Family structure, gender and adolescent emotional well-being

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Abstract

This paper focuses on gender differences in emotional well-being of adolescents in five different family settings; original two-parent families, single mother-, single father-, mother/stepfather- and father/stepmother families. It analyzes two main mediators; economic deprivation and parental socialization and is based on unusually rich data from the child supplements of the Swedish Level of Living study from 2000 and the Surveys of Living Conditions from 2001, 2002 and 2003 (n: 5,353). The results show lower well-being of children in single mother and stepfamilies. These associations are mainly mediated through economic deprivation in single mother families and through parental socialization in stepfamilies. We find different patterns of lower well-being levels for boys and girls in single mother families and stepfamilies. Adolescents living with a single father do however not report lower emotional well-being and the oldest boys living with a father and a stepmother show higher well-being than the reference category.

Introduction

Both Swedish and international research on children's psychological well-being show an association between low level of well-being and living in single-parent and stepfamily households. The reasons may however differ by family type. Two of the main theoretical explanations for the difference in child well-being between family types have been linked to differences in economic resources and parental socialization (see for example Sweeney,

2010). Children's access to both financial and parental resources can however vary not just depending on whether the child lives with a single parent or in a stepfamily setting but also depending on the sex of the child as well as that of the resident parent. Hence this paper analyzes the association between children's emotional well-being and access to economic and parental resources by both family structure and parent's sex. These are aspects that have been largely overlooked in analysis of children's well-being in different post-separation family types.

This paper focuses on children in Sweden, a country that is often considered a forerunner in family demographic behaviors like cohabitation, divorce, multi-partner childbearing and family reconstitution (van de Kaa, 2001). Sweden is also often considered the prototype of a universalistic welfare state with generous government support especially for parents regardless of whether they are married, cohabiting, single or re-partnered (Esping-Andersen, 1990). A variety of proactive family policy measures have been argued to ameliorate the negative effects of divorce and post-divorce family settings for children (Houseknecht and Sastry, 1996; Trost, 1996). Thus, the Swedish case offers new insights into the processes through which family structure may influence children's well-being.

Family structure, resources and parental engagement

In a review of the field Sweeney (2010) identifies four main explanations for family structure differences in children's well-being. The first three posit causal processes in which family structure influences economic resources, parental engagement, and stress arising from instability that produces different family structures. In turn, economic resources, parental engagement and stress influence children's well-being. In addition, the association between family structure and child outcomes may result from selection on unobserved characteristics that simultaneously influence family structure, economic resources, parental engagement,

stress, and child well-being. The present study will focus on identifying the role of economic and parental resources, hereafter referred to as the economic deprivation hypothesis and the socialization hypothesis. The data do not allow for an analysis of instability or selection, but these processes are considered in evaluating the results. The study also pays particular attention to gendered and developmental (child's age) dimensions of family structure and associated processes linked to child well-being.

The economic deprivation hypothesis highlights the importance of family income for children's well-being. Both children's personal economic distress and the family's financial situation have been showed to be related to lower emotional well-being among children (Hagquist, 1998) and are related to family structure (Jonsson et al., 2010; Jonsson et al. 2001; Jonsson and Österberg, 2004). Stepfamily formation is associated with increased family income, due to another income-earning adult in the household (Holden & Smock, 1991; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). This is why children who acquire a stepparent might be expected to experience improved emotional well-being in comparison to children in single-parent families.

The socialization hypothesis highlights the importance of parenting and parental investment for understanding children's emotional well-being. On one hand it predicts that stepfamily formation may improve child well-being after parental union dissolution because a new adult in the household can take over responsibilities and help the parent with everyday tasks thus giving the parent more time to interact with the child (Thomson et al., 2001). A stepparent can also help with child supervision (Thomson et al., 1992) and offer emotional support to the parent and help in difficult decisions regarding the child. The stepparent may also offer warmth and support to the child. On the other hand it can also be argued that a new adult in the household may produce stress for the child and competition for the parent's affection and attention (Crosbie-Bumett and Ahrons, 1985) thus reducing parental investment and

emotional well-being. The presence of a "relative stranger"(Beer, 1988) in the household may also create stress, up to and including overt conflict, about household organization, child rearing and other relationships. Children's emotional well-being may be particularly vulnerable to stepfamily effects during the teenage years when identity formation occurs (Meeus 1996; Meeus & Dekovic 1995) and when they begin the process of separation from the parental family.

These processes may also be gendered, operating differently for mothers and fathers and for boys and girls. Mothers have more to gain economically by re-partnering given that women earn less than men. Boys and girls should however benefit equally from increased economic resources brought to the household by a stepparent. Parallel to differential investment in boys and girls by biological fathers (Lundberg et al., 2006, Lundberg et al., 2007; Yeung et al. 2001) stepfathers may be more active in a relationship with a male stepchild than with a female, taking on a more parent-like role and thus increasing emotional well-being. Stepmothers experience more conflict in a re-constituted family and more difficulties rearing stepchildren than do stepfathers (Furstenberg & Nord 1985: McDonald & DeMaris 1996) making children in these families more likely to experience lower emotional well-being.

There are also gender aspects in the selection into stepfamilies. Boys are less likely to acquire a stepparent than are girls (Turunen, 2011) making these families more select. Mothers are less likely to re-partner than fathers (Turunen, 2011) so the mother-stepfather families will be more select of the mothers than the father-stepmother families are of fathers.
Given the selectivity of mothers who re-partner, and the higher risk of conflict in father-stepmother families, one can expect lower risk of distress for children in mother-stepfather families compared to the father-stepmother families. But because the majority of children live with their mothers after a union dissolution the single fathers and father-stepmother families that do exist should arguably be more selective of especially engaged fathers, whereas the

single mother and mother-stepfather families may not be different with respect to the mother's engagement.

The conditions for stepfamily formation and step-parenting may also depend on both welfare and gender regimes. When welfare states like Sweden provide economic subsidies to parents, and extra subsidies to single parents, economic resources may not be a major source of emotional problems for children whose parents separate nor be much improved if the parent re-partners. Economic selection into stepfamilies may also be relatively weak (Turunen 2011). Therefore family structure should have a lesser effect on well-being in the Scandinavian welfare states compared to liberal welfare states like the USA. Furthermore, the role of the parent's or child's sex may not be so great where women and men are expected to be economically independent, where fathers are expected to be heavily engaged in childrearing and where boys and girls are to be treated the same, as is the case in Sweden.

Previous research

Differences in emotional well-being of children in original two-parent families and post-divorce family structures have been widely studied during the past decades, especially in the United States (Amato, 2001; Ganong and Coleman 2004; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Sweeney, 2010). Meta analyses have shown that living with a single mother after divorce is associated with statistically significant negative outcomes for children although the effect sizes are generally small (Amato 2001; Amato & Keith 1991). The magnitudes decreased over time, largely due to use of more sophisticated methods that in general produce smaller effect size, but probably also due to divorces becoming more common and divorcees a less select group (Amato & Keith, 1991). Yet the family structure gap did not continue to decrease during the 1990's. Amato (2001) shows that when controlling for study characteristics the well-being gap between children living with two biological parents and a single mother is

increasing again in the 1990's. Amato argues that possible reasons for this development can be found in the changed characteristics of divorced couples and in the economic expansion of the 1990's in the United States that mainly benefited children living with two working parents.

Post-separation living in a single parent household as well as in a reconstituted family with a parent and a stepparent have both been shown to be associated with adverse outcomes for children. Thomson and colleagues (1994) have shown that economic circumstances is a mediator of lower child well-being in single mother families to a greater extent than in reconstituted ones and that less parental support accounts for the somewhat lower well-being among children living with stepparents.

A meta-analytic review by Amato (1994) showed that children in stepfamilies are equally or worse off than those in single mother families. In a comparison of children living with single mothers and those living with their mother and a stepfather, Sweeney (2007) found that higher household income and increased parental contact in post divorce stepfamilies compared to single mother families offset some of the negative mental health effects associated with stepfather families. The associations were not spuriously produced by preexisting maternal characteristics like health, drinking behavior, education etc. When controlling for these factors as well as the number of family structure transitions, the duration of family stability and recent residential mobility living with a mother and stepfather has been found to be associated with an increase in symptoms of depression compared to children living with single mothers after parental union dissolution. Other studies have however found that children with remarried residential parent are less depressed than those living with single parents (Aseltine, 1996).

The findings are rather inconsistent when it comes to age differences in the association between emotional well-being and family structure (Amato, 2000). For example Sweeney (2007) showed a clear age gradient with the oldest children having most depressive symptoms and the youngest least. In contrast Brolin Låftman's and Österberg's (2006) study of Swedish adolescents showed the lowest psychological well-being in the ages 13-15 and no significant difference between the youngest and the oldest children. Some previous studies have shown gender differences with girls experiencing lower psychological well-being after divorce than boys (Barret & Turner, 2005; Brolin Låftman & Österberg, 2006; Mokrue et al. 2012; Rodgers, 1994). Other studies find no gender differences (Aseltine, 1996).

Very few studies on post separation family structure and children's well-being take into account the gender of the custodial parent or stepparent. In general they show mothers being more active and engaged in the children (e.g. Demuth and Brown, 2004; Marks & McLanahan, 1993; Thomson et al., 1993).

Finally, the association between family structure and children's outcomes has been far less studied in contexts where economic resources may not vary so much between family types, such as the Nordic welfare states.

The Swedish context

Sweden provides an excellent case for studying family structure and gender differences in children emotional well-being. Sweden has a relatively high prevalence of family disruption and reconstitution combined with generous public support for families but also a wide acceptance for different family forms (Trost, 1996) and a relatively high share of children living with their father after separation. In these respects it provides a theoretically important contrast to the context of the United States on which the vast majority of relevant research is based. Sweden is among the countries with the highest degree of change when it comes to

family structure dynamics, closely following the United States. Andersson (2002) shows that in 16 Western- and Central European countries as well as the USA, the proportion of children having experienced a parental separation by age 15 range between 50 percent in the US and 9 percent in Italy. Sweden lies in between with 34 percent of all children having experienced a separation. Of these children, between 38 and 78 percent of children whose parents separated will have lived in a stepfamily setting 10 years after a parental union disruption; Sweden is toward the high end with 62 percent of Swedish children experiencing parental separation having lived with a stepparent by age 15. For children born to single mothers 52% will have had experience of stepfamily formation by age 9, lower than in the United States (65%) but still very high.

Sweden has for a long time had family policies designed to minimize the economic differentials in family life. The extensive social policies directed towards parents and children include long paid parental leave with job protection for working parents (80 percent pay up to a cap for 13 months), monthly child allowance, means tested housing allowance, free education (including tertiary), heavily subsidized, high quality, and widely available child care and after-school activities for primary school children among other things. All these benefits are independent of the parent's union status and in most cases general and not means-tested, with the exception of the housing allowance (Andress et al. 2006; Oláh and Bernhardt 2008; Sundström 1991). The economic consequences of a separation are therefore less severe in Sweden where these family policies reduce the cost of ending a dysfunctional union and at the same time reduce single parent's economic need of re-partnering (see Turunen, 2011). Shared legal custody of children has been the default arrangement after separation in Sweden since 1983 (Oláh, 2001) and shared physical custody with children having alternating residence in two parental households is also increasingly common (Schiratzki, 1999; Lundström, 2009).

Given the vast differences in family policies and income redistribution one might expect that the economic explanations for associations between family structure and child well-being would be less important in Sweden, and that family structure differences would therefore also be smaller. Relative gender equality would also lead us to expect less difference in economic conditions experienced by children living with single fathers versus single mothers or mother and stepfather versus father and stepmother. Breivik and Olweus (2006) have shown, however, that living with a single mother after parental union dissolution in Norway is associated with similar outcomes as in the United States, despite a greater availability of welfare benefits for Norwegian parents. And just as in the United States, Swedish children living with a single parent or in a stepfamily show lower educational attainment compared to those living in a biological two-parent family (Jonsson and Gähler 1997).

The mechanisms mediating the association of family structure and lower well-being also seem to be similar in the Scandinavian context. Using the same data set as the article at hand Brolin Låftman and Österberg (2006) analyzed the association between adolescents' psychological as well as psychosomatic health complaints and social relations at home, in school and in their leisure time. Family structure was part of their operationalization of social relations at home together with children's reports on strained parent-child relationship and whether they talked with parents when worried. They found that the higher risk of psychological complaints in stepfamilies compared to original two-parent ones was reduced and became statistically non-significant when controlling for the parent-child relationship. The risk of psychosomatic complaints remained, however, significantly higher in stepfamilies. This was largely explained by unemployment, social class and financial hardship.

Previous research has also shown an association between low perceived health among Swedish adolescents living under financially stressful situations (Hagquist, 1998; Sleskova et al., 2006) and despite active social policies, many targeting parents, recent research has shown

a clear association between child poverty and family structure in Sweden (Jonsson et al., 2010).

The present study adds to the existing literature by analyzing the interaction of family structure and gender of both the parent as well as the child. Furthermore it is based high quality data with information from both parents and children.

Data

The data for this study comes from the child supplement to the Swedish Level of Living survey (LNU) from 2000 and the Surveys of Living Conditions (ULF) from 2001, 2002 and 2003. These surveys consist of nationally representative samples of the Swedish population aged 18-75 years in LNU and 18-84 in ULF. The total response rate was 76% with an underrepresentation of the foreign born, low educated and unemployed (Statistics Sweden, 2003).

Children age 10-18 residing with the respondent were also interviewed in these surveys, providing unusually rich data from two different perspectives. In this paper children's reports are used on issues that can be assumed are better known by children themselves than their parents, such as questions regarding their emotional well-being and relationships with parents. Parents' reports are used for questions that children might not have accurate information about such as parents' financial situation, occupational class, etc.

Children were interviewed simultaneously with the parent's interview after informed consent had been obtained from both legal guardians. While the parent was interviewed by a professional interviewer from Statistics Sweden, children completed a self administered questionnaire while listening to the interview questions on headphones. The questionnaire had only the response options and not the questions and the child was asked to put it in an

envelope, seal it and hand it to the interviewer immediately after having finished it, thus providing confidentiality to the child. 82% of the children residing with the adult respondent agreed to participate in the interview with the response rate being somewhat higher among younger adolescents and among those whose parent was the respondent in the adult interview.

The total sample size for this study is 5,353 adolescents of whom half are boys and half girls. For more information on the Child-LNU see Jonsson and Österberg (2010) and for more on Child-ULF see Statistics Sweden (2005).

Measures

This analysis uses two different outcome variables for children's emotional well-being. Exploratory factor analyses showed that the children's responses to questions about emotional well-being comprised two main factors. These can roughly be said to be items measuring psychological well-being, or inner feelings of discomfort and uneasiness, and those measuring somatic problems that are often related to psychological well-being i.e. stomach aches, headaches, stress and sleeping problems

The psychosomatic well-being scale is based on children's reports of how often during the past 6 months they had felt stressed, had headaches, stomachaches or problems falling asleep at night. The response options were: "Daily", "Several times a week", "Once a week", "A couple of times a month", "Rarely or never" and were coded from 1 to 5 with 1 representing the poorest outcome (most frequent) and 5 representing the best (least frequent). The scale was produced by averaging the four responses; it has a Cronbach alpha value of 0.62, a mean of 3.9 and a standard deviation 0.74.

The psychological well-being scale is based on responses to the following statements: "I am often tense and nervous", "I often feel sad or down", "I am often grumpy and annoyed", "I get very easily angry", "I have difficulties sitting still and concentrating", "I am almost always

happy and in a good mood", "I have enough energy to do things". The response options were "Matches exactly", "Matches roughly", "Matches poorly" and "Does not match at all". In order to get the 4-option scale based on these response options to match the above described 5-option response scale beased on the frequency of events the responses were coded to a 1 to 5 scale where 1 represents the "Does not match at all-option" and 5 the possible answer and 5 the "Matches exactly-option". "Matches roughly" was given the value 2.33 and "Matches poorly" was coded to 3.67. In this manner the distance between the response options was kept the same while generating scale from 1 to 5. The scale variable was constructed by taking the average of the seven responses and has a Cronbach alpha value of 0.71, a mean of 3.8 and a standard deviation of 0.63.[1]

Family structure is based on the respondent's information about partners and children in the household and is classified as: original two-parentfamily (reference category), single mother-, single father-, mother/stepfather- and father/stepmother. Being able to distinguish between single mothers and single fathers as well as stepfamilies with a mother and a stepfather and those with a father and a stepmother is quite rare in previous research (Coleman and Ganong 2000; Ganong and Coleman 2004: Sweeney 2010) and makes it possible to analyze new aspects of stepfamily life. Sweeney's (2007) analysis of theoretical explanations for lower well-being in stepfamilies was based on single mother- and mother-stepfather families. Brolin Låftman and Österberg (2006) who use family structure as a measure of structural aspects of

[1] Brolin Låftman and Österberg (2006) identified the same two dimensions of emotional well-being. Their measures are, however, dichotomous, each constructed from three different items where having at least two out of three problems is considered as 1 and less than two as 0. The interval-level measures used here produce less measurement error and thus greater reliability.

social relations in the home only distinguish between two-parent families, single parent families and stepfamilies.

Financial distress is measured by the parent's and child's reports of their "cash margin". Parents were asked whether they could quickly raise 12,000 Swedish crowns (roughly $1,700) in 2000 and 14,000 crowns ($2000) in 2001-2003. Cash margin is chosen instead of parent's earned income as an indicator of economic situation in order to better measure real financial distress. This is especially important in the Swedish context where a sizeable part of a divorced or separated parent's income may come from public transfers such as child allowance, housing subsidies etc. and from child support payments from the absent parent. Children were asked whether they could quickly raise 100 crowns/$14).

I further include household unemployment defined as at least one of the resident adults being unemployed. Finally I include household socioeconomic status. This is a four-category variable with upper non-manual worker, intermediate/lower non-manual worker, farmer or self-employed and manual worker constructed using the principle of dominance order within the household (Erikson, 1984).

Four indicators measure the parent-child relationship, all based on children's own responses to yes/no questions. First is the child's report of whether the parents have enough time for him/her. To be categorized as "yes", children in two-parent families must report that at least one of the resident parents, including a stepparent, has enough time. In single parent families the measure is based on the resident single parent. The same approach is used to construct an indicator of whether the child talks to the parent/parents when feeling worried or anxious and whether they help the child with homework. The reason for not getting help with homework may be either neglect from the parent or simply that the child does not need any help. Therefore I have also included a control variable for whether the child has reported not needing help with homework. There is also a small group of children who do get help even

though they have reported not needing any. In these cases one can assume that the help is due to either parent-child differences in opinion of whether help is needed or because it is seen as a good way to socialize with the child. The three variables described above can be said to measure trust and parental presence. I have also included a fourth variable measuring parent-child conflict or relationship strain. It is based on a survey question asking whether the child gets along with the parents/stepparent. Children reporting that they get along badly or very badly with at least one of the resident parents are considered as having a conflicted or strained relationship. The two response categories were collapsed due to the small share of children reporting to getting along very badly with a parent or stepparent.

[Table 1 about here]

Modeling and method

I estimated four different models for each outcome. I found a statistically significant two-way interaction between family structure and child's age for psychological well-being and between child's age and sex for both psychological and psychosomatic well-being. The models for psychological wellbeing are therefore estimated with an age-family structure interaction term and separately for boys and girls and the models for psychosomatic well-being are estimated with an age-sex interaction term.

The baseline model controls for immigrant status and includes the family structure effect, interacting with age and/or child's gender, depending on the outcome.

In the next model, measures of economic deprivation are added in order to test the economic deprivation hypothesis. The third model includes instead the measures of parent-child relationship quality in order to test the socialization hypothesis. And the fourth model includes both economic and socialization indicators. Sampling weights are used because the sample of children has been drawn with the parent as sampling unit. The probability of a child

in a two-parent family to be in the sample is therefore twice as high as for a child living with a single parent. In order to control for clustering, i.e. more than one child from the same family in the sample, I have used robust standard errors by applying Stata's cluster-command. Estimates are generated with ordinary least-squares regression as the outcomes are measured at the interval level.

Findings

Table 2 presents the distribution of different family types. About three quarters of all children live in an original two-parent family and about the same proportion live with a single mother as with a mother and a stepfather. Single father- and father/stepmother families are less common with about 4 and 3 percent of all children living in these family settings.

Table 2 shows that the children are fairly evenly distributed over different socioeconomic groups with children of self-employed and farmers being the smallest category. 5% of the children have at least one parent who was born outside of Europe. 85% of the parent respondents and 71% of the children have a cash margin. Among the children only about 5% report that they don't have a cash margin of their own whereas 24% says that they don't know. 84% of the children talk with the resident parent/parents when they are worried or anxious and 93% say that their resident parent/parents have time for them. 81% of the children get help from their parents. 7 % of the children live in a household where at least one of the adults is unemployed.

[Table 2 here]

In Table 3 we see how all independent covariates are distributed over the five different family types. We can see that more boys than girls live with a single father. Stepfamily living is much less common among children of non-European immigrants. Among the economic

covariates we can see that single mother report not having a cash margin more often than the parents in the other family types and children living in single parent and stepfamilies report not having a cash margin of their own more often than children I original two parent families although the vast majority in all family types do have a cash margin. Not talking to one of the co-resident adults when feeling worried or anxious is much more common in single father and father/stepmother families whereas the difference between original two-parent families and the other family types are not as big when it comes to th children feeling that their parent has enough time for them. Conflicted relations between the child and a parent or stepparent are much more common in both stepmother and stepfather families than in the original and single parent families.

[Table 3 here]

Psychological well-being

Tables 4 and 5 show the results of the multivariate analysis of children's psychological well-being. Boys (table 4) in the pre-teen age category 10-12 years show no significant differences in psychological well-being by family type after controlling for economy or parenting. In the early/mid teen category of ages 13-15 we see a statistically significant negative association in both stepfamily types. The association increases somewhat when controlling for economic factors and weakens when only controlling for parent-child relationship. The negative association persists in the fourth model with both economic and parenting covariates. When comparing the upper teen category of ages 16-18 to the reference category (10-12 years old in original two parent family) we see a persistent negative association across all four models for children in single mother families and in father/stepmother families. The negative association in single mother families disappears when controlling for economic factors.

Unlike boys the girls (table 5) in the pre-teen category show a negative association between living in both kinds of stepfamilies and psychological well-being. The negative association for girls in their early teens living in mother/stepfather families is reduced when controlling for the parent-child relationship variables bust is still negative. Just like for boys the negative association for early-teen girls in single mother families disappears when adding controls for economic circumstances.

The oldest girls in both original two –parent families as well as single mother families have lower psychological well-being compared to the youngest girls. The negative association disappears for girls living with both their original parents when controlling for parenting but persist through all four models for the girls living with a single mother. The relatively strong association for the oldest girls in mother/stepfather families disappears when controlling for parenting.

When looking at the control variables we see that having a parent born in a Non-European country is associated with an increase in psychological well-being for girls after controlling for the economic variables and in the full model but not when only controlling for the parent-child relationship. There is no such association for boys. Not having a cash margin is associated with lower psychological well-being for all children, especially when it is the child's own lack of a cash margin. Living with at least one unemployed adult shows no association with the psychological well-being of the child. Household occupational class shows a weak gradient with the children of manual workers having the lowest estimates for both boys and girls. Girls living with a parent who is self-employed or a farmer also show a negative association. There is however no significant difference between children of upper and low or intermediate non-manual workers.

The parenting or parent-child relationship quality variables show a relatively strong effect on the psychological well-being of both boys and girls. Having at least one parent to talk to when feeling worried or the parent having time for the child is associated with higher well-being. Having a parent who helps with homework is positively associated for girls but the association becomes non-significant for boys after controlling for economy. Children who experience conflict with a parent report markedly lower psychological well-being.

Psychosomatic well-being

Tables 6 and 7 present the results of the four different regression models on the scale for psychosomatic well-being. Boys (table 6) show a negative association between living with a single other and psychosomatic well-being that persists when controlling for both economic and parenting variables. Girls (table 7) on the other hand have a negative association for those living with a mother and stepfather. The effect is somewhat reduced when controls for parenting are added. The girls in single mother families have lower psychosomatic well-being than those living with two original parents until controls for economic factors are added.

The most striking difference between boys and girls is that girls have clear age gradient whereas boys have no age differences in psychosomatic well-being. The estimates for the girls are statistically significant and fairly stable across all four models with the largest change in the estimates seen when controlling for economy for the two oldest age categories of girls.

Immigrant status does not have a statistically significant correlation with psychosomatic wellbeing but the point estimates are weakly positive just like for the psychological models controlled for economy. Parent's and the child's cash margin have a positive correlation for girls whereas only child's own cash margin is positively correlated for boys. Household unemployment has no significant correlation with psychosomatic wellbeing which also is in accordance with the results from the psychological models. Household occupational class

shows a pattern with girls with self-employed/farmer parents having higher psychosomatic well-being than children of upper-non manual workers and no difference for girls in blue collar families.

The relationship quality variables show a similar pattern for psychosomatic- as for psychological well-being. Talking with a parent is positively associated with psychosomatic well-being for girls. Having a parent who has time for the child is strongly positively associated for both boys and girls and having a conflicted relationship with a parent is negatively associated with psychosomatic wellbeing for both. Unlike for the psychological models the models for psychosomatic well-being show no correlation between well-being and parents helping with homework.

Conclusions

There are clear, albeit small, differences in the wellbeing of Swedish children living in different family settings. First it is evident that the lower psychological wellbeing for children in single mother families can mainly be explained by financial hardship. The statistically significant negative association disappears when controlling for economy for all boys and for girls in the early to mid teens. The pattern is in accordance with the economic deprivation theory that predicts lower well-being in family settings with a single financial provider and reaffirms the findings of, for example, Thomson and colleagues (1994) and Sweeney (2007). The fact that the negative association persists after controlling for economy for the oldest girls living with single mothers might be due to them having higher costs of living or that the upper teens is an especially vulnerable period for girls. The vulnerability explanation is consistent with the fact that the family structure effect for this age group is reduced to a greater degree than for other ages by controls for parent-child relationship quality. Children in single father families do not report lower well-being although the descriptive statistics showed that

children in single father and father stepmother families experience more strained relations with the adults in the household. The fact that these children still do not report lower well-being can be because men on average earn more than women and are therefore experience less financial hardship when raising children alone and previous research has shown that single fathers are better off than single mothers when it comes to incomes and employment but also outside support (e.g., Biblarz & Raftery, 1999; Bramlett & Blumberg 2007; Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Hoffmann & Johnson, 1998). It is also in line with previous research showing that children in single father families do not show higher risk of emotional health problems (Bramlett and Blumberg, 2007; Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996*)*. Research has however shown that while children in single father families do not report an increased risk of internalizing behavior they have an increased risk of externalizing behaviors like substance abuse (Breivik and Olweus 2006b; Hoffmann and Johnson, 1998), outcomes that were not studied in this paper.

Compared to single mother families the psychological well-being of children in stepfamilies seems to be less dependent on financial circumstances and more associated with the parent-child relationship quality. The oldest category of boys report higher well-being in father/stepmother families than any other family setting.

There is a clear negative age gradient for girls in the models for psychosomatic well-being (table 6 and table 7) whereas no such pattern can be seen for boys. Psychosomatic wellbeing for girls shows a significant association with family structure only in mother/stepfather families and for boys only in single mother families. The negative association for girls is reduced somewhat when controlling for financial hardship but not affected by adding controls for parent-child relationship quality whereas the opposite is the case for the boys in single mother families. Taken the patterns for both the psychological as well as the psychosomatic outcomes together we can conclude that boys and girls may be affected differently by living

in different family structure settings. The girls show a rather consistent pattern of lower emotional well-being in a stepfamily setting with a mother and a stepfather wheras boys show a somewhat less clear negative pattern for living with a single mother.

It is important to keep in mind that even though this study finds statistically significant negative correlation with psychological and psychosomatic wellbeing for children in both single mother families and in stepfamilies, the effect sizes are rather small. Furthermore it should be noted that the present study does not take the number or timing of family structure changes into account due to limitations in the data. Both could be argued to mediate the disadvantage associated with living with a single mother or in a stepfamily.

Acknowledgements

I am thankful to The Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS) for funding this research, Professor Elizabeth Thomson and Doctor Livia Oláh for reading drafts and giving useful comments during the writing process and Doctor Sara Brolin Låftman for help with the data file. I would also like to thank for comments and suggestions from participants in the SUDA colloquia as well as conferences where I have presented earlier drafts of this paper.

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Table 1. Children getting help with homework.

Gets help with homework	Yes	No	Total
Doesn't get help	546	468	1,014
	11%	86%	19%
Gets help	4,247	79	4,326
	89%	14%	81%
Total	4,793	547	5,340
	100%	100%	100%

Data source: LNU 2000, ULF 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics. Variables by sex of child.

Variables	Both sexes		Boys		Girls	
	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.
Family type						
Original two parent	3976	74%	1983	7%	1993	75%
Single mother	490	9%	239	9%	251	9%
Single father	206	4%	105	4%	101	4%
Mother and stepfather	539	10%	278	10%	261	10%
Father and stepmother	142	3%	76	3%	66	2%
Age group						
10-12	2081	39%	1036	39%	1045	39%
13-15	1841	34%	915	34%	926	35%
16-18	1431	27%	730	27%	701	26%
Immigrant status						
Parent non-European immigrant	276	5%	142	5%	134	5%
Not non-European immigrant	5077	95%	2539	95%	2538	95%
Parent has cash margin						
Yes	4549	85%	2277	85%	2272	85%
No	796	15%	400	15%	396	15%
Child' has cash margin						
Yes	3799	71%	1923	72%	1876	70%
No	263	5%	134	5%	129	5%
Doesn't know	1284	24%	620	23%	664	25%
Talks to parent if worried						
Yes	4477	84%	2220	83%	2257	84%
No	876	16%	461	17%	415	16%
Parent has time for child						
Yes	5026	94%	2528	94%	2498	93%
No	327	6%	153	6%	174	7%
Parent helps with homework						
Yes	4335	81%	2125	79%	2210	83%
No	1018	19%	556	21%	462	17%
Household unemployment						
No adult unemployed	4960	93%	2492	93%	2468	92%
At least one adult unemployed	264	5%	135	5%	129	5%
Household socioeconomic status						
Upper non-manual	1260	24%	640	24%	620	23%
Intermediate or lower non-manual	1784	33%	897	33%	887	33%
Self employed or farmer	664	12%	338	13%	326	12%
Manual worker	1433	27%	707	26%	726	27%
Other	212	4%	99	4%	113	4%
Adult-child conflict						
Yes	901	17%	430	16%	471	18%
No	4452	83%	2251	84%	2201	82%

Data source: LNU 2000, ULF 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics. Independent variables by family structure

	Original two parent		Single mother		Single father		Mother and stepfather		Father and stepmother		
	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Total nr.
Child's age											
10-12	1573	40%	169	34%	67	33%	208	39%	64	45%	2081
13-15	1342	34%	174	36%	81	39%	200	37%	44	31%	1841
16-18	1061	27%	147	30%	58	28%	131	24%	34	24%	1431
Child's sex											
Boy	1983	50%	239	49%	105	51%	278	52%	76	54%	2681
Girl	1993	50%	251	51%	101	49%	261	48%	66	46%	2672
Parent non-European immigrant											
No	3765	95%	445	91%	194	94%	533	99%	140	99%	5077
Yes	211	5%	45	9%	12	6%	6	1%	2	1%	276
Parent's cash margin											
Has cash margin	3515	89%	276	56%	164	80%	468	87%	126	89%	4549
No cash margin	453	11%	214	44%	42	20%	71	13%	16	11%	796
Child's cash margin											
Has cash margin	2894	73%	322	66%	143	69%	353	66%	87	61%	3799
No cash margin	171	4%	40	8%	13	6%	28	5%	11	8%	263
Doesn't know	905	23%	128	26%	50	25%	157	29%	44	31%	1284
Talks to parent when worried											
No	616	15%	82	17%	57	28%	83	15%	38	27%	876
Yes	3360	89%	408	83%	149	72%	456	85%	104	73%	4477
Parent has time for child											
No	218	5%	44	9%	16	8%	38	7%	11	8%	327
Yes	3758	95%	446	91%	190	92%	501	93%	131	92%	5026
Parent helps with homework											
No	701	18%	135	28%	51	25%	90	17%	41	29%	1018
Yes	3275	82%	355	72%	155	75%	449	83%	101	71%	4335
Household unemployement											
No unemployed	3771	95%	468	96%	199	97%	510	95%	141	99%	5089
Unemployed	205	5%	22	4%	7	3%	29	5%	1	1%	264
Household occupational class											
Upper non-manual	1073	28%	37	8%	19	10%	82	16%	49	37%	1260
Intermediate or lower non-manual	1284	33%	210	47%	60	30%	185	36%	45	34%	1784
Self-employed or farmer	538	14%	9	2%	32	16%	69	13%	16	12%	664
manual worker	951	25%	189	42%	88	44%	183	35%	22	17%	1433
Adult-child conflict											
Yes	633	16%	61	12%	25	12%	142	26%	40	28%	901
No	3343	84%	429	88%	181	88%	397	74%	102	72%	4452

Data source: LNU 2000, ULF 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Table 4. Results from regression models on boys' psychological well-being

Variables	Model 1: Baseline	Model 2: Economy	Model 3: Parenting	Model 4: Full model
Constant	3.84***	3.98***	3.54***	3.67***
Family structure-age combination				
Age 10-12 years				
Original 2-parent family	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Single mother family	-0.07	-0.02	-0.05	-0.01
Single father family	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.06
Mother/stepfather family	-0.09	-0.07	-0.05	-0.03
Father/stepmother family	-0.22(*)	-0.17	-0.12	-0.10
Age 13-15 years				
Original 2-parent family	0.05(*)	0.01	0.05	0.01
Single mother family	-0.10	-0.05	-0.11(*)	-0.07
Single father family	-0.08	-0.09	-0.03	-0.03
Mother/stepfather family	-0.18**	-0.21**	-0.11(*)	-0.14*
Father/stepmother family	-0.32*	-0.35*	-0.21(*)	-0.25*
Age 16-18 years				
Original 2-parent family	0.08*	0.01	0.10**	0.03
Single mother family	-0.16*	-0.16*	-0.14(*)	-0.14(*)
Single father family	0.08	0.05	0.10	0.07
Mother/stepfather family	0.00	-0.03	0.03	0.01
Father/stepmother family	0.28*	0.23*	0.32**	0.28**
Immigrant status				
Parent not Non-European immigrant	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Parent Non-European immigrant	-0.06	0.02	-0.04	0.03
Parent has cash margin				
Has cash margin		ref.		ref.
No cash margin		-0.13**		-0.11**
Child has cash margin				
Has cash margin		ref.		ref.
No cash margin		-0.25***		-0.19***
Doesn't know		-0.19***		-0.15***
Household unemployement				
No adult unemployed		ref.		ref.
At least one adult unemployed		-0.02		-0.01
Household occupational class				
Upper non-manual		ref		ref.
Intermediate or lower non-manual		-0.02		-0.02
Self-employed or farmer		-0.03		-0.04
Manual worker		-0.09**		-0.08**
Talks to parent when worried				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			0.09**	0.09**
Parent has time for child				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			0.21***	0.21***
Parent helps with homework				
No	ref.	ref.	0.12*	0.10*
Yes	0.08(*)	0.06		
Child needs help w. homework				
Yes	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
No	0.20***	0.18***	0.20***	0.20***
Adult-child conflict				
No	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Yes	-0.39***	-0.36***	-0.42***	-0.40***
R^2	0.02	0.06	0.10	0.13

(*) < 10%. * < .05. ** < .01. *** < 0.001.
N= 2680 . Data source: LNU 2000, ULF 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Table 5. Results from regression models on girls' psychological well-being

Variable	Model 1: Baseline	Model 2: Economy	Model 3: Parenting	Model 4: Full model
Constant	3.85***	4.00***	3.34***	3.51***
Family structure-age combination				
Age 10-12 years				
Original 2-parent family	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Single mother family	-0.13	-0.05	-0.15(*)	-0.09
Single father family	0.01	0.13	0.06	0.03
Mother/stepfather family	-0.19*	-0.15*	-0.16*	-0.12(*)
Father/stepmother family	-0.27(*)	-0.28(*)	-0. 20	-0.20
Age 13-15 years				
Original 2-parent family	0.03	-0.08*	0.00	-0.04
Single mother family	-0.19*	-0.11	-0.12(*)	-0.06
Single father family	-0.12	-0.10	-0.02	-0.01
Mother/stepfather family	-0.23**	-0.24**	-0.14*	-0.15*
Father/stepmother family	-0.04	-0.08	0.11	0.07
Age 16-18 years				
Original 2-parent family	-0.14***	-0.22***	-0.06	-0.12**
Single mother family	-0.29***	-0.27***	-0.22**	-0.21**
Single father family	-0.10	-0.14	0.03	-0.01
Mother/stepfather family	-0.28*	-0.32**	-0.13	-0.16
Father/stepmother family	0.21	0.21	0.08	0.07
Immigrant status				
Parent not Non-European immigrant	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Parent Non-European immigrant	0.09	0.17*	0.09	0.15(*)
Parent has cash margin				
Has cash margin		ref.		ref.
No cash margin		-0.16***		-0.13**
Child has cash margin				
Has cash margin		ref.		ref.
No cash margin		-0.28***		-0.18***
Doesn't know		-0.18***		-0.13***
Household unemployement				
No adult unemployed		ref.		ref.
At least one adult unemployed		-0.03		-0.02
Household occupational class				
Upper non-manual		ref		ref.
Intermediate or lower non-manual		-0.01		-0.02
Self-employed or farmer		-0.08(*)		-0.08(*)
Manual worker		-0.11**		-0.11**
Talks to parent when worried				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			0.20***	0.19***
Parent has time for child				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			0.28***	0.26***
Parent helps with homework				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			0.12*	0.10*
Child needs help w. homework				
Yes			ref.	ref.
No			0.21***	0.20***
Adult-child conflict				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			-0.42***	-0.40***
R^2	0.02	0.06	0.13	0.15

(*) < 10%. * < .05. ** < .01. *** < 0.001.
N= 2671 . Data source: LNU 2000, ULF 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Table 6. Results from regression models on boys' psychosomatic well-being

Variable	Model 1: Baseline	Model 2: Economy	Model 3: Parenting	Model 4: Full model
Constant	4.01***	4.06***	3.77***	3.81***
Family structure				
Mother and father	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Single mother	-0.18**	-0.15**	-0.17**	-0.15**
Single father	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.05
Mother and stepfather	-0.01	0.00	0.03	0.03
Father and stepmother	-0.12(*)	-0.09	-0.07	-0.04
Age				
10-12	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
13-15	0.01	-0.03	0.00	-0.03
16-18	0.03	-0.02	0.03	-0.01
Immigrant status				
Parent not Non-European immigrant	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Parent Non-European immigrant	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02
Parent's cash margin				
Has cash margin		ref.		ref.
No cash margin		-0.04		-0.04
Child's cash margin				
Has cash margin		ref.		ref.
No cash margin		-0.20*		-0.15(*)
Doesn't know		-0.16***		-0.13***
Household unemployement				
No adult unemployed		ref.		ref.
At least one adult unemployed		0.12*		0.12*
Household occupational class				
Upper non-manual		ref.		ref.
Intermediate or lower non-manual		0.02		0.02
Self-employed or farmer		0.02		0.02
Manual worker		0.03		0.03
Talks to parent when worried				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			0.01	0.01
Parent has time for child				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			0.24***	0.24***
Parent helps with homework				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			0.04	0.03
Child needs help w. homework				
Yes			ref.	ref.
No			0.09(*)	0.09(*)
Adult-child conflict				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			-0.26***	-0.24***
R^2	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.05

(*) < 10%. * < .05. ** < .01. *** < 0.001.
N= 2674 . Data source: LNU 2000, ULF 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Table 7. Results from regression models on girls' psychosomatic well-being

Variable	Model 1: Baseline	Model 2: Economy	Model 3: Parenting	Model 4: Full model
Constant	3.84***	3.86***	3.50***	3.54***
Family structure				
Mother and father	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Single mother	-0.09(*)	-0.03	-0.09(*)	-0.04
Single father	-0.03	-0.01	-0.03	-0.01
Mother and stepfather	-0.13**	-0.13*	-0.10*	-0.10(*)
Father and stepmother	-0.03	-0.01	0.02	0.04
Age				
10-12	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
13-15	-0.10**	-0.13***	-0.08*	-0.09**
16-18	-0.25***	-0.30***	-0.21***	-0.25***
Immigrant status				
Parent not Non-European immigrant	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Parent Non-European immigrant	0.09	0.13	0.07	0.11
Parent's cash margin				
Has cash margin		ref.		ref.
No cash margin		-0.15**		-0.13*
Child's cash margin				
Has cash margin		ref.		ref.
No cash margin		-0.21**		-0.14(*)
Doesn't know		-0.11**		-0.07*
Household unemployement				
No adult unemployed		ref.		ref.
At least one adult unemployed		0.07		0.07
Household occupational class				
Upper non-manual		ref.		ref.
Intermediate or lower non-manual		0.04		0.03
Self-employed or farmer		0.10(*)		0.10(*)
Manual worker		0.07		0.06
Talks to parent when worried				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			0.11*	0.09*
Parent has time for child				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			0.29***	0.27***
Parent helps with homework				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			-0.01	-0.01
Child needs help w. homework				
Yes			ref.	ref.
No			0.05	0.06
Adult-child conflict				
No			ref.	ref.
Yes			-0.28***	-0.27***
R^2	0.02	0.04	0.06	0.07

(*) < 10%. * < .05. ** < .01. *** < 0.001.
N= 2674 . Data source: LNU 2000, ULF 2001, 2002 and 2003.