

# **Socioeconomic background and children's shared residence in Sweden**

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## **Background**

The emergent complexity of family forms in the past decades has got a lot of attention within the social sciences. This paper analyses socioeconomic differentials in children's likelihood of having shared residence after parental union dissolution, one aspect of this complexity that has so far largely been overlooked. The reason is likely the fact that it still is relatively rare in most countries. One should however not confuse shared residence with shared custody. Whereas shared custody only gives both parents the legal right to decisions about the child's upbringing, shared residence means that the child actually *lives* equal, or near equal, time in with both parents, alternating between separate households. This makes it possible for both parents to engage in active parenting and giving children the possibility to have ongoing contact with both parents after separation.

Sweden is often considered a fore-runner in development of new family life patterns that are soon followed by other industrialized countries. Whereas shared legal custody is the default option after union dissolution, shared residence for children is a relatively new phenomenon in Sweden. But it is becoming increasingly common. This phenomenon has however not yet been widely analyzed.

Lundström (2009) has shown that shared residence have increased among children with separated parents in Sweden. During the mid-1980s, it was still very rare phenomenon with only one percent of children with separated parents living with both of the parents after union disruption. Since then, the phenomenon has become much more common with more than a quarter of children whose parents separated having shared residence in 2007.

McLanahan (2004) argues that children in America and elsewhere are facing what she calls diverging destinies as a result of the second demographic transition. Children of higher socioeconomic backgrounds are gaining and those of lower socioeconomic backgrounds are losing parental resources as a result of differing patterns of divorce, separation and non-union births. Shared living arrangements increases the child's access to both parents after a union dissolution compared to living in a single parent household and could potentially mitigate some of the loss of resources.

Kitterød and Lyngstad (2012) who have studied shared residence in Norway have found that shared residence is most common where the parents lived together a long time before the separation. It is however less common in Norway than in Sweden as it is only 11 percent of parents who live alone who have children living with them every other weeks in Norway. In Norway, there is a correlation between shared residence and parents' socioeconomic status. The likelihood of shared residence is greater in the Norwegian families where the father has a high income and the mother is highly educated. Children with shared residence after separation are also more common when the father has a higher education than the mother. Kitterød and Lyngstad found no correlation between child's age or sex and shared residence.

## **Data and methods**

This paper studies shared residence in Sweden where the phenomenon is more common than in neighboring Norway. The analysis is cross-sectional using logistic regression analysis and it is based on the Swedish Level of Living Study (LNU) from 2000 and Surveys of Living Conditions (ULF) from 2001, 2002 and 2003. These are nationally representative rich containing a wide variety of relevant control variables such as parental labor market- and occupational status, educational attainment, income, housing status etc.

The dependent variable is a dummy for shared residence meaning; a child living equal amount of time in the household of the mother and the father after a parental union disruption. The main independent variables are three different socioeconomic measures; parent's occupational class, educational attainment and income category. These are assumed to influence the likelihood of shared residence in different ways. Parents with higher income are more able to keep large enough apartments, two sets of clothes, toys etc. High income is related to a higher likelihood of adapting new lifestyles and family forms such as shared residence and finally different occupational categories have different possibilities to plan work in order to accommodate a child every second week.

## **Preliminary results**

The tentative results show an increased likelihood of shared residence for children of respondents in non-manual occupations compared to children of manual workers after controlling for income and education (Table 1 ). When analyzing men and women separately (not in table) we see that children of both upper and middle/low non-manual workers have an increased likelihood of shared residential living whereas we see no occupational differences in the likelihood of shared residence for children living with a male respondent.

The results show no educational or income differences after controlling for occupational category and other characteristics. We can however see an interesting geographical pattern with shared residence being more common in the Stockholm metropolitan area compared to other major cities and rest of the country.

The results suggest a diverging destinies scenario with children of manual working and low income parents being less likely to have shared residence after family dissolution and thus less access to parental resources.

**Table 1. Children's likelihood of living with shared residence. All respondents.**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Odds ratio</b>
<b>Occupation</b>	
Upper non-manual	2.20***
Middle/ low non-manual	1.27
Manual	ref
Self-employed/ farmer	0.94
<b>Wage</b>	
Lowest 25 %	0.75
Medium 50 %	ref.
Highest 25 %	1.28
<b>Parent's education</b>	
Lower-secondary	0.76
Upper secondary	ref.
Tertiary	0.83
<b>Child's age</b>	
0-3	ref
4-6	1.81*
7-11	1.42
12-15	1.07
16-18	0.74
<b>Parent's age</b>	
<35	ref
36-40	1.05
41-45	1.00
>45	0.65**
<b>Child's sex</b>	
Boy	ref
Girl	0.88
<b>Parent's sex</b>	
Male	ref
Female	0.22***
<b>Stepfamily</b>	
Yes	ref
No	0.89
<b>Non-European</b>	
No	ref
Yes	0.29**
<b>Number of children</b>	
1	ref
2	1.74***
3	1.76**
>3	1.28
<b>Place of residence</b>	
Stockholm	ref

Gothenburg	0.51**
Malmö	0.40**
Other	0.71**

\*p<0,1 \*\*p<0,05 \*\*\*p<0,01

## **References:**

Kitterød, Ragni H. and Jan Lyngstad (2012). Untraditional caring arrangements among parents living apart – The case of Norway. *Demographic Research* 27:5, pp. 121-152.

Lundström, Karin (2009) Växelvis boende ökar bland skilsmässobarn. *Välfärd* 4, pp. 3-5.

McLanahan, Sara (2004). Diverging destinies – How children are faring under the second demographic transition. *Demography* 41:4, pp. 607-627.