

THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON INTERGENERATIONAL EXCHANGES IN FAMILIES¹

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Introduction

In recent decades, changing fertility and mortality patterns have substantially changed the generational structure of families. There have been shifts in the number of intragenerational ties relative to the number of intergenerational ties, and in the proportionate numbers of older and younger family members. With rising life expectancy, long-term intergenerational ties have become the rule rather than the exception. Parents and children tend to share over fifty years of their lives. During a large part of those fifty years, there is an intergenerational tie between adults. Another consequence of the rising life expectancy has been an increase in the number of multigeneration families. More and more families consist of three generations. The family structure reflects the structure of the population at large: families are increasingly becoming 'top heavy'. The size of the older generations is increasing, and that of the younger ones is decreasing.

Apart from changes in fertility and mortality, there has been the influence of changing marriage patterns. Kinship systems have become increasingly complex due to higher rates of divorce, second and third marriages, and consensual unions (Riley 1983). This diversity in family relationships is relatively new. As Hagestad (1981) points out, our vocabulary has difficulty keeping pace with social reality. She gives the example of the ex-granddaughter-in-law. We not only need to get used to the idea of adult grandchildren who can have families of their own, we also lack the words for relationships shaped by divorce and remarriage.

Little is known about the effects of these macro-level changes in kinship systems on relationships between family members. This article focuses on the implications of changing divorce patterns and their effects on exchanges between family members of different generations. The point of departure is that divorce not only disrupts horizontal ties, for example between marital partners, it can also be a threat to vertical ties, such as those between parents and children. The focus is on the families of older adults. The study not only considers intergenerational exchanges in the event of parental divorce but also in the event of the divorce of a child.

Multigenerational families consist of overlapping parent-child relationships.

In a family, an individual can be both a parent and a child. Older adults who participated in the NESTOR survey 'Living Arrangements and Social Networks of Older Adults' (NESTOR-LSN) are the anchors in the present study. In other words, the respondents comprise the older generation, and their adult offspring the younger one. Furthermore, 'received' support means support received by the older adult, and support 'given' means support given to the older adult.

Research questions

The current marital status of men and women is registered nationally in the Netherlands. As was noted above, there has been a sharp increase in recent decades in marriages ending in divorce. On a yearly basis, the number of dissolved marriages has risen from two out of every 1000 marriages in the '40s to ten out of every 1000 marriages in the '90s (CBS 1995). Recent estimates indicate that one in four marriages will end in divorce (Prins and Levering 1992). Though the percentages of divorcees in the older population (age 55 and over) are lower than those in younger age groups, the percentages are on the rise, as is evident in Table 1. The table shows an increase in the 1960-1990 period in the percentages of divorced men and women in each of the five-year age categories. Due to differences in rates of remarriage, the percentage of divorcees is higher among women than men.

The Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) regularly publishes figures on divorce by length of marriage. However, the CBS publications do not distinguish between first and subsequent marriages, so that representative data on the numbers of men and women who ever divorced are not available. To gain insight into the exchanges children have with their divorced parents, data on possible remarriages are indispensable. For the parent, a new partner and new children bring conflicting obligations, and can form barriers to contact with the children

Table 1: Percentages of Divorced Men and Women in the Netherlands in Age Categories and Years

	Females				Males			
	1960	1970	1980	1990	1961	1970	1980	1990
55-59	2.1	2.4	4.0	7.1	1.5	1.6	3.3	6.6
60-64	2.0	2.2	3.7	5.8	1.3	1.5	2.9	5.3
65-69	1.9	2.1	3.5	5.0	1.1	1.3	2.6	4.3
70-74	1.7	2.0	3.0	4.3	1.1	1.1	2.2	3.5
75-79	1.6	1.8	2.6	3.7	0.9	1.0	1.8	2.9
80-84	1.1	1.5	2.4	3.1	0.6	0.7	1.5	2.3
85+	0.1	0.7	2.0	2.5	0.0	0.2	1.3	1.8

Source: CBS, Netherlands.

from the first marriage. Time, energy and attention previously devoted almost exclusively to the 'old' children now have to be divided among a larger number of relatives. Surveys are the only source of information on remarriage. NESTOR-LSN has these data. This brings me to the first question of this article: what percentage of the men and women who were between the ages of 55 and 89 in 1992 have ever divorced?

The next question pertains to the incidence of divorce in successive family generations. How often have both one or more members of the older generation and one or more members of the younger generation divorced? The underlying idea is that the children of divorced parents are more likely to divorce than the children of parents whose marriages remained intact. In the literature this is referred to as the 'intergenerational transmission' of divorce (Mueller and Pope 1977; Diekmann and Engelhard 1995). The mechanism underlying this transmission is unclear. One explanation is that the children of divorced parents take their parents as role models and fail to acquire the social skills needed to form and maintain stable relationships. Another suggests the inheritance of certain behavioural characteristics, such as depressive tendencies. Yet another explanation is that the threshold for divorce may be lower among the children of divorced parents. McLanahan and Bumpass (1988) note that the daughters of divorced mothers have learned that women can successfully manage households without a husband. These daughters may therefore be more inclined to consider divorce as a solution to an unhappy marriage.

NESTOR-LSN data will be used to find out whether the children of divorced parents are indeed more likely to divorce than the children of parents who remained together. Previous Dutch research has provided mixed support for the transmission hypothesis. Klijzing (1992), who used data from the Dutch Relationship Formation study among men and women born between 1928 and 1965, failed to find a greater risk for marital disruption among the children of divorced parents. Manting (1994a), using data from the 1988 national Family Formation Survey, did observe such a relationship, however, as did De Graaf (1996), whose analysis was based on the 1993 national Family Formation survey. Most recently, Dronkers (1997) reported a positive association between the divorce risks of parents and their children on the basis of data from the 1992-1994 Netherlands Family Survey.

The answers to the first two research questions provide an indication of the number of families affected by divorce. This family perspective is relatively new. Most of the prior research focussed on divorce in a single generation rather than the incidence in successive generations. A number of studies have examined whether or not and why divorced parents maintain contact with their children from a previous marriage (Cooney and Uhlenberg 1990; Furstenberg, Hoffman and Shrestha 1995; Uhlenberg, Cooney and Boyd 1990). This question is particularly relevant for divorced fathers: mothers are usually the ones who are given

custody over the children. Do divorced fathers renew the ties with their children as they grow up and become adults? The effects of adult children's divorce on their ties with their parents has been another focus of interest (Johnson 1988 1993). For some, there appears to be a decrease in the exchanges as the result of reduced opportunities on the part of the adult child to provide support to the older parent (less free time available, preoccupation with the personal consequences of the divorce). For others, there appears to be an increase in the exchanges because help is sought from parents. A third line of research has examined the relationships between grandparents and grandchildren in the event of divorce in the middle generation, i.e. the adult children (Furstenberg 1981; Johnson 1985).

A family perspective makes it possible to answer questions that otherwise remain unanswered. One pertains to the relative effect on intergenerational exchanges of the parents' versus their children's divorce. Which is more disruptive? Another question pertains to the possible cumulative effects. What pattern of exchanges can be observed in families *where members of both generations have gone through a divorce*? To answer these questions, four types of families will be compared and contrasted: (1) families where neither parents nor children divorced, (2) families where parents divorced, but none of their children did so, (3) families where parents did not, but one or more of their children divorced, and (4) families where parents and one or more of their children divorced. The exchanges between older respondents and all of their children will be considered. Among the divorced parents, the exchanges are however limited to those with the children from the first (and usually only) marriage that ended in divorce. 'Exchanges' mean giving and receiving instrumental and emotional support.

What differences between the four types of families can one expect? As regards the effects of divorce in the older generation (G1), there are a number of reasons to expect less giving and receiving in families where the parents divorced than in those where the parents' marriage remained intact. One reason is the practical issue of custody. Given the standard custody arrangements, divorce tends to entail a considerable reduction in the contact between fathers and their children. Whether the contact between divorced fathers and their children is renewed later in life remains an open question. Assuming that later interaction patterns are a continuation of earlier ones, one can expect to find relatively low exchange levels between divorced elderly fathers and their children. Another argument pertains to culpability. The parent who is considered responsible for the divorce is likely to be shunned by the children. Again, assuming that later interactions are a reflection of earlier patterns, one should find relatively low exchange levels with either divorced mothers or divorced fathers, depending on who is considered to blame. Preoccupations on the part of the divorced parent may also have a negative effect on the contact with the children. Divorced parents might be too busy trying to make ends meet, reestablishing themselves at work, dating new partners and so forth to meaningfully invest in the relationships with

their children. If one assumes that these relationships do not improve with time, one can expect to find lower exchange levels in families where the parents divorced.

Nevertheless, there are also a number of reasons to expect higher exchange levels in families where the parents divorced than in those where the parents' marriage has remained intact. Again, custody arrangements are relevant. Mothers, as the parents who have custody, are likely to develop intensive and relatively exclusive relationships with their children. If the special quality of these relationships persists over time, one can expect to find relatively high exchange levels between divorced mothers and their children. Another argument, related to the previous one, pertains to singlehood. The divorced parent may seek a replacement for the warmth and closeness that were lost with the breakup of the marriage in relationships with the offspring. The special parent-child ties that develop as a result will presumably continue later in life.

As regards the effects of divorce in the younger generation (G2), research by Johnson (1988 1993) underscores the importance of drawing a distinction between receiving and giving support. Her work suggests that divorced adult children are too preoccupied and too busy to be of much help to their parents. Given their predicament, in fact they need more support from their parents. In other words, in families where the children divorced, one can expect the parents (regardless of their marital status) to receive relatively less support from their children but to provide them with relatively more support. Note, however, that this only holds true if the other (non-divorced) siblings do not step in to help their parents.

Design of the survey

The NESTOR-LSN Dutch survey was conducted in 1992. Interviews were held with 4,494 men and women aged 55-89. Respondents were obtained by drawing samples from the population registers of eleven municipalities in three regions of the Netherlands. The regions and municipalities were selected to make the sample as representative as possible of the Dutch population above the age of 55. To facilitate comparisons across age groups and between males and females, the sample was stratified according to sex and year of birth, and approximately equal numbers of men and women within each five-year age interval from 55 to 89 were drawn from the population registers. Older adults in private households as well as institutions were included in the sample. The overall response rate was 61.7%, which is comparable to response rates for the general population in the Netherlands in surveys conducted by the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (De Heer, 1992). More detailed information on data collection and non-response can be found in Broese van Groenou, Van Tilburg, De Leeuw and Liefbroer (1995).

Respondents were interviewed in their homes using CAPI (Computer Assisted

Personal Interviewing) techniques. On the average, the interviews lasted an hour and 37 minutes. Questions were posed on a wide variety of topics, including the availability of family members, network size, supportive exchanges, well-being, life histories, social background, and personality characteristics.

Results

Number of ever-divorced

Marital history data are available on 3828 older men and women. This study only examines official divorce, not the termination of other partnerships. A focus on marriages ending in divorce, rather than on partner relationships in general, best fits the central research question with its emphasis on intergenerational exchanges in families. Parenthood is closely linked to marriage (particularly for the cohorts investigated here). A total of 269 (7.0%) of the respondents divorced once, forty divorced twice and two did so three times, bringing the number of ever-divorced to 311 (8.1%). If the sample is weighted to make it representative for the Dutch population above the age of 55, the percentage of people who ever divorced is 10.0%.

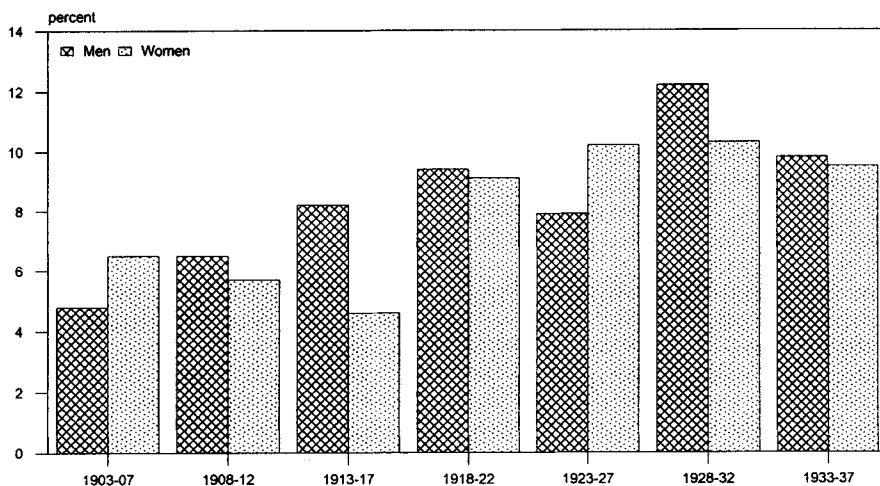
Figure 1 shows the percentages ever-divorced by birth cohort for men and women separately. The gender differences are not significant. Among men and women alike, the percentage who ever divorced is highest in the younger cohorts. Nevertheless the data do not unequivocally support the conclusion that the likelihood of divorce has increased steadily in the past few decades. The percentage ever-divorced is slightly lower in the youngest cohort. Is this a 'true' reversal of the trend (fewer marriages and therefore fewer divorces, Manting 1994b) or do the data reflect an age effect (the duration of the 'exposure' to the 'risk' of divorce is shorter among the younger cohorts simply because they are younger)? Differential mortality linked with marital status may also play a role. The number of ever-divorced in the oldest cohorts may be under-represented due to higher mortality rates.

Of the 311 ever-divorced, 37 (11.9%) are childless, i.e. they have either never had children or have outlived them; 268 (86.2%) have living biological children, and 29 (9.3%) only have living stepchildren. For the present analyses, children from the first marriage ending in divorce have been selected; 60 (19.3%) of the ever-divorced have biological children, but they were born in other marriages. A total of 208 (66.9%) of the respondents meet the specified criteria; 165 of them have no other biological children than those born in the first marriage ending in divorce. This stepwise selection of respondents provides an indication of the complexity of the individual life pathways.

Background characteristics of ever-divorced parents

Marriage and divorce. Table 2 presents descriptive information about the mar-

Figure 1: Percentage of Men and Women Who Have Ever Divorced by Birth Cohort



riages and divorces of the divorced parents, i.e. the 208 ever-divorced parents (103 fathers and 105 mothers) with children from their first marriage ending in divorce. The data are specified by gender and birth cohort. The results should be interpreted with caution, given the small numbers in the various birth cohorts. The purpose of Table 2 is to shed light on the circumstances of the respondents, not to provide an exact description of trends.

The table does not show much variation across the birth cohorts (for either men or women) in the mean age at marriage. The finding that the median year of marriage moves up across the birth cohorts does not come as a surprise. The absence of such a shift across birth cohorts in the median year of divorce is more interesting. Two clusters are visible: one around the years 1947-1950, and one around 1972-1974. The first indicates higher rates of divorce after the Second World War. Marriages that had remained intact throughout the war were nevertheless dissolved a few years afterwards, a pattern described previously by the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS 1976). The second reflects the liberalized divorce laws. In 1971 the procedures for obtaining a divorce were simplified, resulting (along with other factors such as changing attitudes towards marriage and the declining role of the church, CBS 1994) in an increase in the number of dissolved marriages.

Table 2 shows that the men were between the ages of 40 and 50 at the time of divorce, and the women were somewhat younger. The birth cohort differences are not significant. The descriptive data indicate that most of the divorces occurred several years ago. Clearly, the present study pertains to the long-term consequences of divorce. Finally, the table shows that the mean marriage

Table 2: Background Characteristics of the Marriages and Divorces of the Divorced Parents (n = 208)

	Year of marriage (median)		Year of divorce (median)		Age at marriage (mean)		Age at divorce (mean)		Duration of marriage (mean)	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Birth cohort										
1903-07	1933	1929	1947	1949	25.9	26.2	45.2	46.0	19.3	19.8
1908-12	1937	1935	1949	1950	27.9	25.1	41.2	36.9	13.7	19.2
1913-17	1940	1941	1955	1949	25.6	23.1	46.3	36.1	20.7	13.0
1918-22	1947	1942	1956	1955	28.0	22.6	50.2	41.0	22.2	18.4
1923-27	1952	1947	1973	1969	28.9	25.0	51.2	43.6	22.4	20.8
1928-32	1956	1953	1972	1972	26.7	24.1	43.9	42.1	17.2	17.9
1933-37	1960	1958	1973	1974	25.9	23.6	42.1	42.9	16.2	19.3
					$F = 1.1$	$F = 1.0$	$F = 2.1$	$F = 0.7$	$F = 0.7$	$F = 0.6$
					ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns

Source: NESTOR-LSN, 1992.

duration before divorce is close to twenty years. In other words, we are looking at marriages that only ended in divorce after a relatively lengthy period of time, a finding possibly linked to there being children. Research has indicated that having children lowers the likelihood of divorce (Manting 1994a).

Current marital status and living arrangement. Of the 103 ever-divorced fathers, 39 (37.9%) are married at the time of the interview, 56 (54.4%) are divorced and 8 (7.8%) are widowers. Of the 105 ever-divorced mothers, 18 (17.1%) are married at the time of the interview, 74 (70.5%) are divorced and 13 (12.4%) are widows. These figures reflect the men's greater chances of re-marrying. Marital status data only partially indicate the presence or absence of a partner, as is evident from the following figures. Of the 103 ever-divorced fathers, 36 (35.0%) are living without a partner at the time of the interview, 38 (36.9%) with a new spouse, 12 (11.7%) are living together, 16 (15.5%) have a partner outside the household (a 'Living Apart Together' or LAT relationship), and 1 (1.0%) is living separately from his new spouse. Of the 105 ever-divorced mothers, 76 (72.4%) are living without a partner at the time of the interview, 17 (16.2%) with a new spouse, 7 (6.7%) are living together, 4 (3.8%) are involved in a LAT relationship, and 1 (1.0%) is living separately from her new spouse. Clearly, not all of those who are unmarried have no partner, just as not all those who are married are sharing living quarters with their spouses (the reason being that one of the partners has been admitted into a home for the elderly or a nursing home).

Differences between the ever- and never-divorced parents in terms of characteristics relevant to the analysis

To interpret the results, one needs a certain level of certainty that the reported associations are indeed attributable to divorce. For that reason, the analyses correct for differences linked with age and family size. Both of these characteristics are known to be linked to supportive exchanges (Dykstra and Van Tilburg 1994; Van Tilburg, Broese van Groenou and Thom ese 1995). Moreover, the ever- and never-divorced parents differ on these characteristics.

Age. The divorced parents are younger, on the average, than those who never divorced. The mean age at the time of the interview is 68.8 ($SD = 9.2$) for divorced fathers ($n = 103$) and 69.5 ($SD = 9.2$) for divorced mothers ($n = 105$). The mean ages are 72.3 ($SD = 9.8$) and 71.3 ($SD = 9.7$) for never-divorced fathers and mothers, respectively.

Family size. The divorced parents have smaller families, on the average, than those who never divorced. Family size means the number of living biological children (and for the ever-divorced this is the number born in the first marriage ending in divorce). The mean family size is 2.4 ($SD = 1.2$) for divorced fathers, 2.7 ($SD = 1.7$) for divorced mothers, 3.2 for never-divorced fathers ($SD = 1.8$), and 3.6 for never-divorced mothers ($SD = 1.8$).

Divorce in successive family generations

The results indicate that the children of divorced parents have a greater likelihood of divorcing themselves than the children of parents who always stayed together ($F_{(3189,1)} = 19.6$; $p < .001$); 15.6% of never-divorced parents have one or more divorced children; the figure for ever-divorced parents is 27.2%. These figures have been corrected for differences in age ($F_{(3189,1)} = 90.5$; $p < .001$) and family size ($F_{(3189,1)} = 18.9$; $p < .001$). Differences between mothers and fathers are not significant ($F_{(3189,1)} = 0.9$; $p > .10$).

Quality of parent-child relationships

Information on the quality of parent-child relationships by family type is presented in Table 3. To facilitate the interpretation of the data, the results of analyses of variance are given in the bottom half of the table. Age and family size have been introduced in the ANOVAs as covariates, and divorce in the older generation (G1), divorce in the younger generation (G2) and gender have been entered as main effects. To test for differential gender effects and cumulative effects of G1 and G2 divorce, two-way interactions have been introduced as well.

'Quality' is indicated by (a) network membership and (b) supportive exchanges. In NESTOR-LSN, networks were delineated in the following way (details can be found in Van Tilburg 1995). Seven relationship domains were distinguished: household members; children and their partners; other kin; neighbours; colleagues; organizational contacts; and 'others'. For each domain, the

respondents were asked to specify the names of people with whom they were 'in touch regularly' and who were 'important' to them. The definitions of 'regular contact' and 'important' were left to the respondents.

Supportive exchanges have been measured in the following way. For each of the 'top twelve' individuals with whom contact is most frequent, questions have been asked about instrumental support (help 'with daily chores in and around the house, such as meal preparation, house cleaning, transportation, small repairs, filling in forms') and emotional support ('talking about personal experiences and feelings'). Questions have been asked about receiving and giving such support during the past year. Pre-coded answer categories are 'never', 'rarely', 'often' or 'always', with scores ranging from 1-4. For the purpose of the present analyses, the scores for the individual 'top twelve' children have been summed. Total support scores vary from zero (no child among the 'top twelve') to 48 (twelve children with whom support is 'always' exchanged).

Children as network members. The two lefthand columns of Table 3 show the differences by family type in the representation of children in the older adults' social networks. First I will consider the effects of parental (G1) divorce. Divorced parents specify fewer children as network members than the never-divorced. Moreover, the percentage who do not specify any of their children is higher among divorced than never-divorced parents. Though both groups exhibit disturbed parent-child relationships (in the sense that contact does not take place on a 'regular' basis and is not considered 'important'), this is more often the case among divorced parents (with percentages varying from 11% to 27%, depending upon family type and parental gender) than among the never-divorced ones (with percentages varying from 1% to 4%, again depending upon family type and parental gender).

The results indicate a significant effect of divorce in the child generation (G2) on the number of children specified as network members. Generally, a higher number is specified in families where one or more of the children divorced than in families where this is not the case. There is no association between G2 divorce and the likelihood of excluding children from the network. However, Table 3 shows significant interaction effects of G1 and G2 divorce for the mean number of children specified in the network and the likelihood of excluding children from the network. These effects indicate that the likelihood of specifying children as network members is lowest in families where members of both generations have gone through a divorce. Table 3 also shows a significant interaction between parental divorce and the gender of the parent for the likelihood of excluding children from the network. Divorced fathers are more likely not to specify any of their children as network members (i.e. children from the marriage ending in divorce) than are divorced mothers. This finding suggests that divorced fathers

Table 3: Quality of Parent-child Relationships by Family Type and Gender of Parent (means adjusted for covariates)

Family type ^a	# Children in network		% Zero children in network		Instrumental support received		Instrumental support given		Emotional support received		Emotional support given	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
- Divorce G1	2.6	2.7	4.1	4.2	5.3	5.6	4.8	4.4	6.7	7.1	6.4	7.2
+ Divorce G1	1.9	2.2	20.2	10.9	3.0	4.2	2.5	3.7	4.4	6.1	4.3	6.2
- Divorce G2	2.8	2.9	2.9	1.2	5.1	5.9	4.7	4.5	6.7	6.4	6.5	7.6
+ Divorce G2	1.7	2.0	26.9	23.1	2.2	3.7	2.7	2.8	3.9	5.7	4.0	4.8
	<i>F</i>		<i>F</i>		<i>F</i>		<i>F</i>		<i>F</i>		<i>F</i>	
Main effects	17.4 ***		32.2 ***		20.0 ***		22.5 ***		13.7 ***		19.9 ***	
Divorce G1	46.6 ***		93.0 ***		55.2 ***		51.5 ***		33.2 ***		34.0 ***	
Divorce G2	5.1 *		0.9		0.2		0.1		2.4		1.1	
Gender parent	0.6		2.6		4.8 *		15.9 ***		5.4 *		24.5 ***	
Interaction effects	3.5 *		5.5 ***		3.3 *		3.2 *		4.5 *		3.3 *	
Divorce G1 * Divorce G2	3.9 *		9.8 **		4.8 *		0.4		3.9 *		2.7	
Divorce G1 * Gender parent	2.0		6.6 **		2.6		9.1 *		3.8 *		.0	
Divorce G2 * Gender parent	1.4		.0		2.7		.0		2.5		3.9 *	
Covariates	1423.3 ***		18.7 ***		515.5 ***		585.3 ***		551.3 ***		483.4 ***	
Age	3.2		32.0 ***		7.3 **		421.3 ***		50.0 ***		19.3 ***	
Family size	2843.3 ***		5.4 *		1023.8 ***		749.3 ***		1052.5 ***		947.5 ***	
			$R^2 = 47.6$		$R^2 = 25.5$		$R^2 = 27.9$		$R^2 = 26.4$		$R^2 = 24.3$	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ ^a G1 = generation parents

G2 = generation children

- Divorce = never divorced

+ Divorce = ever divorced

are at a greater risk than divorced mothers of becoming isolated from their offspring.

Supportive exchanges with children. Results on the supportive exchanges between parents and children are also shown in Table 3. The findings indicate a high degree of consistency across the various support measures for parental (G1) divorce: it has a negative impact on supportive exchanges. Compared to parents whose marriages remained intact, divorced parents not only receive less instrumental and emotional support from their children, they also give less instrumental and emotional support to their children.

As regards the impact of divorce in the younger generation (G2), Table 3 shows no main effect, but there is a significant $G1 * G2$ interaction for received instrumental support and received emotional support. In other words, divorce in the younger generation only has negative repercussions for parent-child supportive exchanges under specific conditions, i.e. if the parents are also divorced, and only for their parents receiving instrumental and emotional support, not for their parents giving support to their children. Parents receive the least support from their children if not only they but also one or more of their children have gone through a divorce. In this sense, divorce in successive generations appears to have cumulative negative effects.

Table 3 shows a main effect of parental gender on each of the four support measures. Compared to fathers, and regardless of marital status, mothers receive more instrumental and emotional support from their children, and give less instrumental support but more emotional support to their children. The significant $G1 * \text{gender of parent}$ interactions suggest that divorce differentially affects the exchanges mothers and fathers have with their children. Though parental divorce generally leads to fewer exchanges with children, this is more so for fathers than mothers. As Table 3 shows, the difference between the ever-divorced and never-divorced in mean instrumental support given are larger for fathers than mothers. The findings for received emotional support show a similar pattern. Here again divorced fathers have a greater likelihood of becoming estranged from their children than divorced mothers.

I noted above that parents giving their children support is not negatively affected by a child's divorce. In fact, as the far righthand column of Table 3 shows, divorce in the younger generation can lead to increased support being given by parents. The $G2 * \text{gender of parent}$ interaction indicates that never-divorced mothers give their children relatively more support if one or more of them have divorced. The provision of emotional support by never-divorced fathers is relatively unaffected by divorce in the younger generation. Apparently mothers step in to help their divorced offspring cope with the emotional aftermath of divorce; fathers are less inclined to do so.

Discussion

There are demographic indications that growing numbers of men and women will enter old age with a history of broken, weakened or disrupted family ties. The effects of divorce on family ties, the intergenerational ones between parents and children and between grandparents and grandchildren as well as the intra-generational ones between siblings, have just begun to be examined. Here lie important and urgent challenges for research with equally urgent social policy implications (Goldscheider 1990). One tends to overlook the key role family members play as bridges between the older adult and service providers (Horowitz 1985). Family members function as buffers, and they are an invaluable source of information about the available services. Family members often serve as intermediaries, and their knowledge and experience help create the kind of individual care package the older adult requires. Apart from providing access to medical and community facilities, family members fulfil important caregiving tasks themselves (Dykstra, 1997). Generally, there is barely any recognition of the fact that the care provided by family members amply exceeds the care provided by formal organizations.

Findings from this study indicate that divorced older adults are less likely to have supportive relationships with their adult children than those whose marriages have remained intact. The present study focussed on the relationships with children from the first marriage ending in divorce. As yet, the question of whether divorced older adults have supportive ties with others such as stepchildren, children from a second marriage, new partners, friends and so forth, remains unanswered. Other research has shown, however, that divorced elderly people, divorced men in particular, have relatively small networks (Van Tilburg 1995). In other words, there are indications that the divorced have limited possibilities to call upon others should the need arise. In this sense, divorced older adults, divorced men in particular, are a group at risk.

Others have demonstrated that women tend to suffer financially from a divorce, while men suffer socially (Cooney 1993). Findings from the present study indicate, however, that men and women both suffer socially. More particularly, divorce reduces the contacts and supportive exchanges with children for both men and women, albeit that the reduction is less marked for divorced mothers than divorced fathers. One of the expectations guiding the analyses was that divorced mothers, as the parents with custody, would develop special ties with their children, and that as a result, their relationships in later life would also be highly supportive. This expectation has not been empirically confirmed. Divorced mothers as well as divorced fathers have fewer supportive exchanges with their children than their never-divorced counterparts.

Most of the divorces occurred between 20 and 50 years ago. In other words, we are looking at the long-term consequences of divorce. Few studies have

examined contacts between children and their divorced parents over a long period of time or in the years after the children become adults (Cooney and Uhlenberg 1990). The findings reported here suggest that ruptures in the parent-child relationship brought about by divorce are rarely healed in later life.

Relatively unique to this study is its family perspective: divorce in the parent's and in the child's generation are both considered. Parental divorce has greater repercussions for parent-child relationships than younger generation divorce. The levels of contact and supportive exchanges in families where one or more children have divorced but not their parents, largely resemble those in families where the marriages of the parents and the children have both remained intact. The effects of children's divorce are only evident in the support children give to their parents, not in the support parents give to their children. Children affected by divorce tend to give their parents less instrumental and emotional support, presumably because they are too preoccupied with reorganizing their lives.

The support given by parents appears to be relatively unaffected by younger generation divorce. On the contrary, the families with the closest parent-child ties (as measured by network membership and supportive exchanges) are the ones where the parents have not divorced but one or more of their children have. The emotional support given by never-divorced mothers is particularly high in families characterized by younger generation divorce. This finding suggests that, under particular circumstances, younger generation divorce can strengthen rather than weaken the parent-child ties. More specifically, we see evidence of older women's role as 'kin keepers': i.e. mothers holding the family together in the event of personal upheaval.

Though younger generation divorce may bring parents and children closer together, this is not always the case. If the parents have divorced, younger generation divorce can lead to increased alienation. Findings indicate that parents and children are most likely to become alienated in the event of divorce in successive generations. Furthermore, the lowest supportive exchange levels were observed in families where the parents as well as one or more of their children had gone through a divorce. Apparently, divorce in successive family generations has a cumulative negative effect on the parent-child ties. In these families, the parents and children are least likely to see one another on a regular basis or to give each other help.

In this study, divorcees have been compared with people whose marriages have remained intact. No attention has been devoted to variations in the group of divorcees. General differences between divorced and non-divorced people constitute the focus of attention. Future studies should address differences among divorced people. Examples of questions to be posed are: When do divorced parents continue to maintain close ties with their offspring? How important are the circumstances surrounding the divorce, such as the age of children at the time of divorce or the amount of time that has passed since the divorce? What are the

implications of the arrival of children from a second marriage? Qualitative research conducted by Furstenberg (1981) suggests that the implications can vary considerably. Ties may improve when the children from a previous marriage are taken in by the new family, but there may also be further estrangement because the new family commitments leave less time and energy for the children from a previous marriage. Eggebeen's (1992) research supports the latter view. His research indicates that parents' inclination to help their children who are no longer living at home is inversely related to the percentage of stepchildren among their children. Another possibility would be for future research to more closely examine the circumstances surrounding the divorces of the younger generation (the adult children). Earlier studies have shown that grandchildren play a decisive role in bringing family members together or keeping the older and younger generations together (Furstenberg 1981; Johnson 1985).

Results from the present study suggest that divorced elderly people are at risk in the sense that, compared with people who have never divorced, they are more likely to be estranged from their children or have non-supportive family ties. In the introduction I noted the increasing numbers of divorcees among older men and women. Do these increasing numbers imply a growing group of older adults who will have difficulty mobilizing the support they require? Of course one should always be careful when making predictions about the older adults of the future, given the drawbacks of using information about the current older adults to formulate the predictions. Attitudes of the future older population may radically influence the role of family members as support providers. Attitudes about appropriate sources of help may be changing. Many of the adults coming into the aged cohorts are better educated, and have greater resources to purchase assistance, and they may feel differently about services such as home care and adult day care. It is conceivable that the 'new' older adults will show a greater inclination to turn to formal agencies for assistance in the home, preferring independence and exhibiting more reluctance to rely upon their adult children (Smyer and Hofland 1982). Nevertheless, both the older adults who are unwilling to call upon their family members (because they prefer to make the necessary arrangements themselves) and those who are unable to do so (because they lack supportive family relationships, for example as a result of divorce) will have to prepare for the stages of old age when help is required. It is not unlikely that these measures will include a heavy reliance on formal services. In turn, service-providing organizations will need to take into account that fewer and fewer older adults will be embedded in 'standard' family constellations. The informal-formal caregiving interface will need to be tailored to meet the increasing complexity and diversity in family relationships.

NOTES

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