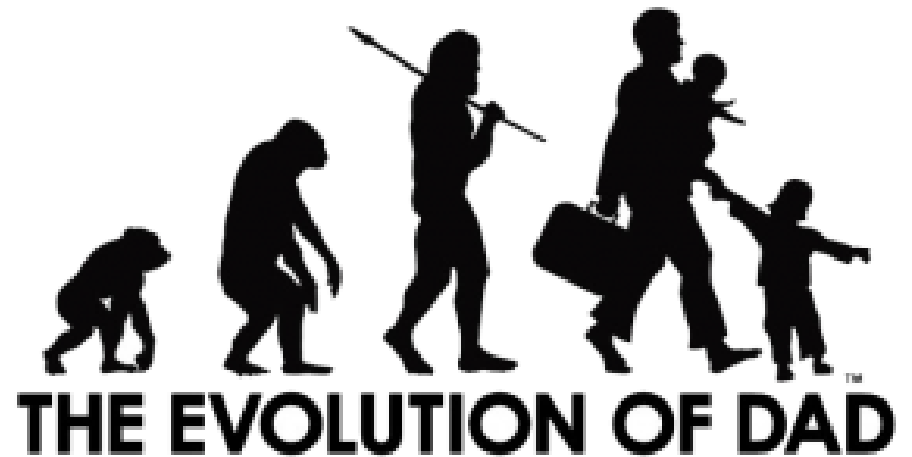


# Alternating residence after parental separation: the well- being of parents and children

Sofie Vanassche, Koen Matthijs & An Katrien  
Sodermans

# Context

- 1995: joint exercise of parental responsibilities
- 2006: equally divided alternating residence must first be considered by the judge if either parent makes a request for this arrangement
- Shifting gender roles



# Two datasources



- Scheiding in Vlaanderen / Divorce in Flanders:
  - Sample of 1/3 intact & 2/3 dissolved marriages from which both (ex-) partners, a common child, a parent of each partner & new partners were questioned (2008-2010).
  - [www.scheidinginvlaanderen.be](http://www.scheidinginvlaanderen.be)
- Leuvens Adolescenten en Gezinnenonderzoek / Leuvens Adolescents and Family Study:
  - Yearly survey among pupils within secondary schools
  - Six rounds completed (2006-2014)
  - [www.kuleuven.be/lago](http://www.kuleuven.be/lago)





The custody arrangement of children after parental separation

# Evolution of shared residence in Flanders by year of separation (in %)

	Total	1990-1995	1996-1999	2000-2005	2006-2011
Mother custody	67,0	78,9	79,7	63,5	57,2
Shared residence	24,5	11,3	14,9	27,6	32,9
Father custody	8,5	9,9	5,5	8,9	9,9

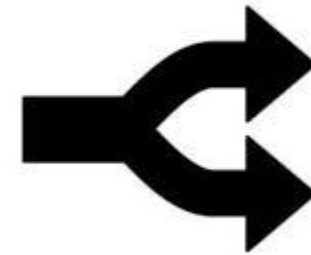
# With who do children live after separation?

	%	Type
Always with mother	29,7	67% Mother custody
Almost always with mother (a.o. weekend with father)	37,3	
Unequally divided, shared residence, more with mother	5,9	24,5% Shared residence
<b>Equally divided shared residence (50-50)</b>	16,6	
Unequally divided shared residence, more with father	2,1	
Almost always with father (a.o. weekend with mother)	3,9	8,5% Father custody
Always with father	4,6	

# Shifts in the profile of families in shared residence

(compared to period before 1995)

- Social diffusion
  - Shifted normative climate
  - Legislative changes
- Bifurcation: co-parenting versus parallel parenting
  - Suggested by judge
  - Perceived as a parental right
  - Terminology “equal shared custody”



# Policy issues



- Legal preference for joint custody versus self-selection
- Little flexibility in the concrete elaboration of shared residence
  - Structural constraints
- Social inequalities







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# Co-parenting

**Table 1 Frequency of co-parental communication and decision-making between former partners with a minor child (%)**

	Talking with former partner about the focal child	Taking important decisions with former partner about focal child
Never	25	37
Less than once a month	28	43
Once a month	17	12
More than once a month	17	7
Once a week	9	1
More than once a week	3	0.5
Daily	1	0.5
N	1051	1051

Source: Divorce in Flanders (2011), own calculations

# Co-parenting by ex-partners

**Joint decision-making: 20%**



**Frequent co-parental conflict: 26%**



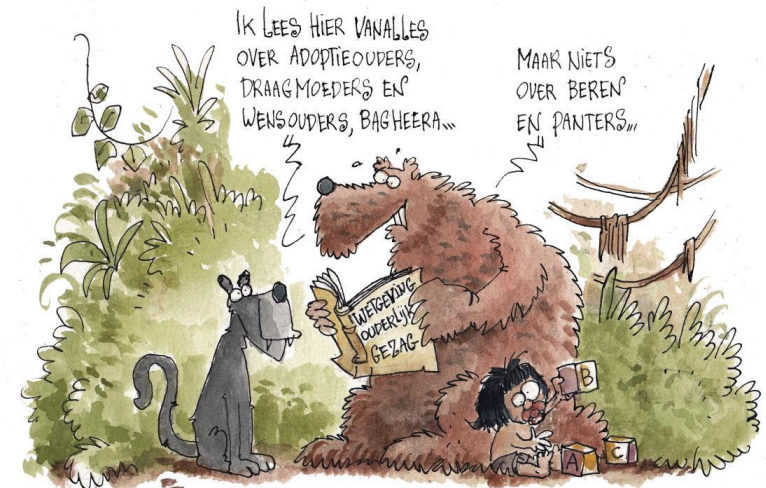
**Co-parental communication: 25%**



**No co-parental communication: 29%**

# Parental roles after separation

- Divorced parents establish parental union with new partner
  - Strong association with quality of new partner relationship
  - No competition with parental union with ex-partner
- Often there is a good relation between children and stepparents that are living together



# Policy issues

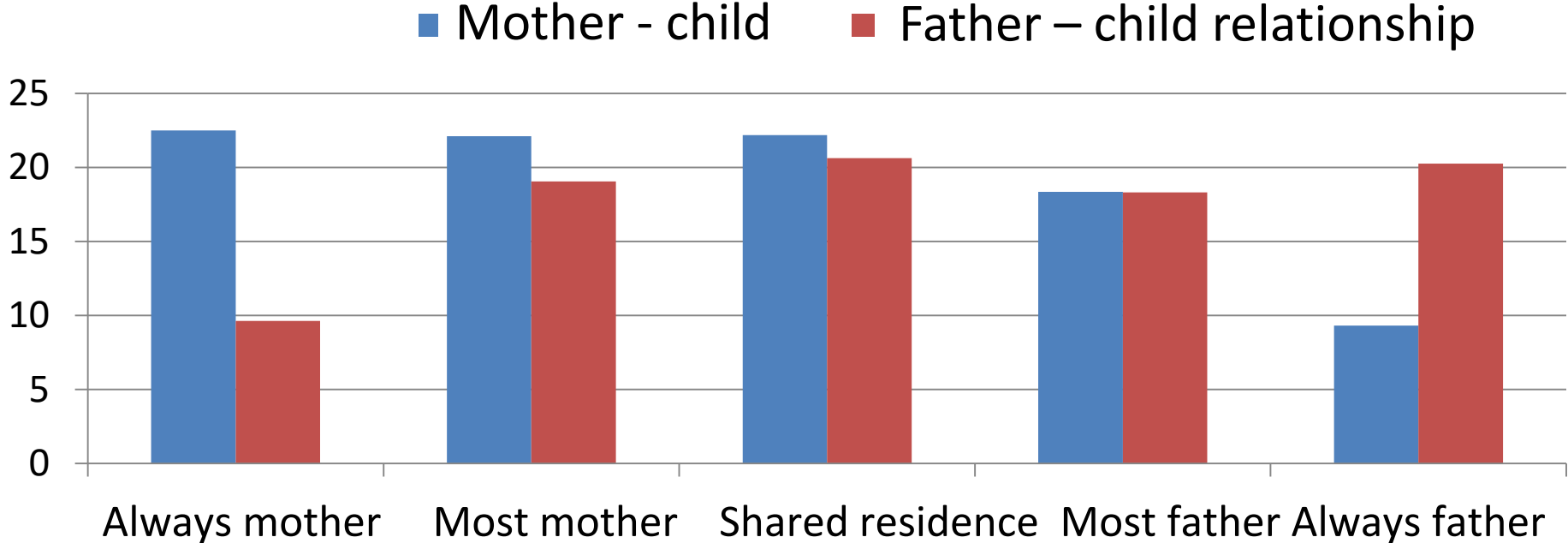
- Norm versus daily practice
  - Co-parenting after separation
  - Stepparenthood
- What strategies to parents develop?
- Which support do parents need?
  - Most initiatives targeted towards agreement at time of separation





The well-being of parents and children after separation

# The parent-child relationship after separation



# Shared residence and child well-being

- Few differences in the well-being of children between custody arrangements
- Continuity versus stability hypothesis
  - Continuity in parent-child bond and resources
  - Frequent transitions, diverging parenting contexts social network under pressure





# Shared residence: risk factors

- Frequent parental conflict: opportunities & exposure
  - ‘Solution’: transition via school
- No communication between parents
- No good relationship between child and a parent
- Personality child: fixed pattern, clear rules



# Shared residence & the well-being of mothers

Compared to full-time residential mothers, co-mothers:

- Have an equally good relationship with their children,
- More easily start a new partner relationship,
- Have a more active social life,
- Are equally happy.



# Shared residence & the well-being of fathers

Compared to non-residential fathers, co-fathers:

- Have a better relationship with their children,
- Are as likely to start a new partner relationship,
- Have a similar social life,
- Are equally happy.



# Discussion

- Shared residence has clear advantages for mothers, fathers and children
  - Not only a rigid 50-50 division
  - Importance of hearing children's voices
- Awareness
  - Risk factors
  - Social inequalities





Questions?