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Paper

Children of separated parents: registered versus reported place of residence

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in the residential situation of children of separated parents from researchers, government agencies and the media. This is not surprising given the high rate of family dissolution and the observed changes in post-separation residential arrangements. According to both the registered addresses in the Personal Records Database (BRP; see Statistics Netherlands, 2016), and the survey New Families in the Netherlands (NFN; Statistics Netherlands, 2017), a large majority of children live with their mother after separation. Nonetheless, the share of parents opting for a shared residence arrangement after a divorce has increased in recent decades (Poortman & Van Gaalen, 2017). Shared residence means that children spend about equal time with both their parents. This arrangement was also stimulated by the 2009 law reforms in which parents were obliged to agree on a parenting plan and in which equal time arrangements were encouraged (Staatsblad, 2008). Based on the NFN survey data, 27% of parents opted for this arrangement for their children at the time of separation in 2010 (Statistics Netherlands, 2017).

This new trend in having shared custody and residence for children is difficult to capture from Statistics Netherlands' microdata, as a person can only be registered at one address in the BRP. A child's registered address after their parents' separation may thus not accurately reflect their actual address, as in reality many of these children will spend part of the time at their other parent's home. This complicates research on children's post-separation residence using micro-level register data of Statistics Netherlands.

This paper discusses the extent to which the registered address (either with the mother or the father) matches the child's actual residence as reported by one of the separated parents. To conduct this comparison, data from the BRP were compared with information from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) (see text box).

Data and target population

The NKPS study includes detailed information about the residential arrangements of children and offers a unique opportunity for a one-to-one comparison, as the respondents from the panel study can be matched to the BRP microdata using a unique identifier. For this research, the target population were children under 22 years of age whose legal parents were both alive and registered as living in the Netherlands, but did not live together. Information about these children was obtained through one of their parents, who participated in the first wave of the NKPS, which was conducted between October 2002 and January 2004, and answered survey questions about their children's residence. This parent is referred to as the anchor. The first wave of the NKPS was used for this study, not the most recent one, because of significant panel

attrition over time and the already small sample. Based on five survey questions (see appendix), the anchor's children were classified as being in one of the following six situations: i) living with the anchor parent, ii) living with the other parent, iii) living with neither parent, iv) shared residence, v) living mainly with the anchor parent and vi) living mainly with the other parent. In this paper, shared residence was operationalised as a child spending between 12 and 16 nights every four weeks at the other parent's home. In the BRP, children were either i) registered with the anchor parent, ii) registered with the other parent or iii) registered with neither parent. The total sample consists of 548 children from 323 survey respondents.

2. Potential sources of discrepancies

2.1 Reliability of children's registered address in the BRP

There are several situations in which the registered address gives an incorrect representation of the place of residence of a child of separated parents. One such example is shared residence or some other arrangement whereby a child spends half or a smaller part of the time at the address of the other parent. By definition, such arrangements cannot be captured in the BRP. Another instance is when parents are led by the optimization of tax benefits in choosing their children's address of registration. For example, for separated parents with two or more children, it can be fiscally beneficial to register one child with one parent, and the other child(ren) with the other parent, partly depending on the parents' labour and income situation. This way, both parents improve their odds of qualifying for certain single parent tax arrangements. Separated parents with one child can decide to register the child with the parent with the lowest income, regardless of whether this is also the child's main place of residence. This practice is even advised by the Dutch National Institute for Budget Information (Nibud). Finally, it also occurs that parents unintentionally do not update the registered address to the main place of residence. To sum up, the registered address of children of separated parents is not necessarily the address where they spend most of their time.

2.2 Reliability of parents' assessment of their own role in the NKPS

The reliability of the NKPS data can also be called into question. The perspective of only one of the two parents is obtained, which does not necessarily match the other parent's perspective, or the child's. Over the years, research has repeatedly found discrepancies between the perspectives of men and women, for example in the way they validate their contribution to the household (e.g. Kamo, 2000) or in the contact frequency of fathers with non-resident children (e.g. Kitterød & Lyngstad, 2014). It often appears that men overestimate their own role – or that women underestimate the role of men. We explore this in paragraph 3.4.

3. Results

3.1 Majority of children registered with mother

According to the BRP data, 76 percent of children with separated parents was registered with their mother at the time of the interview (between October 2002 and January 2004), whereas 15 percent of children was registered with their father and 9 percent was registered with neither parent.

3.2 Where children live and spend the night according to their parents

For comparison, we look at NKPS reports from the parents themselves about where their children live and spend the night, and how they have divided this with their ex-partner. The parents who participated in the NKPS survey have indicated for each child whether or not the child lives with them, if the child lives with them full-time or if the child also lives and spends the nights somewhere else, and if so, with whom and on average for how many nights per four weeks (see appendix). Table 3.2.1 shows the residential situation of children as reported by one of their parents. The survey questions allow for a more detailed picture of the residential situation of these children, compared to the BRP. The NKPS data confirm the outcomes of the BRP microdata: most of the children from separated parents live full-time with their mother. Table 3.2.1 further shows that a small share of children lives in shared residence, spending a part of the month with one parent and another part of the month with the other parent.

3.2.1 Residential situation: address as reported by one of the parents¹⁾

NKPS reports	
Lives with mother	69.5
Lives with father	11.5
Lives with neither parent	10.1
Shared residence	4.8
Lives mainly with mother	3.1
Lives mainly with father	1.0
Total	100.0

Source data: NKPS wave 1.

¹⁾ Children aged <22 whose legal parents are both alive and registered as living in the Netherlands, but not living together; one the parents participated in NKPS wave 1.

3.3 Registered address usually the main place of residence

A micro-level comparison shows that by and large the registered address matches the main place of residence, where they spend most time, as reported by the anchor parents in the NKPS (see Table 3.3.1). The vast majority of children who are registered with the anchor live full-time at this address, according to the anchor. Even if the child lives at the registered address only part of the time, it is usually the residence where the child is reported to spend most time, or the parents have a shared residence arrangement. It is an exception for the child to live full-time or mainly at an address other than the registered address, e.g. with the other parent or with neither parent. Furthermore, the majority of children who are registered with the other parent live full-time with the other parent, according to anchor.

3.3.1 Reported address, by address of registration - status as anchor parent (respondent) or other parent¹⁾

NKPS reports	BRP registration		
	registered with anchor	registered with other parent	registered with neither parent
Lives with anchor	89.0	2.0	3.8
Lives with other parent	1.5	82.4	5.7
Lives with neither parent	1.2	3.4	90.6
Shared residence	2.8	9.3	0.0
Lives mainly with anchor	5.5	1.5	0.0
Lives mainly with other parent	0.0	1.5	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source data: NKPS wave 1 and BRP.

¹⁾ Children aged <22 whose legal parents are both alive and registered as living in the Netherlands, but not living together; one the parents participated in NKPS wave 1.

3.4 Overestimation own role

It is somewhat more common for a child to be registered with the other parent while the anchor parent indicates that the child lives 50/50 with both of them (9.3%), than the other way around, so for a child to be registered with the anchor and this anchor reporting that the child spends an equal amount of time with the other parent (2.8%, see Table 3.3.1). This might suggest a proclivity to overestimate one's own role.

Male anchors seem somewhat more likely than female anchors to indicate that a child lives with the father full-time, mainly with the father or in shared residence (see Table 3.4.1). In accordance with the literature, this suggests that men overestimate their own role in their children's lives, or that women underestimate the men's role. Table 3.4.1 also shows evidence of a similar pattern among female anchors, who report more often than male anchors that a child lives with the mother or mainly with the mother. A chi-square test confirms that children's reported address is related to the sex of the reporting parent ($p=0.003$).

3.4.1 Reported address, by sex of the reporting parent¹⁾

	According to male anchor	According to female anchor
NKPS reports		
Lives with mother	64.5	72.4
Lives with father	13.1	10.5
Lives with neither parent	12.1	8.9
Shared residence	6.1	4.1
Lives mainly with mother	1.4	4.1
Lives mainly with father	2.8	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: NKPS wave 1.

¹⁾ Children aged <22 whose legal parents are both alive and registered as living in the Netherlands, but not living together; one the parents participated in NKPS wave 1.

3.5 Registration with father more often an incorrect representation of residential situation

Similar to Table 3.3.1, Table 3.5.1 shows a comparison between the registered and the reported address, but this time by the sex of the parent. Table 3.5.1 shows that it is more common among children registered with their father as compared to children registered with their mother that they live with the other parent or in shared residence, according to the NKPS reports. This suggests that child registrations with fathers might more often than registrations with mothers give an incomplete or incorrect image of children's residence.

3.5.1 Reported address, by address of registration - sex of the parent¹⁾

	BRP registration		
	registered with mother	registered with father	registered with neither parent
NKPS reports			
Lives with mother	89.0	8.1	5.7
Lives with father	0.4	73.3	3.8
Lives with neither parent	1.8	3.5	90.6
Shared residence	4.0	11.6	0.0
Lives mainly with mother	4.0	0.0	0.0
Lives mainly with father	0.7	3.5	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source data: NKPS wave 1 and BRP.

¹⁾ Children aged <22 whose legal parents are both alive and registered as living in the Netherlands, but not living together; one the parents participated in NKPS wave 1.

Among male anchors, the correspondence between the registered and reported address is somewhat lower than among female anchors (results not shown). When a child is registered with a male anchor, this father more frequently reports that the child does not live with him full-time, but lives part- or full-time with the mother. This does not occur as often among female anchors with registered children. However, the number of children who are registered with their father is low, making it difficult to compare these percentages.

4. Conclusion

In general, the registered address of children of separated parents is an adequate representation of where NKPS respondents report that children live and spend the night. Most children are reported to live full-time at their registered address, and for those who live with their other parent part of the time, their registered address is typically the address where they are reported to spend most nights.

Meanwhile, it became apparent that a registration with the father deviates more often from the NKPS reported residential situation than a registration with the mother. It is not uncommon for children who are registered with their father to actually live with their mother, or 50/50 with both parents. This should be taken into account when interpreting data about fathers who have children registered at their address.

Both the BRP addresses and the NKPS information can deviate from reality for various reasons (e.g. financial strategy, discrepancy in perception). In our analyses we find only limited evidence for such deviations. However one should realise that the observed differences and similarities are based on a rather small sample of children, whose parents separated before the 2009 law reforms.

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Appendix

The following NKPS survey questions were used:

X501 Does {name, description} live here in this household or not?

INT: If the respondent is not sure, the person is considered to live in the same household if he/she lives in the household for an average of at least two days a week.

1 in this household → question X701

2 elsewhere

X1001 Does this child live with your ex-partner?

1 yes

2 no, lives alone

3 in a home or institution

4 in a boarding school

5 in a foster home, host family

6 with his/her grandparent(s) on mother's side

7 with his/her grandparent(s) on father's side

8 with uncle/aunt on mother's side

9 with uncle/aunt on father's side

X701 Does {name, description} always form part of this household, or does he/she live elsewhere some of the time?

1 always lives here → question X1002

2 lives elsewhere some of the time

X703 How many nights on average does {name, description} sleep elsewhere?

– enter number of nights

X704 With whom does {name, description} live when he/she is not here?

1 with his/her father/mother

2 with his/her partner

3 with his/her grandparents

4 with other family members

5 with in-laws

6 with friends

7 in a welfare home, institution, prison, etc

8 in a boarding school

9 in a hotel, pension or lodging house

10 he/she lives alone

11 travelling

12 elsewhere

Explanation of symbols

Empty cell	Figure not applicable
.	Figure is unknown, insufficiently reliable or confidential
*	Provisional figure
**	Revised provisional figure
2018–2019	2018 to 2019 inclusive
2018/2019	Average for 2018 to 2019 inclusive
2018/'19	Crop year, financial year, school year, etc., beginning in 2018 and ending in 2019
2016/'17–2018/'19	Crop year, financial year, etc., 2016/'17 to 2018/'19 inclusive

Due to rounding, some totals may not correspond to the sum of the separate figures.

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