

# Children's Relationships with Grandparents and Emotional Well-Being after Parental Divorce

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# Grandparents & grandchildren

Demographic changes of last decades

- Greater longevity & lower fertility
  - ➔ More room to grandchild-grandparent relationships
- Increase in divorce rates
  - ➔ Many grandparents and grandchildren confronted with divorce in parent-generation
  - ➔ Weaken intergenerational family ties?  
Or raise importance of grandparents for socialization and well-being of children?

# Grandparents & grandchildren

## Grandparenthood in Western societies:

- Norm of non-interference
  - Norm of being there
- ➔ Grandparents as latent network, 'Family National Guard', on sidelines but ready to march in in times of need

## Parental divorce:

- Often big and negative impact on children's emotional well-being
- Grandparents can be extra source of support and stability

Influence grandparents on emotional well-being grandchildren after parental divorce?

# Grandparents & children's well-being after parental divorce

## Existing evidence:

- Limited, often based on small or specific samples
- (Ruiz & Silverstein 2007, Lussier et al. 2002, Henderson et al. 2009)
- Positive relation between closeness or cohesion to grandparents & (some aspects of) grandchildren's psychological functioning or adjustment after parental divorce

# Grandparents & children's well-being after parental divorce

## Our study:

- Larger random sample
- Data: Divorce in Flanders
- Is the quality of relationships with grandparents associated to children's emotional well-being?
- Can relationships with grandparents moderate the impact of a parental divorce on the emotional well-being of children?

# Data

## Divorce in Flanders:

- 2009-2010
- Married and divorced anchor couples + common child
- Subsample of 1080 children
  - 10-25 years old
  - living with at least one parent
  - at least one grandparent alive
  - 1/3 married parents, 2/3 divorced parents
  - merged with data participating parent(s)

# Dependent variables

## Positive & negative indicator of emotional well-being:

- Self-esteem:
  - Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (10 items, 5-point scale, Cronbach's Alpha 0,86)
  - Principal Components Analysis
  - Component, higher score = higher level of self-esteem
- Depressive feelings
  - Only children 14+ (N=823)
  - CES-D8 (8 items, 5-point scale, Cronbach's Alpha 0,82)
  - Principal Components Analysis
  - Component, higher score = more depressive feelings

# Independent variables

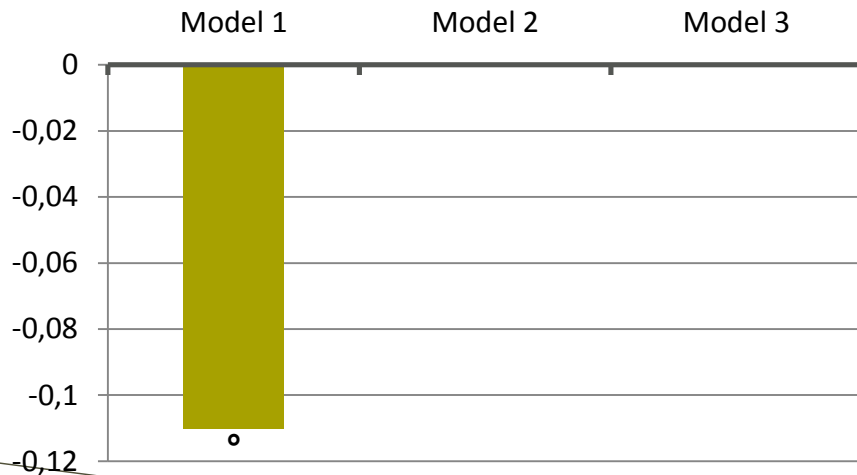
- Quality of relationship with grandparents: highest rating among available grandparents
  - Not good (no contact, very bad, bad, not bad not good)
  - Good = reference category
  - Very good
- Divorced parents vs. parents in first marriage
- Age & sex
- Quality of relationship with mother & with father (not good - good - very good)
- Educational level of highest educated parent (low - medium - high)
- Number of grandparents alive
- If parents divorced: residence arrangement, level of parental conflict, time since divorce



# Results linear regressions

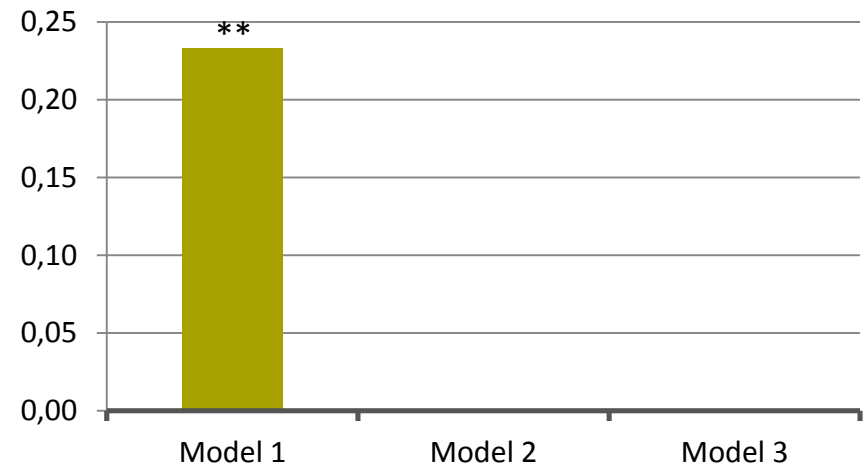
## Self-esteem

Coefficients of having divorced parents  
Reference=married parents



## Depressive feelings

Coefficients of having divorced parents

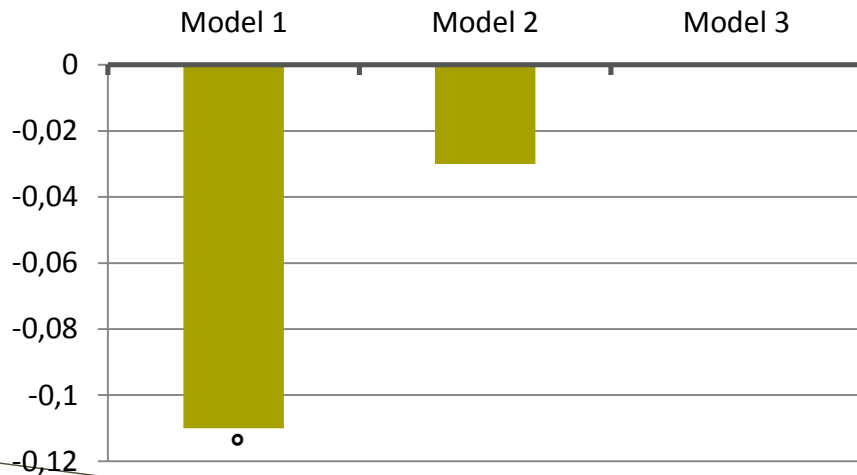


Model 1: controlled for age, sex & education parents

# Results linear regressions

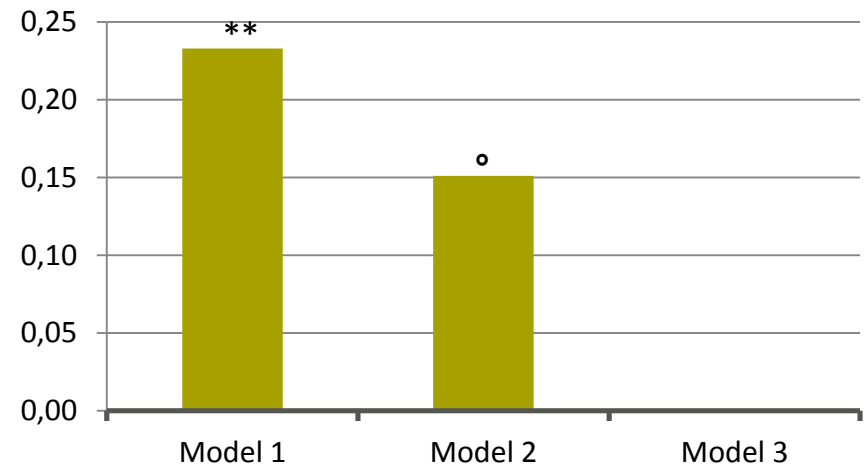
## Self-esteem

Coefficients of having divorced parents  
Reference=married parents



## Depressive feelings

Coefficients of having divorced parents

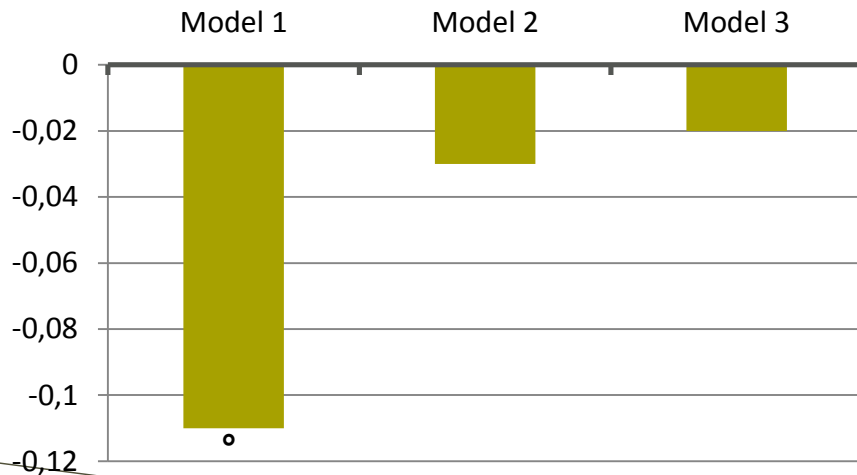


Model 1: controlled for age, sex & education parents  
Model 2: + relation with father & relation with mother

# Results linear regressions

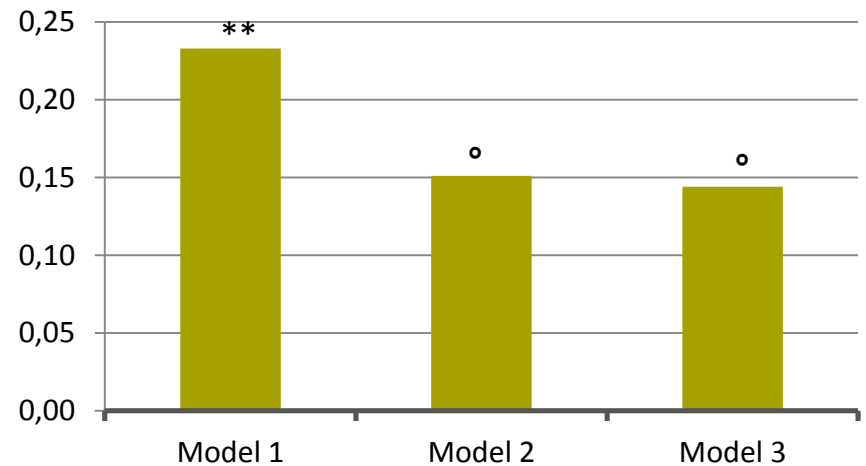
## Self-esteem

Coefficients of having divorced parents  
Reference=married parents



## Depressive feelings

Coefficients of having divorced parents



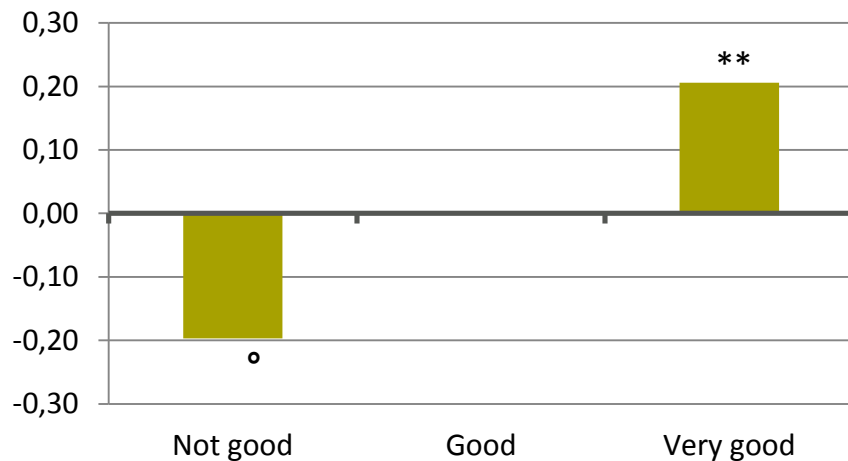
Model 1: controlled for age, sex & education parents  
Model 2: + relation with father & relation with mother  
Model 3: + relation with grandparents  
+ number grandparents

# Results linear regressions

## Self-esteem

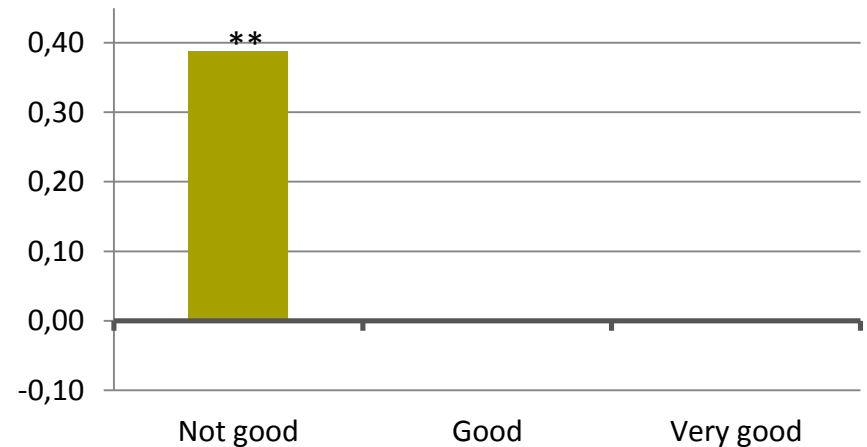
Quality of relation with grandparents

Reference=good



## Depressive feelings

Quality of relation with grandparents



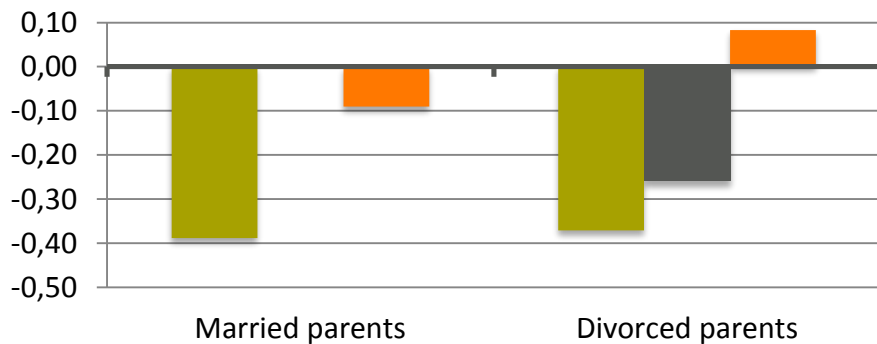
Model 3: controlled for parental divorce, age, sex & education parents  
+ relation with father & relation with mother  
+ relation with grandparents + number grandparents

# Results interaction parental divorce & relation with grandparents

## Self-esteem

Quality of relation with grandparents by parental divorce

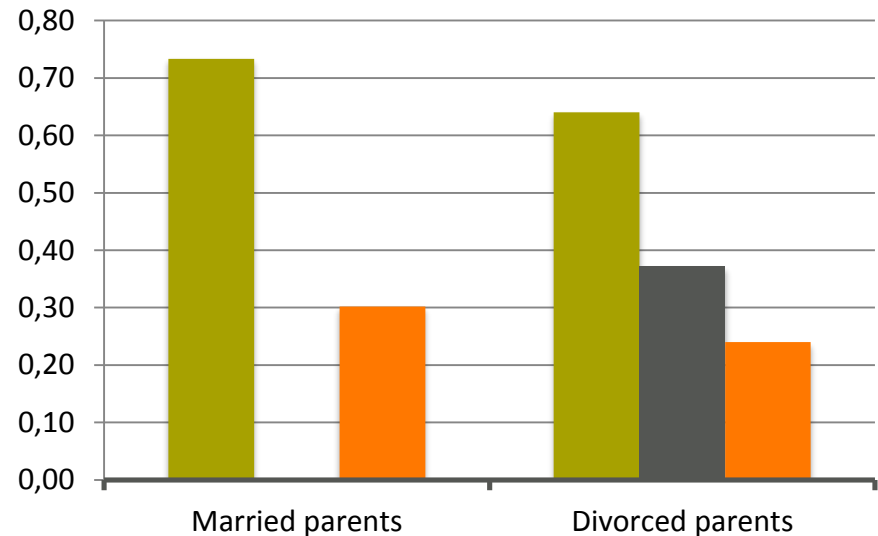
Reference=good relation \* married parents



■ Not good ■ Good ■ Very good

## Depressive feelings

Quality of relation with grandparents by parental divorce

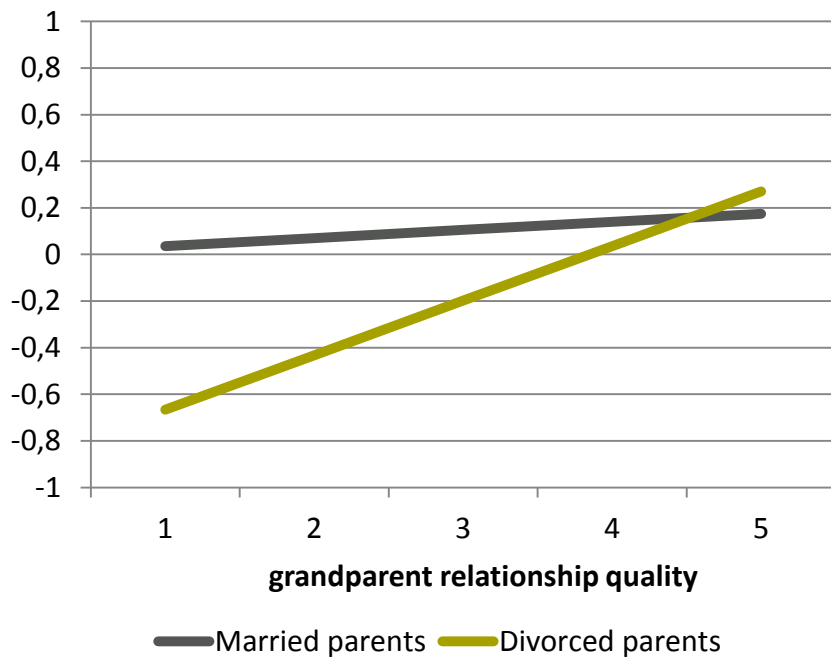


Model 4: controlled for age, sex & education parents + relation with father & relation with mother + relation with grandparents + number grandparents

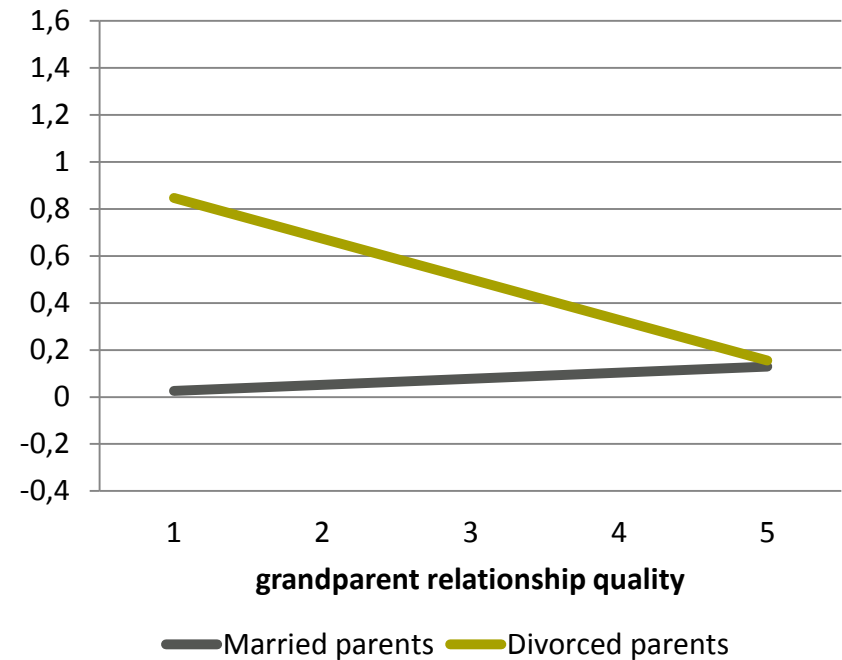
# Results interaction parental divorce & relations with grandparents

Alternative model 4: quality relationship with grandparents as continuous variable 1-5

Self-esteem



Depressive feelings



# Results linear regressions

## Model 5: only grandchildren with divorced parents

- Extra controls: residence arrangement, level of parental conflict, years since divorce
- Very good relationship with grandparent
  - > higher score of self-esteem
- No good relationship with grandparent
  - > higher score on depressive feelings
- Interaction tests with interactions
  - > when divorced parents have frequent conflict, stronger effect of having a very good relationship with grandparent on self-esteem

# Conclusions

- The quality of relationships with grandparents is positively associated to grandchildren's emotional well-being,
- Particularly when parents are divorced
  - ➔ Next to parents, grandparents can play a role in buffering the negative impact of a parental divorce on grandchildren's emotional well-being
  - ➔ Grandparents as 'family guards' or latent resource, activated in times of need