find no association (King 2007; Marsiglio 1992). The most empirical evidence points however to a positive association between the quality of the new partner relationship and the stepparent-stepchild relationships.

Within joint custody, the ex-partners are more frequently and explicitly present compared to sole custody, which can be experienced as a threat of the new partner relationship. This presence can

be a barrier in the development of a strong couple bond between new partners, negatively influencing the marital quality of the new couple (Ganong & Coleman 2004; Weston & Macklin 1990). Ganong, Coleman & Hans (2006) argue that new partner relations following divorce occur under the watch of the ex-spouses, with their own interests in the quality of the stepfamily system (Schrodt 2011). On the other hand, joint custody with regard to the children from the previous union can also be beneficial for the new partner relationship. It allows the stepparents to invest more time in their romantic relationship (Crosbie-Burnett 1989). Due to these contradictory research findings, we have no clear expectations whether joint custody for children from previous relationships is beneficial or not for the new partner relationship.

Divorce not necessarily means the end of conflict between the ex-partners and some post-divorce relationships may even be more discordant than pre divorce. A very robust finding in the research literature is the negative association between parental conflict and disruptive co-parenting and child outcomes (Amato 2010). Stepfamilies that are faced with high conflict between the ex-partners are more likely to have children with interpersonal or intrapersonal problems, creating additional challenges for the stepfamily to face (Ganong, Coleman & Hans 2006). On the other hand, some couples continue to respect each other, remain friends after divorce and succeed in establishing a cooperative co-parenting relationship. Although these kinds of post divorce co-parenting relationships result in the most positive outcomes for children, they also can hinder the integration of an stepparent in the family system (Ganong & Coleman 2004). Actively co-parenting by the ex-partners may make it more difficult to set boundaries around the new partner relationship (Ganong Coleman & Hans, 2006). As the research literature is inconclusive, we do not have a clear expectation regarding the direction of the association between the relationship between the ex-partners and the relationship between the stepparent and stepchild. In line with the differential interrelatedness hypothesis, we do expect a stronger association between these relationships within joint custody arrangements. In addition, we expect a selection of low-conflict and high co-parenting ex-couples into joint custody arrangements (Gunnoe & Braver 2001).

One of the most challenging relationships within stepfamilies is probably those between stepparents and their partner's ex-spouse. Besides the tension created by having a common relational partner, they also have common and competing interests in co-parenting children (Schrodt 2011). We did not find any research regarding the influence of this relationship on the

stepparent-stepchild relationship. Building upon the idea of parents and stepparents as allies (Marsiglio & Hinojosa 2007), we expect a positive relationship between both relationships. In line with the differential relatedness hypothesis, we expect this relationship to be stronger related to the stepparent-stepchild relationship within joint custody arrangements compare to sole custody arrangements.

### **2.3 Stepmothers and stepfathers**

Two, three decades ago, the dominant sole mother custody often went together with the presence of a residential stepfather. Residential stepmothers were very small in numbers and therefore often ignored in studies. This changed dramatically with the increasing popularity of children in joint custody following divorce. Residential stepmothers are therefore an increasingly visible and researchable group, allowing to explore deeper the gender differences in the experiences of step relationships.

There are two important differences between stepfathers and stepmothers: society has higher expectations with regard to motherhood than with regard to fatherhood (Nielsen 1999) and stepmothers are more involved in day-to-day care of children and the control of the household than stepfathers (Ambert 1986). Therefore, stepmothers have often more difficulties than stepfathers, especially with regard to role ambiguity, as well as in relation to the stepchild, her own child(ren), the mother of the stepchild, ... (Ganong & Coleman 2004).

Steprelationships also differ according to the sex of the stepchild. The most common finding is that boys have better relationships with stepparents than girls, and that the negative influences of living in a stepfamily are bigger for girls than for boys (Ganong & Coleman 2004). The same-sex hypothesis suggest that daughters have a better relationship with the mother, and sons with the father. For stepparents, the opposite would be true (Pasley & Moorefield 2004). Clingempeel, Brand & Ievoli (1984) found the stepparent-stepdaughter relationship in both stepmother and stepfather families to be more problematic than stepparent-stepson relationships. They found however no difference in the relationship quality of stepparents according to the sex of the stepchild.

Although this study not aims to focus on gender differences in the quality of stepparent-stepchild relationships, the findings in the research literature demonstrate the importance of distinguishing the different gender dyads when studying steprelationships. In addition, there may be important differences between stepmother and stepfather families regarding socio-economic, demographic and marital history dimensions, which makes it somewhat tricky to model them simultaneously (Clingempeel & Segal 1986)

### **3. Data and methods**

#### **3.1 Data**

We use data from the project Divorce in Flanders, a high-quality large-scale database containing information on 1025 intact and 3525 dissolved marriages (Mortelmans e.a. 2011). Using a multi-actor perspective, both (ex-) partners, a child and parent of both (ex-)partners, and the new partner of the divorced partners were questioned. A major strength of these data for the present study is information on the stepparent-stepchild relationship by stepparents and stepchildren.

In this article, we use data collected with the ex-partners of the dissolved marriages, with the new partners of these divorced men and women and of children living in the parental home. The data for the ex-partners and children was gathered via *Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing* (CAPI). Participation and consent of at least one parent was a necessary condition for the participation of a resident child. The new partners received a paper-and-pencil questionnaire (drop-off method), but also had the possibility to participate by web survey. Participation and consent of the partner was a necessary condition for the participation of a new partner.

In answering our research question, we use four different research samples, according to the sex of the stepparent and whether the reported relationship quality by stepparent or stepchild is used: 1) children reporting on the relationship with stepfather (N=353), 2) children reporting on the relationship with stepmother (N=366), 3) stepfathers reporting on the relationship with the stepchild (N=234) and 4) stepmothers reporting on the relationship with the stepchild (N=263). For the four research samples, the same conditions hold: 1) the stepparent lives together with the parent of the stepchild, 2) the stepchild lives together with at least one of his/her biological parents, 3) the stepchild is between ten and twenty-one years old at the time of the interview and 4) there is at least some contact between the child and the parent that lives together with the

stepparent. Combined, these four research samples gives us information on 426 stepfather and 486 stepmother configurations. For 147 stepfather configurations both stepfather and stepchild were questioned, for 136 stepmother configurations the stepmother and stepchild.

Next we discuss the operationalization of the study variables. The descriptives of all variables for the four samples are presented in table 1. This table also marks the data source of the variable, indicating from which actor in the study the information was taken.

### **3.2 Dependent variables**

The quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship was measured with a single question with five answering categories: very bad, bad, neither bad nor good, good, very good (range 1-5). This question was asked to both stepparents and stepchildren. We distinguish between the relationship quality reported by children on the relationship with stepfather, by children on the relationship with stepmother, by stepmothers on the relationship with the child and by stepfathers on the relationship with the child. The general tendency is that the stepparent-stepchild relationship is perceived as good to very good by both stepparents and stepchildren.

### **3.3 Key independent variables**

*Coresidence stepchild and stepparent.* To determine whether the child lives together with the stepparent (fulltime or parttime) or not, we used the information on the custody arrangement reported by the parents. Mothers and fathers had to indicate on a calendar how many days and nights the child spend within their household and within the household of the other biological parent. This information was used to determine whether the child lives fulltime in the same household with the parent (and stepparent), lives part-time in the same household with the stepparent or does not live together with the stepparent. Fulltime co-residence was defined as more than 75% of time; parttime co-residence as between 25% and 75%.

*The quality of the parent-child relationship, reported by the child.* The quality of the parent-child relationship was questioned similar to the stepparent-stepchild relationship, with a single question for mother and father separately with five answering categories : very bad, bad, neither bad nor good, good, very good (range 1-5).

*Conflict between parent and stepparent, reported by the child.* The children were asked to indicate on a seven point-scale how often their father/mother and his/her new partner had arguments during the last twelve months. Answer categories vary from never to daily (range 1-7).

*Conflict between parent and stepparent, reported by stepparent.* The new partners were asked to indicate on a seven point-scale how often five specific conflict situations occurred between them and their partner. Answering categories varied again from never to daily. The variable was constructed as the mean score on these five items (range 1-7).

*Conflict between mother and father, reported by the child.* Children had to indicate the frequency of five specific conflict situations between their mother and father. The variable was constructed as the mean score on these five items (range 1-7).

*Quality of the relationship between the biological parents of the stepchild, reported by the stepparent.* The stepparent was asked how good the relationship is between their partner and his/her ex-partner with a single questions with five answering categories: very bad, bad, neither bad nor good, good, very good (range 1-5).

*Co-parenting stepparent and parent, reported by the stepparent.* The new partners were asked to indicated on a seven-point scale how often during the last twelve months 1) they talked with their partner about the child and 2) they took important decisions regarding the child. Answering categories varied again from never to daily. The variable was constructed as the mean score on these two items (range 1-7).

*Quality of the relationship between the stepparent and the other parent, reported by the stepparent.* The stepparent was asked how good the relationship is with the ex-partner of his/her current partner with a single questions with 5 answering categories: very bad, bad, neither bad nor good, good, very good (range 1-5).

### **3.4 Control variables**

We control for the *sex* and *age* of the stepchild. Girls and adolescents would experience more troubles in adapting to stepfamily configurations (Ganong & Coleman 2004; Stewart 2005). Age is modelled with two dummy variables, distinguishing 10 to 13 years old (the reference category), 14 to 17 years old and 18 to 21 years old, corresponding to early, middle and late adolescence. Sex is operationalized as a dichotomous variable with boys as reference category.

A second group of control variables are measures of family configuration, which showed to be related to the stepparent-stepchild relationship in previous studies (Marsiglio, 1992; Stewart 2005a, 2005b). The information for these variables comes from the partner questionnaire.

*Presence of new partner with other parent.* We control for the presence of a stepparent in the other parental household, that is a stepmother regarding the stepfather-stepchild relationship, and a stepfather regarding the stepmother-stepchild relationship. The reference category of this dichotomous variable consists of the stepparent-stepchild dyads in which the other parent does not live together with a new partner.

*Presence (residential) stepsiblings.* We control for the presence of biological children of the stepparent from previous relationships or stepsiblings within or outside the household. The reference category of this dichotomous variable consists of the stepparent-stepchild dyads in which the stepparent does not have children from a previous relationship. Two dummy variables express 1) the presence of non-residential stepsiblings and 2) the presence of at least one residential stepsibling.

*Presence halfsiblings.* We control for the presence of shared children from the stepparent and biological parent in the household or half siblings. The reference category of this dichotomous variable consists of the stepparent-stepchild dyads in which the stepparent and biological parent have no biological shared children.

A third group of control variables is related to the timing of the family transitions. The information for these variables comes from the partner questionnaire.

*Duration since divorce.* We control for the years passed by since the parental divorce.

*Duration relationship partner and stepparent.* We control for the duration of the relationship between parent and stepparent.

### **3.5 Analytical strategy**

We begin by looking how the custody arrangement of the child is associated with the parent-child relationships, the relationships between the ex-partners, the new partner relationships and the relationships between old and new partners. These associations are important as explanations for existing associations between custody type and quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. All relationships are modelled with ordinary least square regression models. To estimate more cleanly the association, we controlled for the age and sex of the stepchild, the duration since



divorce and the duration of the new partner relationship. Previous research has shown that children in joint physical custody are on average younger, more recently experienced the parental divorce and, consequently, are living more recently within a stepfamily formation (Sodermans, Vanassche, Matthijs 2011). Boys would also more often live in joint custody arrangements than girls (Sodermans, Vanassche, Matthijs 2011).

Next, we look at the predictors of a good stepparent-stepchild relationship in a multivariate way. First, we estimate three models for the relationship with stepmother and with stepfather reported by the child. Secondly, we estimate three models for the relationship with the stepchild, reported by stepmother and stepfather. All models are presented stepwise. The first model only contains the custody arrangement and control variables. In the second model, the other family relationships are added. This allows to see the additional explanatory power and the change in the effect of custody arrangement caused by including these variables. In the third model, significant interaction effects between the custody arrangement and the relationship variables are presented. These allow to see whether the association between the stepparent-stepchild relations and other family relations differs according to the custody arrangement of the stepchild. All independent relationship variables are mean-centred to reduce multicollinearity. This has no effect on the significance of the interaction or on the values of the specific slopes (Holmbeck 2002).

In the multivariate analyses, we followed two strategies to deal with the multi-actor non-response. The first strategy involves imputation of the mean for the variables of the actor who did not participate, that is variables based on the data of the new partners regarding the reported relationship quality by the stepchild and variables based on the child data regarding the reported relationship quality by the stepparents. We control for these imputations with a dummy-variable expressing the non-response of this actor. A consequence of this method is that the “standard deviation is underestimated and relationships between variables are distorted by pulling estimates of the correlation toward zero” (Gelman & Hill 2007, pp. 532-533). Within each model, there are however only two variables with a considerable amount of mean-imputed cases, namely the stepparent variables in the stepchild models and the child variables in the stepparent models. The overall impact of the imputation is therefore expected to be limited. The second strategy is applying complete-case analysis. Applying this strategy, only stepdyads from which both stepchild and stepparent participated to the study are used. The pitfall here is that the results may

only hold for the selective group in which both stepparent and stepchild participated. By comparing the results from both strategies, we aim for drawing more reliable conclusions. For space-saving reasons, we only present the results for the mean-imputed models and discuss the correspondence of the complete-case analyses within the text.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Family processes in different stepfather and stepmother configurations**

Table 2 presents the association between the custody arrangement and all other study variables. Children in father custody report a worse relationship with mother than children in mother custody, and the reverse holds for the relationship with father. Similar, the relationship with a fulltime non-residential stepparent is worse than the relationship with a fulltime residential stepparent. These results support the residence hypothesis, suggesting that the daily interaction involved in co-residence benefits a close relationship between stepchildren and stepparents. In contrast, the relationship quality reported by stepparents seems to be less conditional of co-residence, especially for stepmothers.

The relationship with mother is not differently evaluated within joint and mother custody, while the relationship with father seems to be best evaluated in father custody. Similar, the relation with stepmother is best evaluated within father custody, while there are no differences in the relation with stepfather for children in joint and mother custody. In contrast with our expectations, the relation with parttime residential stepparents is never better than with fulltime residential stepparent, the relationship with parttime stepmothers is even worse than those with fulltime residential stepmothers. For the relation reported by stepparents, parttime or fulltime co-residence does not seem to matter.

Regarding the frequency of conflict between the biological parents and within the new partner relationships, children in father custody report less parental conflict and conflict between father and stepmother compared to children in mother custody.

Stepfathers report somewhat more conflict with their partner in joint custody compared to mother custody. The relation between the ex-partners is also perceived better by the stepparents within

joint custody compared to sole custody arrangements. Together these findings suggest more challenges for the new partner relationship in case of a close relationship between the ex-partners. As we do not find differences in the relationship quality between fulltime and parttime residential stepfathers, it may be that the association of increased conflict between mother and stepfather and of a good relation between mother and father are counterbalanced regarding the relationship with the stepchild, or one or both relationships are unrelated to the stepparent-stepchild relationship.

Overall, the frequency of conflict between both parents and between parent and stepparent seems quite similar in joint and sole custody arrangements. It may be that positive and negative effects of joint physical custody regarding the relationship between parents and between parents and stepparents balance each other out. Stepparents do report a better relationship between the ex-partners in joint custody. On the one hand, this could indicate a selection of more harmonious ex-couples into joint custody arrangements, but this is not confirmed in the results regarding parental conflict. A closer relationship may also create more possibilities for conflict. On the other hand, joint custody may also positively affect the relationship between the ex-partners over time. The latter is no selection effect, but a consequence of the arrangement itself. The better relationship between mother and father in joint custody is not reflected in a better stepparent-stepchild, which indicates either a lack of association between the relation between parents and the stepparent-stepchild relation or the effect to be counterbalanced by other associations with joint custody.

Regarding the reported co-parenting by respectively stepfather and mother and by stepmother and father, co-residence with the stepchild seems again to be very important. Fulltime non-residential stepparents clearly report less co-parenting than residential stepparents. A remarkable difference between stepfathers and stepmothers is that stepfathers report no more or less co-parenting with the mother regarding children in joint custody compared to mother custody, while stepmothers report less co-parenting regarding children in joint custody compared to children in father custody. The lower degree of co-parenting by parttime residential stepmothers however is not reflected in a better relationship with parttime stepmothers. Either the degree of co-parenting by fathers and stepmothers is not related to the stepparent-stepchild relation, or the association is counterbalanced by other associations with joint custody.

Finally, the relationship between stepfather and father is not related to the custody arrangement of the child. Stepmothers on the other hand do report a better relationship with the mother for children in joint custody compared to children in mother and father custody. This better relationship between mother and stepmother in joint custody is however not reflected in a better relationship with parttime residential stepmothers. This suggests either no association between the mother-stepmother relation and the stepparent-stepchild relation or the association being counterbalanced by other associations with the custody type.

#### **4.2 Which factors are associated with a good relationship between stepparents and stepchildren?**

Table 3 shows the results regarding the relationship quality with respectively stepfather and stepmother, reported by stepchildren. Model 1 confirms that children who live together fulltime with their stepmother report a better relationship. We do not find a similar association regarding the relationship quality with the stepfather, but additional analyses reveal that this association is suppressed by the variable expressing the participation of the father. The latter on its turn is explained by the relationship variables in model 2.

The differences according to custody arrangement disappear after the relationship variables are included in model 2. The inclusion of these variables increase the explained variance from 13% to 33% regarding the relationship with stepfather and from 10% to 35% regarding the relationship with stepmother. In sum, mainly the within-household relationships are associated with the relationship between stepparent and stepchild. The quality of the relationship with mother is strongly associated with the relationship with father, the relationship with father is strongly associated with the relationship with stepmother. The relationship with father is however not associated with the relationship with stepfather, and the relationship with mother not with the relationship with stepmother. The frequency of conflict between mother and stepfather is negatively associated with the relationship with the stepfather, the frequency of conflict between father and stepmother is negatively associated with the relationship with the stepmother. The frequency of parental conflict is not associated with the relationship with neither stepfather or stepmother. The only related between-household relationship is the relation between mother and stepmother for the relation with stepmother. Mothers may thereby be import in supporting the development of a good relationship of the child with the stepparent.

In model 3, three interaction effects between the custody type and relationship variables came out for the relation with stepfather, one regarding the relation with stepmother. In the complete-case analysis, the coefficients of the interaction terms with the degree of co-parenting between mother and father and the relation between father and stepfather are significantly different from zero. Therefore, we decided to keep them in the final model. In model 2, the degree of co-parenting between stepmother and father seems to be important for the relation with stepmother, but model 3 shows this only to be the case in mother custody. Similar, there are indications that co-parenting by stepfather and mother is only positively associated with the relationship with stepfather for children in father custody. These findings do not support the limited child-rearing hypothesis, but they also do not suggest higher step parental involvement to be positively related to the stepparent-stepchild relation within the same household. The results rather suggest that if children do not at all co-reside with a stepparent, at least some involvement in the child-rearing is important for a good relationship. The interaction effect between the relation with mother and the custody arrangement points in the same direction: a good relationship with mother is even stronger associated with the relation with stepfather if children live fulltime with their father. Finally, a good relation between father and stepfather also seems especially important for a good relation with stepfather for children in father custody. Here again, fathers may act as allies of the stepparent in developing a good relationship with the stepchild. Finally, none of the interactions supports the differential relatedness hypothesis, suggesting a stronger association of between-household relations within joint custody.

With regard to the control variables in table 3, girls report a lower relationship quality with stepfathers than boys, while no differences are found between the relation of boys and girls with stepmothers. Older adolescents report a lower relationship quality with stepparents than young adolescents. If the other parent also has a new partner, children report a better relation with a stepparent, which may have to do with less loyalty conflicts compared to single parents. We find no differences according to the number of years since parental divorce. The duration of the relationship between father and stepmother is negatively related to the relationship quality. Finally, if the stepmother has children from a previous relation living in the household, children report a worse relation with her.

Table 4 reports the results for the relationship with the stepchild reported by stepfathers and stepmothers. As for the children, we see in model 1 that living together with the parent is positively associated with the relationship quality reported by stepfathers. In model 1, we see no significant differences according to custody arrangement in the relationship quality reported by stepmothers.

The inclusion of the relationship variables in model 2 again increases the explained variance, but not as much as for the stepchildren. The mother-child relationship is again strongly associated with the relationship quality reported by stepfathers. We find however no similar effect of the relationship with father regarding the stepmother-stepchild relationship. We do see again for both stepfathers and stepmothers a negative association between the degree of conflict between the parent and stepparent and the relationship of the stepparent with the child. Also the degree in which stepfathers and stepmothers are involved in decisions regarding the stepchild is positively related to the reported relationship quality. In addition, for stepmothers we see that a good relation with the mother is important for a good relationship with the child.

In model 3, we see very similar interaction effects between the custody type and the relationship variables as for the relation reported by the stepchild for stepfathers. The results for co-parenting with the mother and the relation with the father point towards the importance of involvement in childrearing and support by the fathers if the child is living with the father. The interaction between the relation with mother and father custody however works the opposite way around compared to the child model. This effect only appears in combination with the other interaction terms but also holds in the complete-case analysis. It suggests that the relationship quality with mother is negatively related to the relationship quality with the stepchild reported by stepfathers within father custody. Stepfathers may feel standing at the side-line in case of a close relation between mother and her non-residential children.

For stepmothers, we found two interaction effects. Analogue the findings for the stepchildren, co-parenting of the stepmother is not positively related to the quality of the relationship of the stepmother with the child within joint custody, in contrast to mother and father custody. Finally, a

good relationship quality between the ex-partners seem to be negatively related to the relationship of stepmothers with the stepchild in joint custody and, especially, father custody.

Finally, neither age nor sex of the child seems to be associated with the relationship quality reported by stepparent. Also the family configuration and the number of years since parental divorce are not related to the relationship with the stepchild, except for a negative association between the presence of residential children from a previous relationship and the relationship of the stepmother with the stepchild.

## **5. Discussion**

The juridical and normative support of joint legal and joint physical custody has led to an increasing amount of youngsters living parttime with mother and parttime with father following divorce. As a consequence, a growing group of children is living parttime together with the new partner of one or both parents. This study focused on the association between parttime stepfamily configurations and the quality of the relationship between stepparent and stepchild. Using a family system perspective, we focused on how joint custody arrangements are associated with different family relationships, how these relationships are interrelated with the stepparent-stepchild relationship and whether these associations vary across custody arrangements.

At least some co-residence with a stepparent seems important for of a good relationship quality, confirming the residence hypothesis. The relationship with non-residential stepparents is clearly worse. The multivariate analyses reveal that the relationship between the custody arrangement and the relationship with stepparents and stepchildren mainly runs via a good relationship with the parent living with the stepparent. On average, there is no difference between fulltime and parttime residential stepfathers. The relation of stepchildren with parttime residential stepmothers is however less good than with fulltime residential stepmothers, although stepmothers of stepchildren in joint custody report on average a better relation with the mother. Stepmothers also report a lower degree of co-parenting with the father in joint custody arrangements compared to father custody, but we saw the degree of co-parenting not to be associated with the stepmother-stepchild relation within joint custody. The less good relationship with father in joint custody (compared to father custody) seems to be the most important factor in explaining the lower

relationship quality with parttime residential stepmothers compared to fulltime residential stepmothers. This may also explain why there is no difference between the custody arrangement in the relationship quality reported by stepmothers, as these showed no association with the relation with father. In sum, opposite to our expectations, the results do not suggest a better relationship with parttime stepparents, but reversely, a worse relationship with parttime stepmothers compared to fulltime residential stepmothers.

A good relationship with father is important for a good relationship with stepmother, a good relationship with mother is important for a good relationship with stepfather. When parents have a good relationship with the child, they will be inclined to stimulate a good relationship between stepparent and stepchild (King 2007). The increase in joint custody and the better relationship with father following divorce could help in this regard to reduce differences between stepfather and stepmother configurations and weaken the existing negative stereotypes around stepmotherhood. The relationship with father is not related to the relationship with stepfather, neither is the relationship with mother related to the relationship with stepmother. Hence, there is no spill over between those relationships, but there are also no indications of conflict or competition between parent and stepparent of the same sex (King 2007). This holds for stepchildren in both joint and sole custody. A good relationship with respectively father and mother does not impede a good relationship with stepfather and stepmother. These findings are in line with results from previous studies (Buchanan et al. 1996; King 2007).

The stepfather-stepchild relationship is negatively associated with the frequency of conflict between mother and stepfather, the stepmother-stepchild relationship is negatively associated with the frequency of conflict between father and stepmother. The frequency of parental conflict on the other hand is not related to the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Again, these results confirm the stronger association of within-household relationship dyads than of between-household relationship dyads.

In general, we can say that the differential interrelatedness hypotheses is confirmed regarding the stronger association of within-household relationships dyads compared to between-household relationship dyads. We found no evidence for a stronger association of between-household



relationships within joint custody. The latter may also explain why we do not find a better relationship quality with parttime stepparents as there is no additional positive effect of the part-time non-residential parent on the steprelationship.

We also found no empirical support for the limited child rearing hypothesis. A higher degree of co-parenting with the parent by the stepparent did not seem to be negatively related to the relationship of the stepchild with the stepparent. It may be that other measures of stepparental involvement (e.g. monitoring, authority, joint activities, ...) are more important in this regard. It may also be that our sample mainly contains established stepfamilies, and a limited stepchildrearing role is especially in the beginning of stepfamily formation important. For non-residential stepparents, increased co-parenting even positively affects the relationship of children with their stepparent. The latter association may suggest that if stepparent and stepchild do not co-reside, at least some involvement of the stepparent is important for the child for establishing a good relationship with the stepparent. For stepparents, increased co-parenting was in general positively related to the relationship with the stepchild. These results suggest that a certain degree of involvement of the stepparent in the life of the stepchild is important for a good relationship. On the other hand, within joint custody arrangements, the degree of co-parenting was found not to be related to the stepparent-stepchild relation. The lower degree of co-parenting by stepmothers within joint custody compared to father custody can therefore not function as a beneficial condition for better stepparent-stepchild relations by lower stepparental involvement.

The results further suggest some differences between stepmothers and stepfathers that are worth further exploring. First, the stepparental involvement of parttime stepfathers was not lower than those of fulltime residential stepfathers, while parttime residential stepmother are less co-parenting with father than fulltime residential stepmothers. The latter suggests that the stepmother role is more reduced by the presence of the mother in joint custody than the stepfather role by the father presence. Secondly, the relation between mother and stepmother is more important for the stepmother-stepchild relationship than the relation between father and stepfather for the stepfather-stepchild relation. Thirdly, only in joint custody more frequent co-parenting between father and stepmother is not positively related to the relation of the stepmother with the stepchild. Finally, a good relation between the ex-partners only seems to negatively affect the relation with

the stepchild of stepmothers, not of stepfathers. All these results suggest more challenges regarding the role and position of stepmothers next to mothers than of stepfathers next to fathers.

The result regarding the relation between the stepparent and the ex-partner of their partner point towards the idea of parents as allies of stepparents in developing a good relation with the stepchild (Marsiglio,& Hinojosa 2007). In the present research literature, this relation is largely ignored. The importance of this relation for the relation between stepparents and stepchildren may encourage researchers to explore deeper the importance of this relationship in the well-functioning of stepfamilies.

We can also compare the determinants of the stepparent-stepchild relationship from both stepparent and stepchild perspective. The relationship with the parent residing with the stepparent is clearly more important for the stepchild than for the stepparent. The degree of co-parenting with the partner and the relationship between the parents & stepparents are more important for stepparents than for stepchildren. Relationships within the own subsystems are in other words more strongly related to the perceived relationship quality than relationships outside the own subsystems.

We also want to reflect on some limitations of the present study. Firstly, the presented results do not allow to make conclusions on the selection of good or bad child dyads and stepparent-stepchild dyads into specific custody arrangements. Custody arrangements can change, for example if children experience problems with a new partner of mother or father, they can decide to live fulltime with the other parent. Especially in joint custody, the step to move to the other parent in case of discordant (step)parent-(step)-child relationships will be smaller. Secondly, a point of further attention is the association of the stepparent-stepchild relationship with the complete family history of the child, in which the present marital status of the parents (and stepparents) are taken into account, as well as additional family transitions since parental divorce. Remarriage, post-martial cohabitation, preceding stepfamily dissolutions, duration of preceding single parent configurations, ... may all have their own influence on the quality of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Finally, role ambiguity is important concept within system theory, which was not concluded in the present study. We may assume that uncertainties about the positions and

roles of family members are negatively related to the quality of the family relations (Clingempeel & Segal 1986), including the relation between stepparent and stepchild. The multiple parent figures and higher interrelatedness of maternal and paternal household within joint custody may be associated with more ambiguity within the family system. This requires further investigation.

The general conclusion of this article is that the differences between non-residential, parttime and fulltime residential stepparenthood are mediated and moderated by other family relationships, such as those with and between the biological parents and their partners. These results may be inspiring for future research as they demonstrate the importance of recognizing the variation in stepfamily formations and their internal processes, including parttime steprelationships. The increasing number of children in joint physical custody following parental divorce and the reality of stepfamily formations gives the latter an important social dimension.

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**Table 1: Descriptives for study variables of the four reach samples (means and standard deviation and percentages)**

	Data source <sup>1</sup>	Sample children with stepfather (N=353)	Sample children with stepmother (N=366)	Sample stepfathers (N=234)	Sample stepmothers (N=263)
<b>Relation with stepparent</b>	C	3.9 (1.0)	3.5 (1.1)	4.0 (0.9)	3.8 (1.1)
<b>Relation with father</b>	C	4.0 (0.9)	3.8 (1.0)	3.9 (1.0)	4.1 (0.9)
<b>Relation with mother</b>	C	4.3 (0.8)	4.3 (0.8)	4.4 (0.8)	4.2 (0.9)
<b>Conflict between parent and stepparent</b>	C	2.6 (1.3)	2.6 (1.4)	2.5 (1.3)	2.6 (1.4)
<b>Conflict between parents</b>	C	1.6 (1.0)	1.6 (1.0)	1.6 (1.0)	1.7 (1.0)
<b>Relation with stepchild</b>	SP	4.1 (0.8)	4.0 (0.8)	4.1 (0.8)	3.9 (0.8)
<b>Conflict between parent and stepparent</b>	SP	1.6 (0.5)	1.6 (0.6)	1.6 (0.5)	1.6 (0.7)
<b>Relation between parents</b>	SP	2.9 (1.1)	2.7 (1.2)	2.9 (1.2)	2.7 (1.1)
<b>Co-parenting with residential parent</b>	SP	4.5 (1.2)	3.9 (1.2)	4.5 (1.3)	3.8 (1.2)
<b>Relation between same-sex parent and stepparent</b>	SP	2.7 (1.1)	2.6 (1.2)	2.6 (1.1)	2.5 (1.1)
<b>Age stepchild</b>	H	15.8 (3.4)	16.0 (3.3)	15.7 (3.4)	15.6 (3.3)
<b>Years since divorce</b>	M/F	10.0 (4.7)	9.2 (4.6)	10.2 (4.7)	8.7 (4.1)
<b>Duration relation parent and stepparent (in years)</b>	M/F	8.2 (4.2)	6.3 (3.7)	8.5 (4.6)	7.0 (4.4)
<b>Girls</b>	M/F	51	46	47	42
<b>Custody</b>	M/F				
Sole mother custody		57	59	65	49
Joint physical custody		33	31	30	38
Sole father custody		10	10	5	13
<b>Other parent living together with partner</b>	M/F	64	51	64	57
<b>Stepparent has own children</b>	M/F				
Stepparent only has children living elsewhere		30	11	28	44
Stepparent has residential children	M/F	28	47	31	10
<b>Parent and stepparent have common child</b>	M/F	23	24	21	24
<b>Child participated</b>	C	100	100	66	56
<b>Stepparent participated</b>	SP	48	43	100	100
<b>Father participated</b>	F	56	57	47	67
<b>Mother participated</b>	M	86	88	100	100

<sup>1</sup> C = Child data, SP = Stepparent data, H = Household data, M/F = Mother/Father data

**Table 2: Beta-coefficients and standard errors for relationship variables within stepfather and stepmother configurations (Reference category = mother custody)**

	Sample children with stepfather		Sample children with stepmother		Sample stepfathers		Sample stepmothers	
	Father	Joint	Father	Joint	Father	Joint	Father	Joint
<b>Reported by child</b>								
Relation with stepparent	-0.18 (0.20)	0.18 (0.12)	0.66 (0.22)**	0.16 (0.14)	-1.19 (0.34)***	0.09 (0.15)	0.69 (0.27)*	0.15 (0.20)
Relation with father	0.52 (0.19)**	0.23 (0.12)*	0.77 (0.19)***	0.22 (0.12) <sup>o</sup>	0.37 (0.37)	0.22 (0.19)	0.84 (0.21)***	0.20 (0.16)
Relation with mother	-0.76 (0.17)***	-0.09 (0.39)	-0.49 (0.16)**	-0.01 (0.10)	-0.95 (0.30)**	-0.05 (0.13)	-0.78 (0.23)***	-0.13 (0.16)
Conflict between parent and stepparent	-0.16 (0.34)	-0.20 (0.18)	-0.74 (0.29)***	0.10 (0.19)	-0.47 (0.80)	-0.23 (0.25)	-0.42 (0.35)	0.35 (0.27)
Conflict between parents	-0.06 (0.23)	-0.10 (0.13)	-0.39 (0.21) <sup>o</sup>	-0.11 (0.13)	0.09 (0.41)	-0.05 (0.19)	-0.35 (0.29)	-0.17 (0.21)
<b>Reported by stepparent</b>								
Relation with stepchild	-0.47 (0.32)	-0.11 (0.15)	-0.09 (0.21)	-0.01 (0.16)	-0.55 (0.25)*	-0.08 (0.12)	0.07 (0.17)	0.02 (0.12)
Conflict with partner	0.03 (0.22)	0.17 (0.10) <sup>o</sup>	-0.02 (0.17)	-0.13 (0.13)	0.11 (0.17)	0.19 (0.08)*	0.07 (0.13)	-0.07 (0.09)
Relation between partner and his/her ex	-0.12 (0.47)	0.48 (0.21)*	-0.45 (0.30)	0.05 (0.22)	-0.06 (0.37)	0.39 (0.18)*	-0.18 (0.23)	0.40 (0.16)*
Co-parenting with partner	-0.85 (0.50) <sup>o</sup>	-0.10 (0.23)	1.39 (0.29)***	0.18 (0.22)	-1.08 (0.42)**	-0.01 (0.19)	1.46 (0.23)***	0.45 (0.16)**
Relation with ex-partner of partner	-0.74 (0.52)	0.21 (0.21)	-0.48 (0.30)	0.26 (0.22)	-0.40 (0.42)	0.22 (0.17)	-0.31 (0.23)	0.44 (0.16)**

<sup>o</sup> $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

*Based upon multivariate regression with following variables: custody arrangement, age stepchild, sex stepchild, years since divorce, duration relationship parent and stepparent and multi-actor response variables*

**Table 3: Non-standardized coefficients en standard errors modeling relation of stepchildren with stepfather and stepmother**

	Relationship stepchild with stepfather (N=353)						Relationship stepchild with stepmother (N=366)					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
<b>Intercept</b>	3,83	(0,26)***	3,56	(0,23)***	3,55	(0,23)***	3,59	(0,31)**	3,46	(0,26)***	3,42	(0,26)***
<b>Custody type</b> (ref: mother custody)												
Father custody (FC)	-0,18	(0,20)	0,11	(0,19)	0,39	(0,20) <sup>o</sup>	0,67	(0,22)***	0,10	(0,20)	0,16	(0,22)
Joint custody (JC)	0,15	(0,12)	0,16	(0,11)	0,14	(0,11)	0,11	(0,14)	0,03	(0,12)	0,01	(0,12)
<b>Girls</b> (ref: boys)	-0,25	(0,10)**	-0,14	(0,09)	-0,15	(0,09) <sup>o</sup>	-0,13	(0,11)	-0,01	(0,10)	0,00	(0,10)
<b>Age child</b> (ref: 10-13 years old)												
14-17 years old	-0,21	(0,13) <sup>o</sup>	-0,09	(0,12)	-0,06	(0,12)	-0,15	(0,15)	0,05	(0,13)	0,05	(0,13)
18-21 years old	-0,38	(0,13)***	-0,18	(0,12)	-0,22	(0,12) <sup>o</sup>	-0,27	(0,16) <sup>o</sup>	0,14	(0,14)	0,12	(0,14)
<b>Years since divorce parents</b>	0,02	(0,02)	0,03	(0,02) <sup>o</sup>	0,02	(0,02)	0,02	(0,02)	0,02	(0,01)	0,02	(0,01)
<b>Duration relation parent and stepparent</b>	0,01	(0,02)	0,01	(0,02)	0,01	(0,02)	-0,05	(0,03) <sup>o</sup>	-0,04	(0,02) <sup>o</sup>	-0,04	(0,02) <sup>o</sup>
<b>Other parent living with partner</b> (ref: no)	0,17	(0,10) <sup>o</sup>	0,19	(0,09)*	0,18	(0,09) <sup>o</sup>	0,22	(0,12) <sup>o</sup>	0,09	(0,10)	0,09	(0,10)
<b>Stepparent own child(ren) relation</b> (ref: no)												
Only unresidential child(ren)	-0,17	(0,14)	-0,16	(0,12)	-0,11	(0,12)	-0,38	(0,27)	-0,13	(0,24)	-0,06	(0,24)
Residential child(ren)	-0,04	(0,13)	-0,09	(0,12)	-0,09	(0,12)	-0,28	(0,17) <sup>o</sup>	-0,24	(0,15) <sup>o</sup>	-0,24	(0,15) <sup>o</sup>
<b>Parent and stepparent child(ren)</b> (ref: no)	0,10	(0,14)	0,15	(0,12)	0,14	(0,12)	-0,04	(0,20)	-0,01	(0,17)	-0,05	(0,17)
<b>Quality relation child with father</b>			0,04	(0,06)	0,04	(0,06)			0,47	(0,05)***	0,45	(0,05)***
<b>Quality relation child with mother</b>			0,45	(0,06)***	0,23	(0,09)**			0,00	(0,07)	0,00	(0,07)
<b>Conflict between stepparent and parent</b>			-0,20	(0,04)***	-0,20	(0,04)***			-0,22	(0,04)***	-0,22	(0,04)***
<b>Conflict between parents</b>			-0,05	(0,07)	-0,07	(0,07)			0,07	(0,09)	0,08	(0,09)
<b>Co-parenting stepparent &amp; partner</b>			0,09	(0,06)	0,01	(0,06)			0,18	(0,07)*	0,40	(0,11)***
<b>Relation stepparent with ex of partner</b>			-0,09	(0,06)	-0,10	(0,07)			0,12	(0,07) <sup>o</sup>	0,14	(0,07) <sup>o</sup>
<b>FC X relation with mother</b>					0,45	(0,15)**						
<b>JC X relation with mother</b>					0,25	(0,13) <sup>o</sup>						
<b>FC X co-parenting stepparent &amp; partner</b>					0,30	(0,22)					-0,31	(0,17) <sup>o</sup>
<b>JC X co-parenting stepparent &amp; partner</b>					0,13	(0,14)					-0,40	(0,16)*
<b>FC X relation stepparent with ex of partner</b>					0,44	(0,36)						
<b>JC X relation stepparent with ex of partner</b>					-0,09	(0,13)						
<b>Stepparent participated</b>	0,15	(0,11)	0,10	(0,10)	0,15	(0,10)	0,22	(0,17)	0,03	0,15	0,08	(0,15)
<b>Father participated</b>	-0,26	(0,11)*	-0,13	(0,10)	-0,11	(0,10)	0,17	(0,21)	0,20	0,18	0,20	(0,18)
<b>Mother participated</b>	0,10	(0,19)	0,05	(0,17)	0,11	(0,17)	-0,07	(0,20)	0,05	0,17	0,03	(0,17)
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.13		.33		.37		.10		.35		.36	

<sup>o</sup>p<.10,

\*p<.05,

\*\*p<.01,

\*\*\*p<.

**Table 4: Non-standardized coefficients en standard errors modeling relation with stepchildren reported by stepfathers and stepmothers**

	Relationship of stepfather with stepchild (N=234)						Relationship of stepmother with stepchild (N=263)					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
<b>Intercept</b>	4,18	(0,21)***	3,99	(0,20)***	3,96	(0,20)***	4,21	(0,25)	4,19	(0,24)***	4,22	(0,24)***
<b>Custody type</b> (ref: mother custody)												
Father custody (FC)	-0,54	(0,25)*	-0,14	(0,25)	0,49	(0,29) <sup>o</sup>	0,03	(0,17)	-0,07	(0,18)	-0,30	(0,21)
Joint custody (JC)	-0,09	(0,12)	-0,05	(0,11)	-0,01	(0,11)	0,06	(0,12)	-0,04	(0,12)	-0,02	(0,12)
<b>Girls</b> (ref: boys)	-0,04	(0,10)	-0,05	(0,10)	-0,05	(0,10)	-0,03	(0,11)	0,01	(0,11)	0,02	(0,10)
<b>Age child</b> (ref: 10-13 years old)												
14-17 years old	-0,07	(0,13)	-0,02	(0,13)	-0,02	(0,13)	-0,15	(0,14)	-0,09	(0,13)	-0,10	(0,13)
18-21 years old	0,06	(0,14)	0,16	(0,14)	0,06	(0,14)	-0,17	(0,15)	-0,08	(0,14)	-0,10	(0,14)
<b>Years since divorce parents</b>	0,01	(0,02)	0,02	(0,02)	0,03	(0,02)	0,01	(0,02)	0,00	(0,02)	-0,01	(0,02)
<b>Duration relation parent and stepparent</b>	-0,01	(0,02)	-0,02	(0,02)	-0,02	(0,02)	-0,01	(0,02)	0,00	(0,02)	0,01	(0,02)
<b>Other parent living with partner</b> (ref: no)	-0,03	(0,11)	0,03	(0,10)	-0,01	(0,10)	-0,10	(0,11)	-0,06	(0,11)	-0,04	(0,11)
<b>Stepparent own child(ren) relation</b> (ref: no)												
Only unresidential child(ren)	-0,04	(0,13)	-0,06	(0,12)	-0,06	(0,12)	-0,17	(0,20)	-0,13	(0,19)	-0,08	(0,19)
Residential child(ren)	0,06	(0,12)	0,04	(0,12)	-0,02	(0,12)	-0,24	(0,13)	-0,22	(0,12) <sup>o</sup>	-0,20	(0,12)*
<b>Parent and stepparent child(ren)</b> (ref: no)	0,16	(0,14)	0,21	(0,13) <sup>o</sup>	0,20	(0,12)	-0,14	(0,14)	-0,10	(0,14)	-0,09	(0,13)
<b>Quality relation child with father</b>			0,02	(0,07)	0,02	(0,06)			0,02	(0,08)	0,00	(0,08)
<b>Quality relation child with mother</b>			0,31	(0,08)***	0,31	(0,11)**			0,15	(0,08) <sup>o</sup>	0,12	(0,08)
<b>Conflict stepparent with partner</b>			-0,25	(0,09)**	-0,26	(0,09)**			-0,15	(0,08) <sup>o</sup>	-0,15	(0,08) <sup>o</sup>
<b>Relation between partner &amp; ex</b>			0,04	(0,06)	0,07	(0,06)			-0,15	(0,07)*	-0,06	(0,08)
<b>Co-parenting stepparent with partner</b>			0,14	(0,04)***	0,12	(0,04)**			0,16	(0,05)***	0,25	(0,06)***
<b>Relation stepparent with ex of partner</b>			-0,01	(0,06)	-0,04	(0,07)			0,24	(0,07)***	0,25	(0,07)***
<b>FC X relation with mother</b>					-0,54	(0,26)***						
<b>JC X relation with mother</b>					-0,08	(0,18)						
<b>FC X relation between partner &amp; ex</b>											-0,42	(0,15)***
<b>JC X relation between partner &amp; ex</b>											-0,15	(0,10)
<b>FC X co-parenting stepparent &amp; partner</b>					0,52	(0,15)***					0,06	(0,12)
<b>JC X co-parenting stepparent &amp; partner</b>					-0,06	(0,10)					-0,29	(0,10)***
<b>FC X relation stepparent with ex of partner</b>					0,75	(0,21)***						
<b>JC X relation stepparent with ex of partner</b>					-0,08	(0,10)						
<b>Child participated</b>	-0,11	(0,11)	-0,12	(0,10)	-0,08	(0,10)	0,14	(0,12)	0,08	(0,11)	0,02	(0,11)
<b>Same-sex parent participated</b>	0,09	(0,11)	0,16	(0,10)	0,16	(0,10)	-0,14	(0,13)	-0,09	(0,12)	-0,05	(0,12)
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>		.05		.18		.26		.03		.15		.21

<sup>o</sup>p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001