

Money in postdivorce families: Resource pooling and transfers to children

Aim

Gain insight in pooling of economic resources by partners and financial transfers to children in contemporary postdivorce families.

Theoretical background

Families are pivotal in redistributing income and wealth. Partners pool economic resources, and parents transfer resources to their offspring. In divorced families and stepfamilies, however, the redistribution of economic resources is less self-evident. Financial ties between former partners are usually dissolved after divorce, and stepfamilies lack the strong norms surrounding first-time married family life about pooling resources and parental support to children. Moreover, as family members are spread across different households after divorce and new families may be formed, perceptions of who belongs to the family become more diffuse.

This PhD project examines resource pooling and financial transfers to children in postdivorce families. Given the great diversity in postdivorce family structures, the focus will be on the role of postdivorce family diversity (Arat & Poortman, 2024). Theories depend on whether pooling or transfers to children are studied, but competition is a key mechanism for understanding both phenomena: obligations to a 'new' family may compete with obligations to the 'old' family and how these are balanced out depends on the type of family structure (e.g., whether one or both partners have children from a previous union). As norms on resource sharing are likely gendered given the (still) specialized roles of men and women in society (Van Houdt et al., 2020), the project will also pay special attention to differences by gender (such as differences between stepmother and stepfather families) and gendered associations between family diversity and economic transfers.

Research design

The project combines three data sources: (i) panel data 'New Families in the Netherlands (NFN)', (ii) administrative data, and (iii) newly collected qualitative data. NFN will be used to quantitatively study the extent to which partners in postdivorce families pool income and savings as well as regular financial transfers to children. Administrative data from Statistics Netherlands are used to study substantial financial transfers to children, while the qualitative study will offer in-depth understanding of the motives and considerations of repartnered individuals when pooling resources. Taken together, the project will provide insights into women's and children's economic resilience following divorce and shows whether family diversity constitutes a new driver of socioeconomic inequalities.

Literature

Arat, E., & Poortman, A. (2024). Financial contributions to stepchildren: The role of gender and postdivorce family structure. *Family Relations*, 73(2), 1362-1378.

Van Houdt, K., Kalmijn, M., & Ivanova, K. (2020). Stepparental support to adult children: The diverging roles of stepmothers and stepfathers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(2), 639-656.

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