

Co-parental communication, decision-making and conflict between divorced parents

Differences according to the residential
arrangement of children and the presence of new
partners

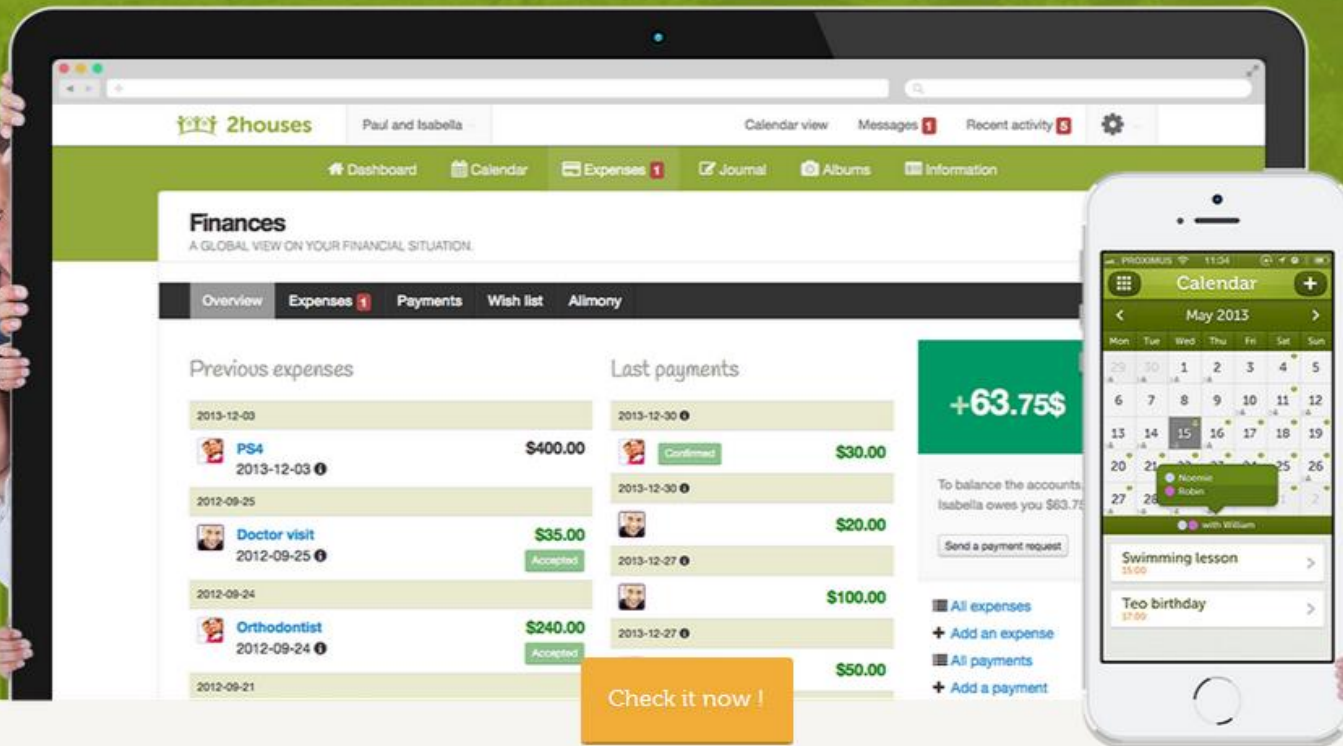
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Onderzoek - Vlaanderen



We're a co-parenting facilitator!



Finances
A GLOBAL VIEW ON YOUR FINANCIAL SITUATION.

Overview Expenses Payments Wish list Alimony

Previous expenses	Last payments
2013-12-03 PS4 2013-12-03 \$400.00	2013-12-30 Confirmed \$30.00
2012-09-25 Doctor visit 2012-09-25 \$35.00 Accepted	2013-12-30 \$20.00
2012-09-24 Orthodontist 2012-09-24 \$240.00 Accepted	2013-12-27 \$100.00
2012-09-21	2013-12-27 \$50.00

+63.75\$
To balance the accounts, Isabella owes you \$63.75.
Send a payment request

- All expenses
- + Add an expense
- All payments
- + Add a payment

Calendar
May 2013
Swimming lesson 15:00
Teo birthday 17:00

[Check it now !](#)

Our tools help separated and divorced parents to communicate, schedule, & better organize their children's activities.

 Download the mobile app!

“Former spouses need to establish new rules for parenting together in their new family structure, and at the same time they need to relinquish their roles as marital partners.”

(Madden-Derdich, Leonard & Christopher, 1999, p. 589)

Literature review: (co-)parenting patterns

- A large heterogeneity in the coparental relationship between ex-partners
- Maccoby, Depner & Mnookin (1990) distinguished four coparenting patterns in the 2nd year following divorce: *disengaged*, *conflicted*, *cooperative* and *mixed coparenting*
 - Similar distribution across mother, joint and father custody
- Amato, Kane & James (2011) identified three types of post-divorce parenting: *cooperative co-parenting*, *parallel parenting* and *single parenting*
 - Cooperative parenting: children less behaviour problems and closest tie with father

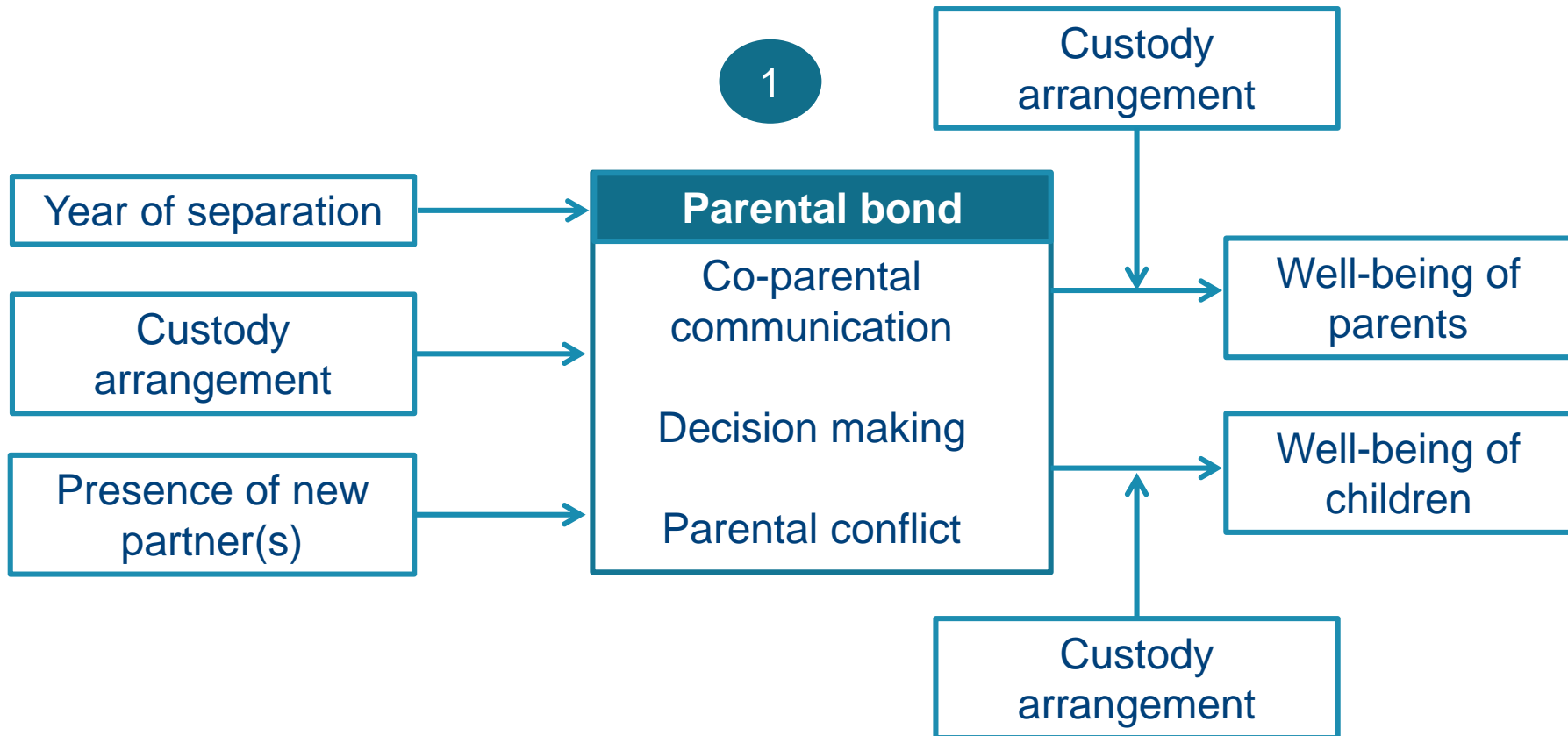
Literature review: challenges

- Coparenting by ex-spouses creates opportunities for conflict (e.g. Maccoby, Depner & Mnookin 1990)
 - Joint custody is often dissuaded in case of frequent and overt parental conflict (e.g. Fehlberg et al. 2011).
- Close contact between ex-partners may induce ambiguity within the post-divorce family system:
 - Ambiguity position (ex-)partner (e.g. Ganong, Coleman & Hans 2006; Schrodts 2011; Weston & Macklin 1990)
 - Multiple and ambiguous parental roles (e.g. Clingempeel, Levoli & Brand 1984; Crosbie-Burnett 1989; Ganong & Coleman 2004)

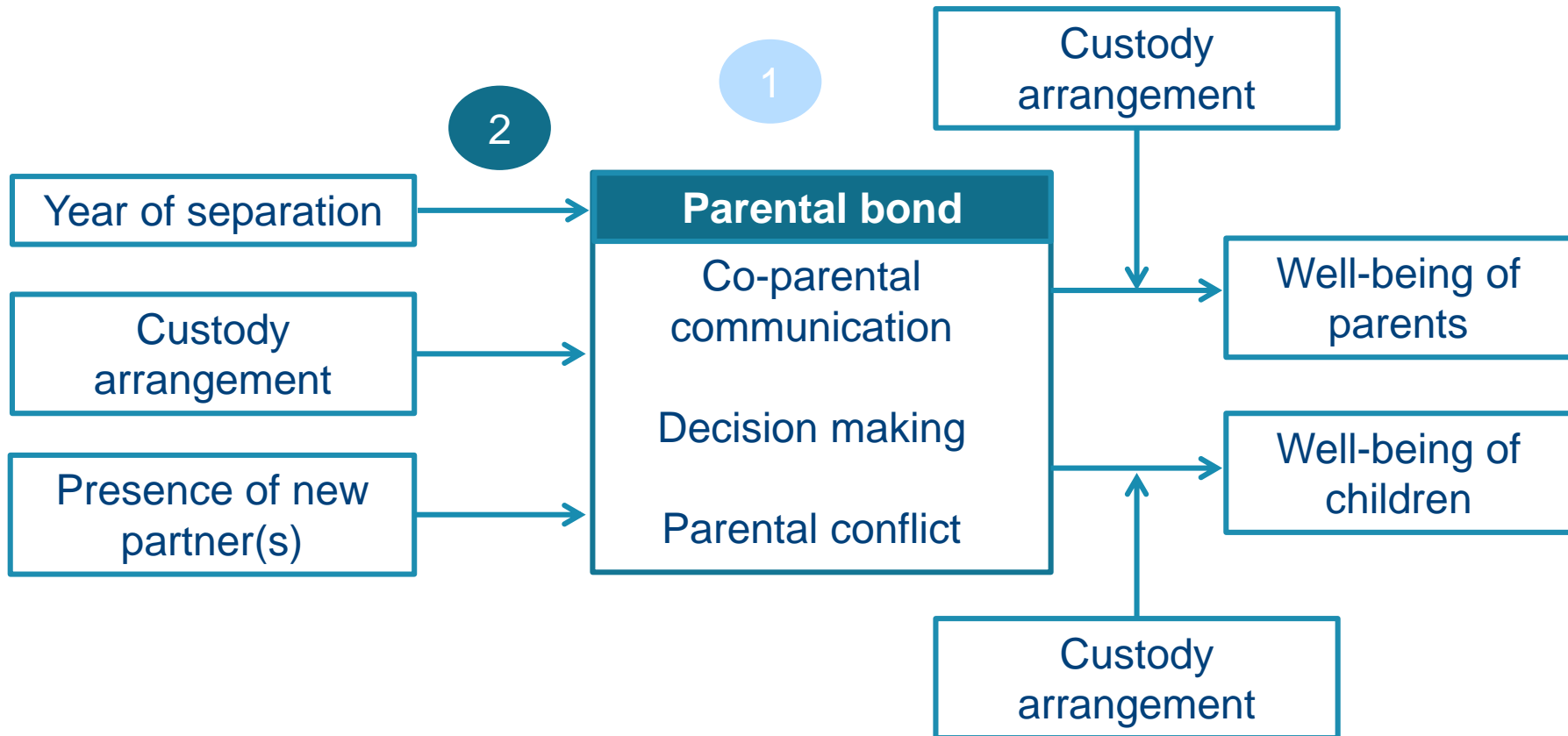
Literature review: stepparents

- Remarriage interferes with the quality of post-divorce (co-) parenting (Amato, Kane & James 2011; Christensen & Rettig 1995, Stephens 1996; Stewart 2010; Villeneuve-Gokalp 2000)
 - Involvement of non-residential parents
 - Less frequent co-parenting
- Involvement of a stepparent in parental issues creates opportunities for new conflicts between the ex-partners.

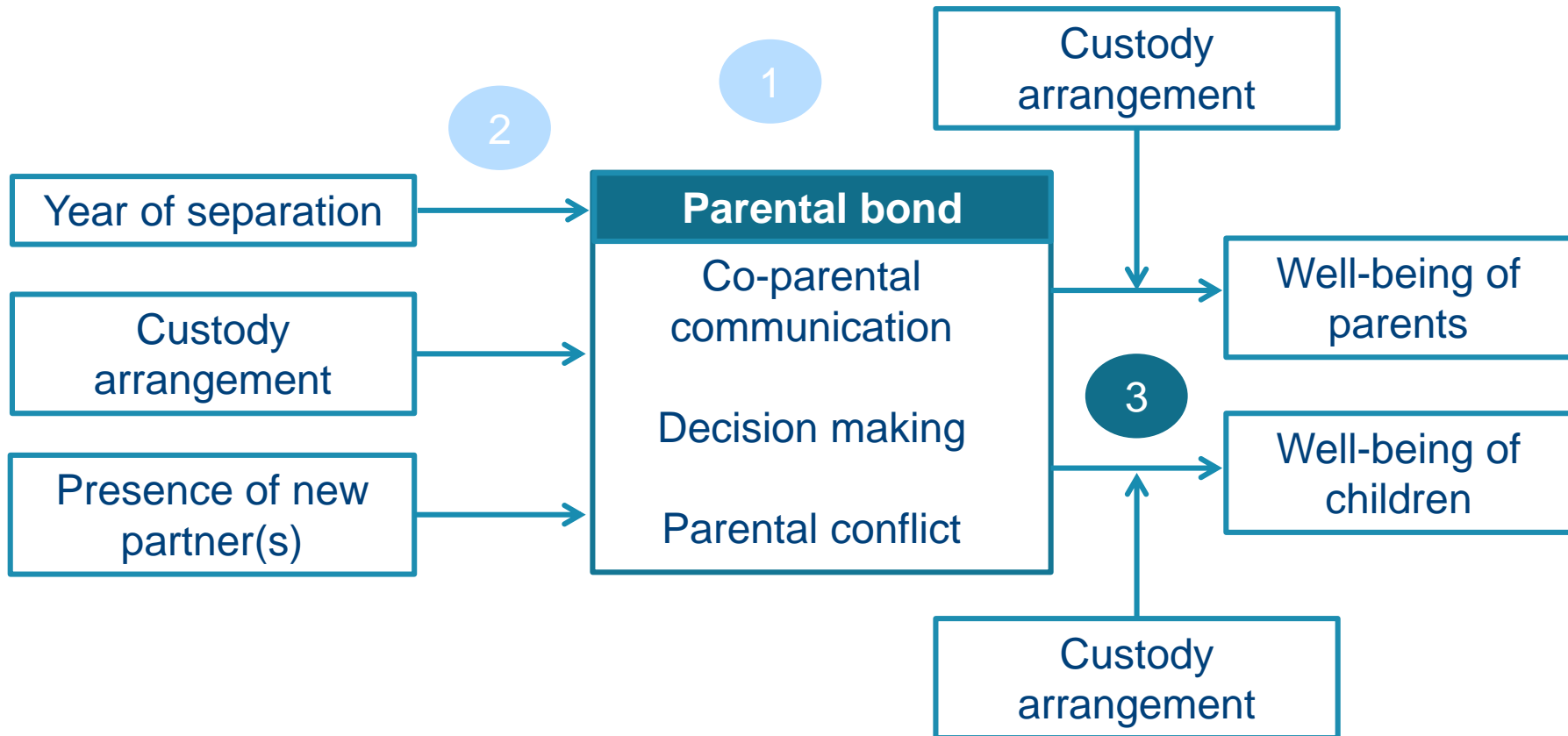
Present study



Present study

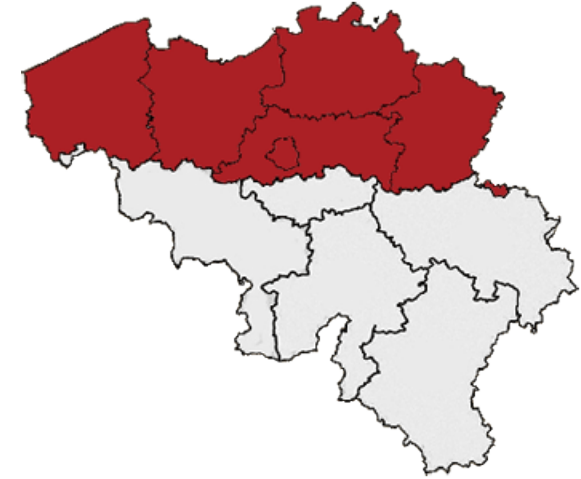


Present study



Flemisch context

- Few/no preceding studies on topic
- High divorce rates
- Belgian divorce law:
 - Before 1995: non-custodial parent no legal rights, except right to visit the child
 - 1995: Joint legal custody following parental divorce is legal standard, parental union remains following divorce
 - 2006: Joint physical custody following parental divorce is the first option to investigate in case parents have no agreement
- 1/3 of children from most recent divorce cohort lives part-time with mother and part-time with father (Sodermans, Vanassche & Matthijs 2013)
- Data availability: Divorce in Flanders





Data: Divorce in Flanders

- Sample of reference marriages from Belgian National Register: 1/3 intact, 2/3 dissolved at time of interview:
- Information on 1025 intact marriages and 3525 dissolved marriages
- Multi-method, multi-actor design: (ex-)partners, a common child, a parent of both partners, new partners
- In case the (ex-)partners of these marriages had at least one common child, a targetchild was selected on which all other actors received questions (e.g. custody arrangement)

Research sample

- Dissolved reference marriages
- With a selected target child between 5 and 17 years old
- Living with at least one of his/her parents

Response	n	%
Mother	221	21
Mother – child	195	19
Father	234	22
Father - child	50	5
Father – mother	173	16
Father – mother - child	178	17
Total (marriages)	1051	100

Sample characteristics

	%
Child is boy	51
Custody	
Mother (>66%)	55
Joint (33-66%)	36
Father (>66%)	6
Unkown/other	3
Highest educational level parents	
Low	8
Medium	45
High	47
Mother lives with new partner	37
Father lives with new partner	47

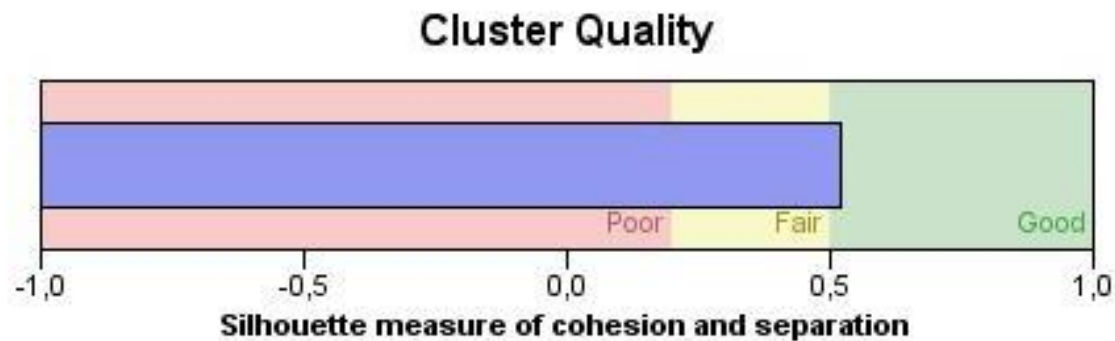
	Min	Max	Mean	S.D
Age of child	5	17	13	3.1
Year of seperation	1989	2009	2004	3.7

Descriptive findings (in %)

	TALKING WITH EX-PARTNER ABOUT CHILD	TAKING IMPORTANT DECISIONS WITH EX-PARTNER ABOUT CHILD	HAVING CONFLICTS WITH EX-PARTNER ABOUT CHILD
Never	25	37	61
Less than once a month	28	42	28
Once a month	17	12	6
More than once a month	17	7	3.5
Once a week	9	1	0.5
Once a week	3	0.5	0.5
Daily	1	0.5	0.5

Two-step cluster analysis: results (mean, S.D.)

	TALKING WITH EX-PARTNER ABOUT CHILD	TAKING IMPORTANT DECISIONS WITH EX-PARTNER ABOUT CHILD	HAVING CONFLICTS WITH EX-PARTNER ABOUT CHILD
Cluster 1	3.8 (0.5)	3.4 (0.5)	1.7 (0.9)
Cluster 2	2.0 (0.5)	1.8 (0.5)	2.0 (0.8)
Cluster 3	3.6 (0.5)	1.8 (0.4)	1.5 (0.6)
Cluster 4	1.2 (0.4)	1.0 (0.1)	1.0 (0.0)



Cluster frequencies

1 Joint decision-making: 20%



2 Co-parental conflict: 26%



3 Communicating: 25%



4 No coparental communication: 29%



Cluster profiles (multinomial log. regression, O.R.'s)

	DECISION- MAKING	CONFLICT	TALKING
Year of divorce (c)	1,1**	1,1***	1,1*
Girls (ref = boys)	0,7	1,0	0,7*
Age child (c)	0,8***	0,9*	0,8***
Custody	(ref = mother)	(ref = mother)	(ref = mother)
Joint custody	4,5***	2,3***	3,3***
Father custody	0,4°	0,6	0,9
Other custody	0,4	0,3*	0,2*
Stepfather (ref = no)	1,1	1,1	1,2
Stepmother (ref = no)	0,5**	0,8	0,8
Educational level parents	(ref = low)	(ref = low)	(ref = low)
Medium	1,0	1,2	0,9
High	1,2	0,9	1,5*

Ref = no coparental communication

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, °p<.10

Child outcomes (OLS regressions, beta coef)

MOTHER CUSTODY

	Relation with father (n=190)	Relation with mother (n=217)	Life satisfaction child (n=219)
Cluster	No communication = ref		
Decision-making	0,82 (0,21) ^{***}	-0,24 (0,14) [°]	0,02 (0,37)
Conflict	0,41 (0,18) [*]	-0,11 (0,12)	-0,10 (0,27)
Talking	0,70 (0,17) ^{***}	-0,16 (0,13)	0,18 (0,31)

JOINT CUSTODY

	Relation with father (n=158)	Relation with mother (n=161)	Life satisfaction child (n=161)
Cluster	No communication = ref		
Decision-making	0,52 (0,23) [*]	0,07 (0,20)	0,80 (0,45) [°]
Conflict	0,34 (0,24)	0,17 (0,22)	0,53 (0,48)
Talking	0,38 (0,23) [°]	0,22 (0,20)	0,86 (0,45) [*]

Controlled for year of separation, age and sex of child, and highest educational level parents

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, °p<.10

Parent's outcomes (OLS regressions, beta coef)

MOTHERS

FATHERS

	Relation with child (n=722)	Life satisfaction mother (n=731)	Relation with child (n=581) ¹	Life satisfaction (n=610)
Cluster	No communication = ref		No communication = ref	
Decision-making	0,05 (0,07)	-0,41 (0,19)*	0,42 (0,09)***	0,01 (0,23)
Conflict	-0,04 (0,06)	-0,61 (0,18)***	0,24 (0,09)**	0,10 (0,21)
Talking	0,07 (0,07)	-0,42 (0,18)*	0,35 (0,09)***	-0,19 (0,22)

Controlled for age of parent, year of separation, custody arrangement of child, educational level of parent, presence of new partner, ex-partner has new partner

¹More pronounced in mother custody compared to joint custody

Discussion: types

- 28% of ex-parents with minor child(ren) never talks with each other about their child(ren)
 - Versus joint legal custody as legal standard since 1995
 - 98% of sample separated after 1995
- Trend: increasing number of divorced parents maintain a parental bond with their ex-partner
 - **Caution:** also longer duration since divorce (!)
- Strong parental bond between ex-partners is more common in case of joint custody
 - Selection and causation?

Discussion: outcomes

- Co-parental communication and decision-making between ex-partners also implies co-parental conflict
 - But some co-parental conflict may still be better than no co-parental communication at all
- Joint custody with no parental communication or frequent co-parental conflict is less beneficial for child wellbeing

Discussion: gender specific findings

- A new partner of father (stepmother) restricts the parental bond between the ex-partners, while a new partner of mother (stepfather) does not
- Strong parental bond beneficial for father-child relationship, also within joint custody!
- Only mothers experience 'difficulties' with maintaining a parental bond with ex-partner, especially in case of frequent co-parental conflict

Thanks for your attention!