

## ARTICLE

# More than two parents?

## Divorced and separated parents' attitudes toward parental responsibility and legal parenthood of stepparents in the Netherlands

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### 1. Introduction

An increasing number of children in the Netherlands grow up with stepparents (Van Gaalen & Van Roon, 2020), with the main driving force being the rise in divorce and separation over the past decades. As many people enter a new relationship after divorce or separation, more and more children are confronted with a stepparent – that is, the new partner of (one of) their parents. Although relationships with biological parents are overall stronger, stepparents can play an important role in children's lives (Ganong & Coleman, 2017). So far, stepparents have had, however, few rights in the Dutch legal system (Antokolskaia, 2015; Draaisma, 2001). An ongoing public and political issue is whether stepparents – or more generally, parental figures other than the legal parents – should have more legal rights. Illustrative in this respect are the report and advices of the Dutch Government Committee on the Reassessment of Parenthood (in Dutch: *Staatscommissie Herijking Ouderschap*) about legal parenthood and parental responsibility for more than two parental figures (*Staatscommissie Herijking Ouderschap*, 2016) and a recent legislative proposal allowing partial parental responsibility for people who play an important role in the daily upbringing of children, such as stepparents (*Kamerstukken II 2018/19*, 33836, 45). Little is known about how people actually think about more legal rights for stepparents. This study applies a social science perspective and empirically assesses how divorced and separated parents think about legal rights for stepparents. The focus is on attitudes towards two types of legal rights: (a) legal parenthood (in Dutch: *juridisch ouderschap*, i.e. being the parent for the law, see e.g. Chapter 6 in the report of the *Staatscommissie Herijking Ouderschap*, 2016); and (b) parental responsibility (in Dutch: *ouderlijk gezag*, i.e. having legal responsibility for a minor child, see e.g. Chapter 7 in the report of the *Staatscommissie Herijking Ouderschap*, 2016).

Favourable attitudes toward more legal rights for stepparents may not be self-evident. Contrary to, for instance, two women and two men who decide to have and raise children together – also called an 'intentional' multiparent family (Antokolskaia et al., 2014) – stepfamilies are 'not intentional' as the multiple parental figures did not jointly decide on having children together (Antokolskaia et

al., 2014; Cammu, 2019a). Parenting across different households may be difficult to begin with and the divorced parents may not be on good terms with each other. New partners (*i.e.*, stepparents) may further complicate postdivorce family relationships. As nowadays both divorced parents are likely to be involved in the child's life (Meyer, Cancian & Cook, 2017; Poortman & Van Gaalen, 2017), stepparents may find it difficult to navigate their role in the context of these existing biological relationships (Sweeney, 2010). Granting legal rights to stepparents may thus not always find support as these may put more pressure on already complex family situations.

So far, there has been little empirical research quantifying the extent of support for stepparent rights. As far as I am aware, there is only one previous Dutch study from 2014 (Antokolskaia et al., 2014). This study among about 300 stepfamily members (N = 302) asked resident parents with a new partner, resident stepparents and nonresident parents whose ex-partner had a new partner who should have parental responsibility. Almost half of resident parents and stepparents (45% and 49%, respectively) thought that the stepparent should have parental responsibility, with most (step)parents – little over a third – in favour of sharing parental responsibility with their current partner (thus, the resident parent or stepparent). Only about one in ten preferred parental responsibility for all parental figures (*i.e.*, the stepparent, resident parent and nonresident parent jointly). Support for parental responsibility of the resident stepparent was much lower among the nonresident parents, about 7%, and mostly in the form of parental responsibility for all parental figures (5%). These figures are already somewhat older and based on relatively small-scale data with an overrepresentation of cases with sole parental responsibility after divorce (Antokolskaia et al., 2014). Moreover, support for legal parenthood and partial parental responsibility were not inquired, yet partial parental responsibility in particular is now relevant in light of the legislative proposal allowing for partial parental responsibility. Furthermore, little is known about who is more in favour of stepparent rights. The observed differences in Antokolskaia et al. (2014) in support for parental responsibility of stepparents between resident (step)parents and nonresident parents already suggest that support levels depend on people's own (step)family situation, *e.g.* on whether the stepparent is the new partner of one's ex-partner or one's own new partner.

In this study, I address the following questions: (i) what are divorced and separated parents' attitudes toward parental responsibility and legal parenthood of stepparents?; and (ii) to what extent are these attitudes shaped by parents' own (step)family situation? The study contributes to the limited body of previous research by studying a broader range of legal rights and examining support for these rights across a wider array of (step)family situations than prior research has done. Most notably, this study also examines support for stepparents acquiring partial parental responsibility and studies (step)family variations in support on the basis of: (1) child residence, (2) whether the respondent or (3) his/her ex-partner has a new partner and if so, the type of relationship, (4) whether the respondent has (resident) stepchildren and (5) whether the respondent or (6) his/her ex-partner

has children with a new partner. The study furthermore contributes to previous knowledge by looking at the role of conflict: (iii) are the associations with people's own (step)family situation stronger in case of higher conflict? As will be elaborated below, differences in support for stepparents' rights across (step)family types may become more pronounced in case of high conflict. Conflict is interesting to study because it is often mentioned as being one of the main potential problems in case of assigning more rights in multiparent families, especially in 'not intentional' families: more parental figures with decision-making rights might increase the potential for conflict and this may especially be the case when there is already (some) conflict (*Staatscommissie Herijking Ouderschap*, 2016, p. 445). A final contribution is that recent and large-scale data are used to examine support for stepparent rights. I use the third wave of the New Families in the Netherlands (NFN) survey, collected in 2020 (Poortman, Brons, Koster & Bosma, 2021).<sup>1</sup> NFN wave 3 is a recent survey held among divorced parents and separated parents (*i.e.*, after a cohabitation or registered partnership). This wave includes unique questions about attitudes toward stepparents' legal rights as well as detailed questions about the (step)family situation of both the respondent and his/her ex-partner. Note that the focus is on the parents' and not the child(ren)'s perspective, as children were not questioned. The NFN also includes over 3,000 respondents, allowing for differentiation among a wide range of (step)family situations.

## 2. Support for stepparent rights across stepfamily situations

Why would support for granting parental rights to stepparents differ depending on one's own (step)family situation? Studies on attitudes and obligations show that personal experiences are reflected in people's attitudes (*e.g.*, Aquilino, 2005). In case of attitudes toward stepparent rights, there may first be *practical* reasons in certain family situations to support parental rights of stepparents. Legal parenthood or parental responsibility may offer more clarity about the roles of different parental figures and – especially in case of parental responsibility – may make it easier for stepparents to parent their stepchild(ren), for example by having the legal right to engage in daily decisions about the child(ren). When a person is in a family situation where such practical needs for more rights are more than hypothetical, support for granting legal rights to stepparents will likely be higher. Second, there may be *relational* or *emotional* reasons to be more or less in favour of legal rights for stepparents. Such rights may have a symbolic meaning for people or may be seen as a form of legitimizing a person's (parenting) role. Legal rights thus have the potential to reinforce and legitimize certain family situations or to put strain on complex post-divorce family situations.

1 The NFN data were collected by Utrecht University in collaboration with Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and were funded by grant 480-10-015 from the Medium Investments Fund of the Dutch Research Council (NWO), Utrecht University and (in case of wave 3) by grant VI.C.181.024 of the Innovational Research Incentives Vici Scheme of NWO. This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Utrecht University (FETC20-311).

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Regarding the role of *child residence*, practical reasons may be particularly important. Resident parents, with whom the child(ren) resides most of the time, are more likely to come across parenting difficulties. Because these parents are primarily responsible for the daily upbringing of the child(ren) and typically have a greater say in decisionmaking than nonresident or shared resident parents (Castillo, Welch & Sarver, 2011; Koster, Poortman, Van der Lippe & Kleingeld, 2021), they are more likely to encounter or be aware of practical issues associated with multiparent childrearing and may thus be more in favour of granting parental rights to stepparents. This may be particularly the case when resident parents themselves have a new partner, because this partner is probably involved in childrearing and people are thus even more likely to come across practical difficulties for stepparents. Resident parents may then also favour stepparent rights as a way to legitimize and acknowledge their new partner's role in the upbringing of the child(ren).

Also *people's relationship status and that of their ex-partner* may shape their support for stepparents' legal rights. Stepparenting and the associated difficulties are more of a reality for people with a new partner than for single people. The practicalities of stepparenting are even more salient when people are living (married or unmarried) with their partner, because of the stepparent's greater role in the child's upbringing. Some research also shows that married stepparents are more involved in childrearing than cohabiting stepparents (Arat, Poortman & Van der Lippe, 2021; Ivanova, 2017) suggesting the highest support among remarried people. Greater support among those with a new partner is also expected for emotional reasons: legal rights may be seen as a way to symbolically reinforce the new union, to signal commitment to the new union – a mechanism that has sometimes also been found to be a reason for having shared children with the new partner (Vanassche, Corijn, Matthijs & Swicegood, 2015). Such emotional reasons furthermore predict that people who are married to their new partner are more likely to be in favour of stepparent rights than those who are cohabiting or in a LAT relationship, because interpersonal commitment is the highest in marriage (Stanley, Whitton & Markman, 2004; Wiik, Bernhardt, & Noack, 2009). An alternative argumentation is that a new partner may complicate the relationship with the ex-partner and possibly the children. People with a new partner may therefore be reluctant to further complicate family relationships, translating into less favourable attitudes toward parental rights of stepparents. Most of the arguments above, however, predict higher support among partnered people; a prediction bolstered by studies suggesting that loyalties toward the new partner and family may be stronger than those toward the ex-partner and old family (Fang, Poortman & Van der Lippe, 2022; Manning & Smock, 2000).

Although practical problems and the need for clarity about a stepparent's role may also be more hard felt when the ex-partner has a new partner (who is the stepparent), people may actually be less in favour of stepparents having parental rights (see Antokolskaia et al., 2014). In this case it is more likely that people prefer a limited role of the stepparent, who may be seen as an outsider, not an adequate parent or a threat to their own role as a parent (Ganong, Coleman, Jamison &

Feistman, 2015). Particularly when the ex-partner is in a serious, committed relationship, such as marriage or cohabitation, and the stepparent is likely to play a bigger role in the child(ren)'s life, people may begrudge this stepparent (more) legal rights, which is likely reflected in their lower support for stepparents' legal rights in general.

People may also be *a stepparent* themselves. From a practical perspective, people who are a stepparent will likely encounter more practical problems in the upbringing of their stepchildren than people without stepchildren, and more so when their role in childrearing is larger. People with stepchildren, especially when the stepchildren live in the same household (*i.e.*, resident stepchildren), will likely be more in need of clearly defined roles and rights than people without stepchildren or nonresident stepchildren. Support among stepparents with (resident) stepchildren may furthermore be higher because it would legitimize their role and constitute an acknowledgement of their contributions to the care and upbringing of their stepchild(ren). An alternative argument may be that stepparents do not wish to interfere or put pressure on the perhaps strenuous relationship between the former partners, suggesting less support among stepparents than among those without stepchildren. It is difficult to predict in advance whether stepparents would want to legitimize their role or do not wish to interfere, as stepparents' views on their role varies widely, depending upon *e.g.* the complexity of the family situation (Ganong & Coleman, 2017, Chapter 8). Because practical reasons would still predict more support among (resident) stepparents, I tentatively predict this to be the case.

When *children are born in the new relationship* of the respondent or in that of the ex-partner, it is *a priori* unclear whether support for stepparent rights would be higher or lower from a practical perspective. To the extent that levels of support are shaped by the greater need for clarity and decision-making rights, the question is whether and how the birth of a shared child affects the amount of involvement of stepparents in their stepchild(ren)'s upbringing. For instance, if involvement of someone's new partner increases after the birth of a shared child (as suggested by the idea of a 'concrete baby', Ganong & Coleman, 1988; 1994), the divorced parent may more strongly support granting legal rights to stepparents because the stepparent's higher involvement may ask for greater leverage in child-related decisionmaking. Empirical evidence is, however, mixed about whether parental involvement in stepfamilies is higher, lower or the same after the birth of a shared child (Stewart, 2005). A more likely argumentation refers to emotional reasons. Assuming that support may also be emotionally driven and reflects divorced parents' wish to reinforce their new relationship after divorce, the birth of a child in the new union may weaken this need for reinforcement. Some studies suggest that a shared child already expresses commitment to the new union (Vanassche, Corijn, Matthijs & Swicegood, 2015), possibly weakening the need to express such commitment via more legal rights for stepparents. When it comes to shared children in the ex-partner's relationship after divorce, people's wish for a limited role of this stepparent may even be stronger as the sentiment may be that this

stepparent (and the ex-partner) now has a new family of his/her own – so, why also need more rights involving the stepchildren.

All in all, it is expected that divorced and separated parents' support for parental responsibility and legal parenthood of stepparents will be more likely when children reside (more often) with parents, when parents have a new partner and more so when they live with and are married to this partner, and when parents are stepparents themselves and more so when they reside with the stepchildren. Support among parents will be less when their ex-partner has a new relationship and more so when this new partner lives with the ex-partner, and when parents themselves or their ex-partners have mutual children with a new partner. Moreover, these differences in support are expected to be larger in case of higher conflict between former partners. Though research is limited, studies suggest that parents encourage greater involvement of the stepparent when the relationship between them and their ex-partner is poor (Fang, Poortman & Van der Lippe, 2022; Hornstra, Kalmijn & Ivanova, 2020). Because higher parental involvement by stepparents is argued to be associated with support for stepparents' rights and the expected differences between the different (step)family situations were often partly based on levels of stepparents' involvement, greater conflict between ex-partners may increase the effects of (step)family type on support. Perhaps more importantly, emotional reasons – such as the wish to affirm someone's new relationship, acknowledge the stepparent's role or begrudging rights of the new partner of the ex-partner – may play a bigger role in case of a high-conflict situation, in turn increasing the effects of the (step)family situation on support for stepparent rights.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Data

This study draws on data from the third wave of the survey New Families in the Netherlands (NFN; Poortman, Brons, Koster & Bosma, 2021) conducted in 2020. NFN is a collaboration between Utrecht University and Statistics Netherlands.<sup>2</sup> It is a large-scale panel survey among a random sample of the population of heterosexual parents with minor children who divorced or separated from a marriage, registered partnership or a cohabiting union in 2010. Both parents of a former union were approached at the time of the first wave (2012/2013) and asked to participate in an online survey. The final reminder also included a paper-and-pencil version. This design was also used in subsequent waves. In total, 4,481 respondents participated in wave 1, with the response rate being 39% (58% at the level of former households) (Poortman, Van der Lippe & Boele-Woelki, 2014). In case respondents had indicated that they did not object to being approached again, they were invited to participate in wave 2 in 2015/2016 and of those approached, 63% (N = 2,544)

2 The data can be found in the microdata catalogue of Statistics Netherlands (see: [www.cbs.nl/en-gb/our-services/customised-services-microdata/microdata-conducting-your-own-research/microdata-catalogue](http://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/our-services/customised-services-microdata/microdata-conducting-your-own-research/microdata-catalogue)).

participated (69% at household level). In addition, a refreshment sample from the original population was approached (N = 920; response rate 32% and 52% among former households) (Poortman, Stienstra & De Bruijn, 2018). In 2020, people who had participated in either previous wave and had given permission to be reapproached, were contacted to participate in wave 3. In total, 3,056 divorced or separated parents participated in wave 3. The response rate was 68% (72% among former households). In 19% of former households both ex-partners participated in wave 3. As in previous waves, former cohabiters, men, younger people, people with non-western descent, people with low income and those on welfare were underrepresented. Attrition between waves was furthermore higher among people with lower socioeconomic status, men, younger people and (for wave 3) single people (Poortman, Brons, Koster & Bosma, 2021). This means that the sample is not completely representative for the population of divorced/separated parents.

For the descriptive analyses as to what parents' attitudes are toward parental responsibility and legal parenthood of stepparents the total sample is used, only excluding those who did not answer questions about these attitudes (*i.e.*, missing values). Because the number of missing values differed depending on the specific question, the N varies in the descriptive analyses from 3,034 to 3,037. For the analyses about variations in support across (step)family situations, I excluded cases with missing values on the attitudinal questions, those who answered 'Don't know' on the attitudinal questions and/or cases with missing values on the independent variables. Because the measures for attitudes toward parental responsibility and legal parenthood were strongly associated, these questions were firstly combined by transforming the data into long format in which each attitudinal question about stepparents' rights (four in total, see the section 3.2 Measures) contributes a case to the dataset (so a maximum of four cases per respondent). After exclusion of respondents with missing values or 'Don't know' on these questions, the data include 2,894 respondents adding a total of 10,374 valid reports about stepparents' rights. When missing values on the independent variables are also excluded, the sample is reduced to 2,371 respondents (from 2,042 former households) yielding 8,563 cases on the level of legal rights. As elaborated in section 3.3 Analytical Strategy, separate analyses for specific questions about stepparents' rights were additionally conducted. Note that all respondents are divorced or separated parents, but that some of them may also be stepparents, depending on whether they entered a new relationship with someone who already had children from a previous union (*e.g.*, 40% of respondents are also a stepparent in the samples used for the descriptive analyses).

### 3.2. Measures

*Attitudes toward rights stepparents.* Four questions were asked, varying as to the type of right (*i.e.*, legal parenthood or parental responsibility) and to whether a stepparent was assumed to be resident or not. Respondents were asked: imagine a minor child lives most of the time with his/her biological parent and a stepparent, (1) do you think that this stepparent should be able to get *parental responsibility* (yes, full responsibility; yes, partial responsibility; no, no responsibility; don't

know) and (2) do you think that this stepparent, with whom the child lives most of the time, should be able to become a *legal parent* (yes; no; don't know). Subsequently, respondents were asked similar questions, but now for the fictive situation where the stepparent is nonresident. The questions were: in case of a stepparent with whom the child does *not* live most of the time: do you think that this stepparent, with whom the child does not live most of the time, (3) should be able to get *parental responsibility* (yes, full responsibility; yes, partial responsibility; no, no responsibility; don't know) and (4) do you think that this stepparent, with whom the child does not live most of the time, should be able to become a *legal parent* (yes; no; don't know). Underneath the questions, short explanations of parental responsibility and legal parenthood were included: 'Parental responsibility is the right of a parent to make decisions about his/her minor child and the right to care for and raise the child. Parental responsibility ends when the child is 18 years old' and 'Legal parents are the parents of the child for the law. This is in principle for life and not the same as parental responsibility'. Despite these short explanations, it may still be that respondents did not completely understand the legal concepts. As explained above and in section 3.3 Analytical Strategy, I analyzed these questions separately in the descriptive analyses, whereas these rights were analyzed in combination – any rights for stepparents – in the explanatory analyses, whilst controlling for the type of right (0 'Parental responsibility'; 1 'Legal parenthood') and whether the fictive situation referred to a resident stepparent (coded 1) or nonresident stepparent (coded 0). In the explanatory analyses referring to support for any stepparent rights, respondents who answered 'don't know' were excluded and no distinction was made between partial and full parental responsibility (both coded 1); the number of cases supporting full parental responsibility were too low, especially for the fictive situation of a nonresident stepparent, to be able to make such a distinction. Thus, respondents were coded 0 if they had answered 'no' to the questions and 1 if they had answered 'yes, full'/'yes, partial responsibility' or 'yes' to legal parenthood.

*Child residence.* Child residence was asked for one particular child, selected at wave 1 (or wave 2 in case of the refreshment sample). The selection was based on the age of the child: the oldest child if all children were under age 10 at the time of wave 1 (or 13 at the time of wave 2) and the youngest child in case one or more children were 10 years or older at the time of wave 1. For this child, respondents were asked with whom the child lived most of the time. Answering categories were 'with me', 'with ex-partner', 'with both about and equal amount of time', 'child lives independently', and 'other'. This last category was coded missing because it is a heterogenous category. To arrive at a parsimonious model, preliminary analyses tested whether categories differed statistically significant from each other in their support for any rights. Because support did not differ between respondents whose child lived independently and those whose child lived with the ex-partner, the following dummy (*i.e.*, 0/1) variables were created: full-time resident child (1 if child lived with respondent; 0 otherwise), part-time resident child (1 if child lived about equally with the respondent and ex-partner; 0 otherwise) and nonresident child (1 if child lived independently or with the ex-partner; 0 otherwise).



*Respondent's relationship status.* Respondents were asked whether they had a steady partner at the moment and if so, they reported about the type of relationship: steady partner, but not living together (LAT); unmarried cohabitation; marriage. I constructed dummy variables indicating that respondents had no partner; were in a LAT relationship; in a cohabiting relationship or in a marriage (all coded 1 if so; 0 otherwise).

*Ex-partner's relationship status.* Respondents reported also about the relationship status of their ex-partner, choosing from: no steady partner, LAT relationship, cohabitation, marriage and don't know. This last category was coded as missing. Because preliminary analyses showed no differences in support depending on whether the ex-partner was married or cohabiting, the following dummy variables were constructed: ex-partner has no partner, ex-partner has LAT partner and ex-partner lives with a partner (be it married or unmarried).

*Presence and residence stepchildren.* In case respondents indicated they had a steady partner, they were asked whether their current partner had children (*i.e.*, respondents' stepchildren) and where these children lived: with their current partner; with the ex-partner of their partner; with both about equally/shared physical custody; all children living independently, and other. The last heterogenous category was coded missing. Respondents who had no partner (missing by definition) were assigned the same code as respondents with no stepchildren. As preliminary analyses showed no difference between respondents indicating that their stepchildren lived with the ex-partner of their current partner full time or part time (*i.e.*, shared physical custody) these categories were combined. This resulted in dummy variables (1 if so; 0 otherwise) for the following situations: respondent has no stepchildren; has stepchildren who live with their partner full time (*i.e.*, full-time resident stepchildren); stepchildren who live with the ex-partner of their partner full or part time (*i.e.*, nonresident stepchildren with ex-partner); and nonresident stepchildren who live independently.

*Respondent has shared children with partner.* Respondents with a partner indicated whether they had children or adopted children with this partner. A dummy variable was constructed indicating whether this was the case. Single respondents were coded 0.

*Ex-partner has shared with partner.* In case the ex-partner had a partner, respondents reported whether their ex-partner had children or adopted children with this partner. If so, respondents were coded 1 on a dummy variable for mutual children (0 otherwise). If the ex-partner was single, 0 was assigned.

*Conflict between ex-partners.* Respondents reported whether their ex-partner had done the following in the past year (1 = yes): 'Made serious accusations against you', 'Said bad things about you to others', 'Called or visited you uninvited', 'Turned your children against you', 'Wrongly accused you of something', 'Spoke ill of your common past', 'Scolded, quarreled with you', and 'Threatened violence' (see Fischer,

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De Graaf & Kalmijn, 2005). I created a count of the number of incidents, with a missing value when at least one of the items was missing.

The following basic control variables were also included.

*Gender of the respondent.* Coded 1 if the respondent reported to be a woman (0 if man).

*Age of the respondent.* Indicates respondent's age at the time of wave 3 (in years).

*Educational level of the respondent.* Highest completed level of education of the respondent ranging from 'elementary school not completed' (coded 1) to 'post-graduate'(coded 10).

*Sample.* Dummy variables were constructed for whether the respondent was part of the refreshment sample (1 if so; 0 otherwise) and for whether a main sample respondent participated in wave 1 the last time (1 if so; 0 otherwise). The reference group are main sample respondents who participated in wave 2 the last time.

Descriptive statistics of all independent variables are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** *Descriptive statistics of central independent and control variables: mean and standard deviation*

	Mean	SD <sup>a</sup>
Type of right: legal parenthood	.469	
Fictive resident stepparent	.485	
<i>Residence child</i>		
Full-time resident child	.361	
Part-time resident child	.195	
Nonresident child (living independent or with ex-partner)	.444	
<i>Relationship status respondent</i>		
No partner	.340	
LAT partner	.190	
Cohabiting	.259	
Married	.211	
<i>Relationship status ex-partner</i>		
No partner	.247	
LAT partner	.194	
Resident partner (cohabiting or married)	.559	
<i>Presence/residence stepchildren<sup>b</sup></i>		
No stepchildren	.362	
Full-time resident stepchildren	.151	
Nonresident stepchildren living with ex-partner	.255	

**Table 1** (Continued)

	Mean	SD <sup>a</sup>
Nonresident stepchildren living independently	.233	
Respondent has mutual children with new partner <sup>b</sup>	.145	
Ex-partner has mutual children with new partner <sup>c</sup>	.177	
Number of conflicts	1.392	2.072
Respondent woman	.587	
Respondent's age	50.951	6.683
Educational level	7.093	1.682
Main sample: wave 1 last participation	.185	
Main sample: wave 2 last participation	.616	
Refreshment sample	.199	

Note: Descriptive statistics are shown for the long-format data (N=8,563 observations).

<sup>a</sup> SD not shown for dichotomous variables.

<sup>b</sup> Calculated in case the respondent has a new partner (N=5,649).

<sup>c</sup> Calculated in case the ex-partner has a new partner (N=6,447).

### 3.3. Analytical strategy

Two types of analyses were conducted. First, I did simple descriptive analyses to show divorced parents' attitudes toward the different rights. Each of the four questions about stepparents' rights was analyzed separately and I graphically present the distribution of respondents over the different answering categories. Weights were used to correct for patterns of under- and overrepresentation (see section 3.1). Note, though, that the unweighted results were nearly identical and that even weighted results should be interpreted with care as it was difficult to construct weights with reasonable properties (Poortman, Brons, Koster & Bosma, 2021). Second, I analyzed the associations between different aspects of people's family situation (*e.g.*, child residence, current relationship status of respondent and ex-partner etc.). The main analyses are based on the long-format data in which respondents' answers to each of the four questions about rights for stepparents constitute a case. This means that the data are multilevel data, with observations referring to the different attitudinal questions nested within respondents, leading to a maximum of four observations per respondent. These analyses thus refer to overall support for granting any legal rights to stepparents. To take into account this nested structure, multilevel analyses were conducted while controlling for the type of right (legal parenthood or parental responsibility) and for whether the fictive situation refers to a resident stepparent or a nonresident one. More specifically, I used multilevel linear probability models (LPM), using command `xtreg` in STATA version 15. I furthermore take into account the clustering of some respondents in the same former household by using the `vce(cluster)` command in STATA. Although the dependent variable is dichotomous, LPM instead of logit models were used because the former type of models are easier to interpret, especially when interaction terms are included, as is the case in these analyses. The main conclusions, however, did not differ when multilevel logit models were used

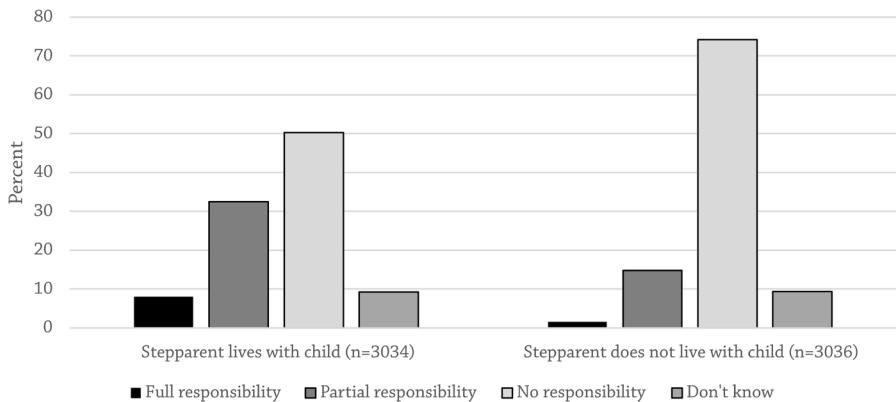
instead. In preliminary analyses, I tested whether the effects of the studied variables differed between the two types of rights and between the different fictive residence situations, by including interaction terms (see Appendix, table A3). These analyses showed only some differences by type of right, but consistent stronger effects of most of the (step)family indicators in case the questions referred to the situation where the child lives most of the time with the stepparent and his/her biological parent (*i.e.*, resident stepparent). Therefore, and because any establishment of legal rights for stepparents would most likely pertain to resident stepparents, I also separately conducted analyses for the two specific questions referring to resident stepparents. OLS regression was used to analyze these separate questions about parental responsibility and legal parenthood for resident stepparents, whilst accounting for clustering within former households.

Several models were estimated. First, I estimated a model including the control variables and the central independent variables, *i.e.* indicators for the different (step)family situations. Second, I estimated models where interaction terms between the central independent variables and conflict were included. For ease of interpretation, the estimated coefficients will not be presented in the main text, but the results will be graphically presented in figures showing the predicted probability to support legal parental rights for stepparents per (step)family situation (see Appendix for the coefficients, Tables A1 and A2). The predicted probabilities were estimated using the command margins in STATA version 15. I also did some additional analyses that will be referred to in the main text. These results can also be found in the Appendix.

#### 4. Results

Figure 1 shows divorced and separated parents' attitudes toward stepparents being able to acquire parental responsibility for the two different fictive situations: when the stepparent lives most of the time with the stepchild and when the stepparent does not live most of the time with the child. Half of the parents (50%) thinks that a stepparent who lives with the child should not be able to get parental responsibility. This percentage increases to 74% in case the stepparent does not live with the child. Though no parental responsibility is the most chosen response, partial parental responsibility for stepparents is the most chosen option in case parents do support some form of parental responsibility. In case the stepparent lives with the child, about a third of parents (33%) is in favour of partial parental responsibility compared to only 8% supporting full parental responsibility for resident stepparents.

**Figure 1** *Attitudes toward whether stepparents should be able to get parental responsibility, by residence of stepparent*

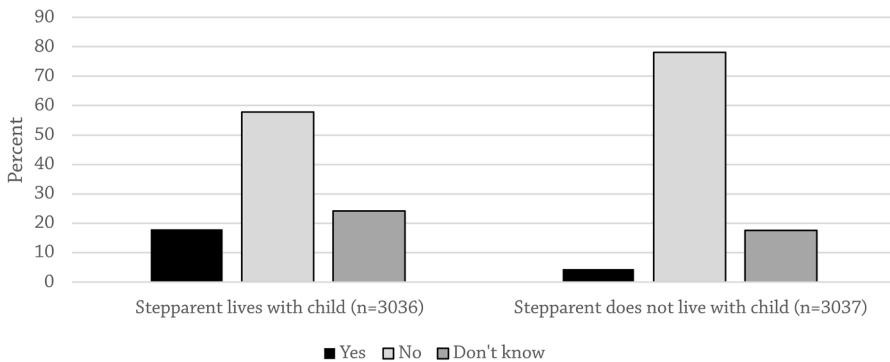


For nonresident stepparents, support for parental responsibility is overall lower but also in this case, support for partial parental responsibility is higher than support for full parental responsibility: 15% versus 2%, respectively. Note that there is also a group of parents who answers 'don't know' (9%). They may be indecisive about granting parental responsibility to stepparents or they may not understand the concept of parental responsibility.

Figure 2 shows parents' support for stepparents being able to become a legal parent. Support for legal parenthood of stepparents is overall lower than support for parental responsibility. For both fictive situations, the majority of parents thinks that a stepparent should not be able to become a legal parent: 58% does not support legal parenthood for resident stepparents and this is 78% for nonresident stepparents. About 18% supports legal parenthood in case a stepparent lives with the child and only 4% does so in case the stepparent does not live with the child. Noteworthy here are the high percentages of parents indicating that they don't know (24% for the question about resident stepparents; 18% for the question about nonresident stepparents). These high percentages either suggest that parents really do not know their stance on the issue or that they do not grasp the concept of legal parenthood.

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**Figure 2** *Attitudes toward whether stepparents should be able to become a legal parent, by residence of stepparent*

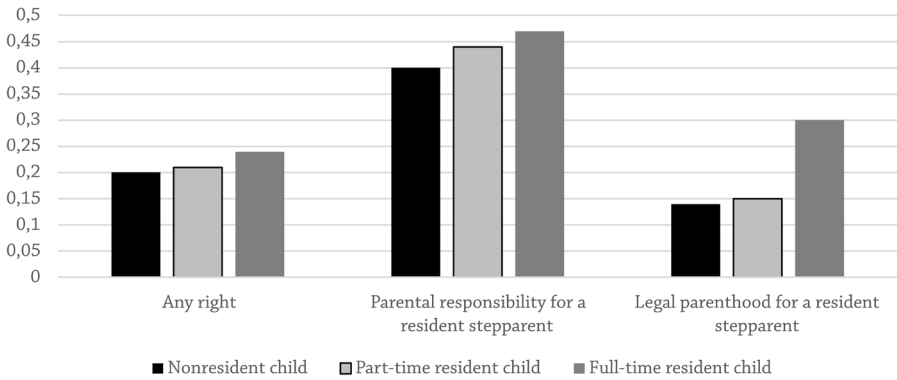


How does support for legal rights vary across different family situations? Figure 3 graphically summarizes the results for how support for stepparents' rights varies depending on child residence (for underlying estimated models, see Appendix, table A1). As expected, support for stepparent rights is highest when the child lives full time with the respondent. Full-time residence stands out, with no differences found in the probability of support between respondents with nonresident and with part-time resident children. The pattern is similar for all three dependent variables, but most pronounced in case of support for legal parenthood for a resident stepparent. The predicted probability of supporting legal parenthood is twice as high in case the child lives full time in the respondent's home compared to the situation of a nonresident or part-time resident child (probability = .30 vs .14/.15). These differences are much smaller when looking at support for any right or for parental responsibility.

Figure 4 shows that the probability of support is higher in when people have a new partner and more so, the more committed this relationship is. Remarried people are most likely to be in favour of legal rights for a stepparent, followed by people who cohabit with their partner, have a LAT relationship and no partner, respectively.

All contrasts are statistically significant (for all three analyses – see table A1 in the Appendix). The pattern is more or less the same regardless of whether one looks at any right, parental responsibility or legal parenthood. The differences between different relationship statuses are relatively big; the predicted probability of support is about twice as high for remarried people than for people without a new partner, and even more than three times as high in case of support for legal parenthood for a resident stepparent.

**Figure 3** *Predicted probability of support for stepparent rights by child residence and type of right*



**Figure 4** *Predicted probability of support for stepparent rights by parent's relationship status and type of right*

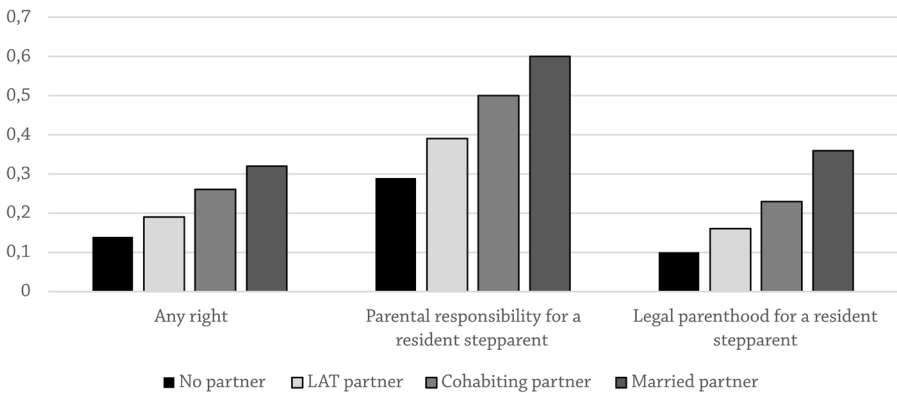
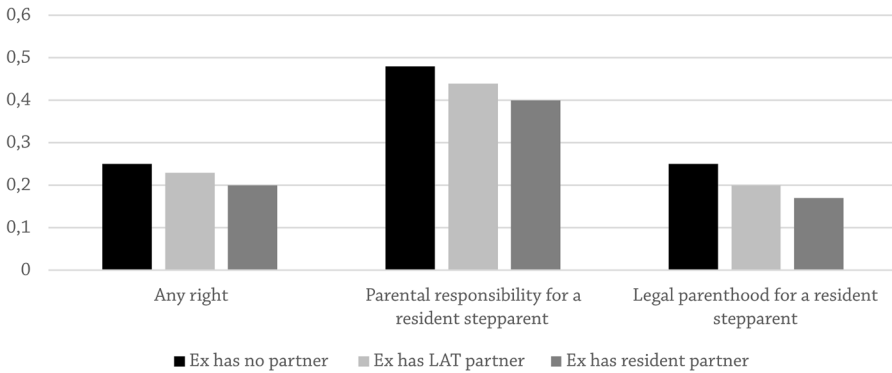


Figure 5 shows differences in support depending on the relationship status of one's ex-partner. Differences are less pronounced compared to one's own relationship status and only the difference between people whose ex-partner has no new partner and those whose ex-partner is living (be it married or unmarried) with a new partner is statistically significant. As expected, in the latter situation support for legal rights – be it any right, parental responsibility or legal parenthood – is lower than when the ex-partner is single.

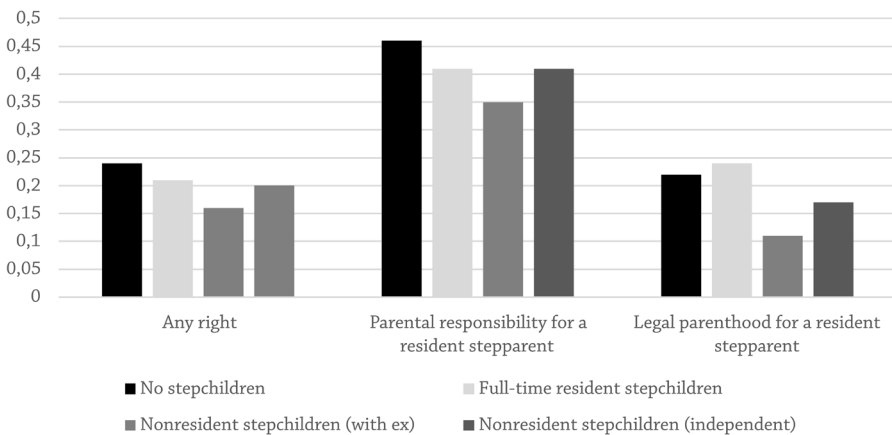
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**Figure 5** Predicted probability of support for stepparent rights by ex-partner's relationship status and type of right



In additional analyses, I also tested whether the effects of the respondent's relationship status are even stronger in case the child lives with the respondent. If both the child and the new partner (*i.e.*, the stepparent) live in the same household (*i.e.* that of the respondent), support may be particularly strong as these stepparents will for instance be most involved in the child's daily life. For similar reasons, I also tested whether the effects of the ex-partner's relationship are stronger in case the child lives with the ex-partner. Results are shown in the Appendix (table A4) and show that the differences in support depending on people's relationship status indeed are stronger in case the child lives in the same household. This is, however, not the case for the effects of the ex-partner's relationship status.

**Figure 6** Predicted probability of support for stepparent rights by whether parent has (residential) stepchildren and type of right



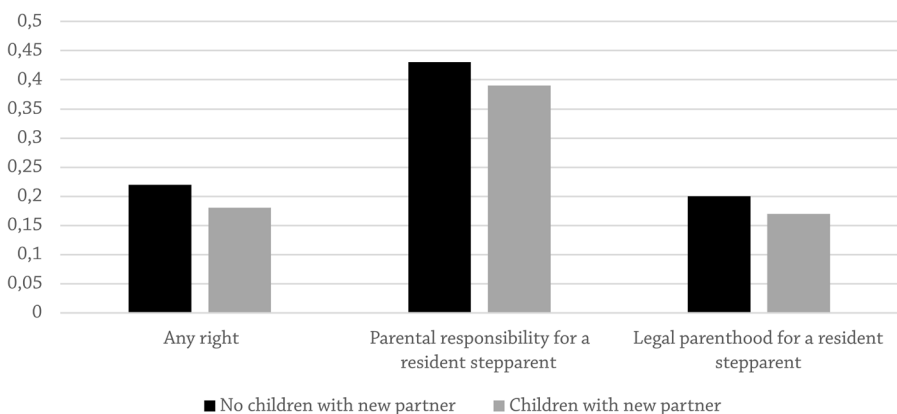
Taken together, Figures 4 and 5 suggest that support for stepparent rights depends on whether people are in a situation where they themselves have a new partner who is the stepparent or in a situation where the ex-partner has a new partner who



is the stepparent. Put simply, when the stepparent is their own partner they are more in favour of legal rights, whereas the opposite holds when the stepparent is the partner of their ex-partner. So what if people themselves are a stepparent? There are few statistically significant differences in support based on whether people are a stepparent and their stepchildren's residence, but support seems lower among stepparents than those not being a stepparent with one group standing out – as can be seen in Figure 6. When respondents have stepchildren who live (part time or full time) with the ex-partner of their new partner, support for legal rights of stepparents is lower compared to the other stepparent situations (*i.e.*, no stepchildren, resident or independently living stepchildren). Results are similar across the three analyses. These findings are in contrast to expectations based on stepparents' levels of involvement and thus experienced practical difficulties or a need for legitimization of their parenting contributions, predicting most support when people are a full-time resident stepparent and least support when they have no stepchildren. Rather, it seems to be about not wanting to interfere when the ex-partner of their new partner is the primary caretaker or sharing care tasks equally with the other parent.

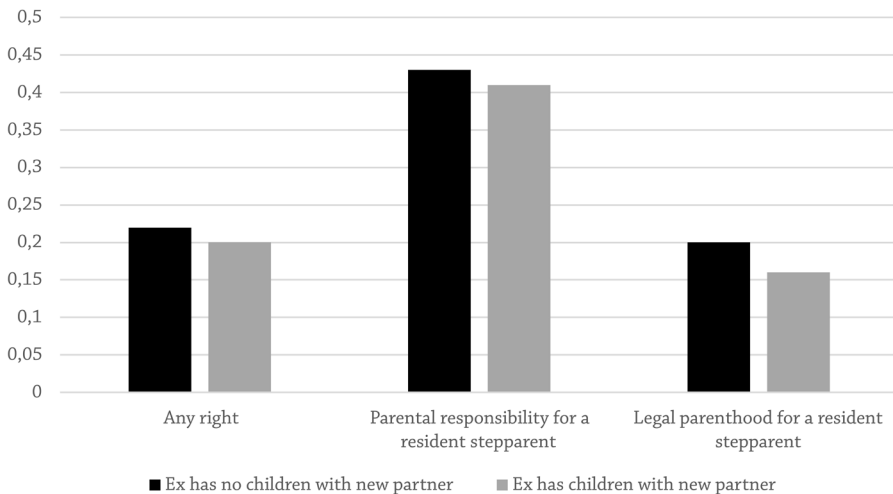
Figures 7 and 8 show whether support varies depending on whether people or their ex-partner have children with a new partner. The probability of support is slightly lower in case of children with a new partner, but none of the differences is statistically significant. Shared children with a new partner, be it of the respondent or the ex-partner, thus are overall not associated with support for legal rights for stepparents.

**Figure 7** *Predicted probability of support for stepparent rights by whether parent has child(ren) with new partner and type of right*



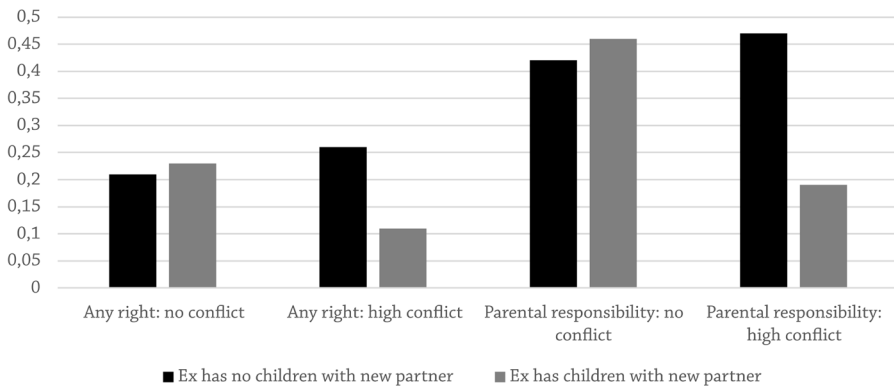
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**Figure 8** *Predicted probability of support for stepparent rights by whether ex-partner has child(ren) with new partner and type of right*



This finding about the role of mutual children in new relationships needs to be nuanced, however, when taking into account the results of the analyses assessing whether effects are stronger in case of higher conflict (see Appendix, Table A2). The previously observed differences between varying (step)family situations in case of support for legal parenthood of a resident stepparent are the same regardless of whether ex-partners have little or high conflict. However, this is not the case for overall support for any legal rights and for parental responsibility of a resident stepparent (see Figure 9). In case of minimum levels of conflict between former partners (*i.e.*, number of conflict-laden incidents = 0), support for any legal rights and support for parental responsibility of a resident stepparent does not differ between people whose ex-partner does not have new children and those whose ex-partner does have new children. In case of maximum levels of conflict (*i.e.*, number of incidents = 8) support is lower among those whose ex-partner has shared children with their new partner: with predicted probabilities being more than twice as low compared to those whose ex-partner does not have new children.

**Figure 9** *Predicted probability of support for stepparent rights by whether ex-partner has children with new partner, type of right and conflict*

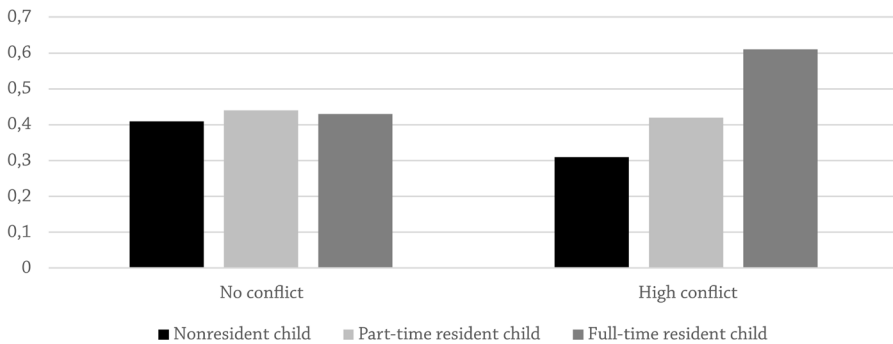


Also some other more pronounced differences between (step)family situations in case of higher conflict were found, but only for support for parental responsibility of a resident stepparent. For this type of legal right, it is found that the child's residence after divorce has little association with support in case of low conflict levels, but increasingly so when conflict is higher. Figure 10 shows the predicted probabilities of support for parental responsibility of a resident stepparent for different child residence arrangements in a scenario of minimum conflict levels and in a scenario of maximum conflict levels.

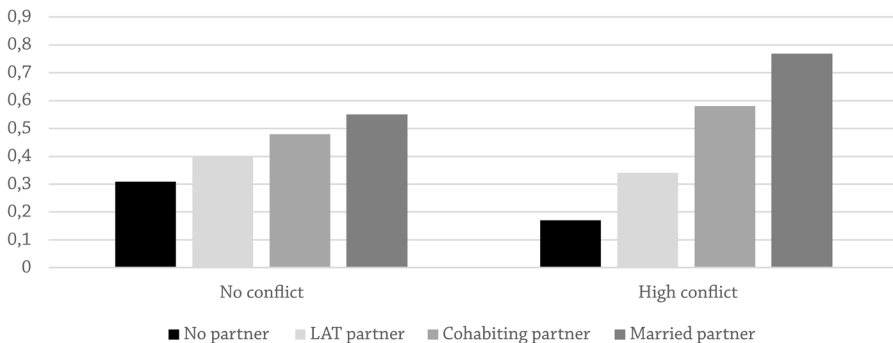
It can be seen that predicted probabilities do not vary between the different child residence arrangements when there is minimal conflict between ex-partners. In contrast, when ex-partners have a lot of conflict, respondents with whom the child lives most of the time have a significantly higher probability of support than respondents with a nonresident child. Also the associations with respondent's relationship status vary by conflict. As shown in Figure 11, support for parental responsibility of a resident stepparent is higher when people have a (more committed) relationship, but more strongly so in case of high conflict.

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**Figure 10** *Predicted probability of support for parental responsibility of a resident stepparent by child residence and conflict*



**Figure 11** *Predicted probability of support for parental responsibility of a resident stepparent by relationship status respondent and conflict*



## 5. Conclusion and discussion

More and more children in the Netherlands grow up in stepfamilies (Van Gaalen & Van Roon, 2020). Although stepparents can play an important role in children's lives, stepparents have had relatively few legal rights (Antokolskaia, 2015). This study took a social science perspective and empirically examined the extent to which divorced and separated parents support parental responsibility and legal parenthood of stepparents using recent, large-scale Dutch data. In addition, the study addressed how support depended upon people's own family situation and the role of conflict in these associations. The findings lead to the following conclusions and tentative implications for legal practice.

First, no overwhelming support for granting more parental rights to stepparents was found among divorced and separated parents. Support ranged from about 40% of parents supporting (full or partial) parental responsibility for stepparents living with the child to only 4% of parents supporting legal parenthood of stepparents who do not live with the child. These figures not only show that a minority of the

parents was in favour of stepparent rights, but also that support was higher in case of the fictive situation of a resident rather than a nonresident stepparent. In addition, support was higher for parental responsibility than for legal parenthood and when a distinction was between partial and full parental responsibility for resident stepparents, support was about four times higher for the former type of parental responsibility (33% vs 8%). Unfortunately, it is difficult to compare this study's findings to those found in Antokolskaia et al. (2014) because of different questions and samples.

Second, support levels depended on whether people had experience with stepparenting in their own lives, but distinctively so depending on who was the stepparent. When people were in a situation where they had full-time resident children or when people themselves had a new partner who was the stepparent, people were more likely to support legal rights for stepparents: repartnered people were more likely to support such rights than single people, particularly so when the child lived in the same household as the stepparent. The reverse held when people were in a situation where the stepparent was the new partner of their ex-partner (see also Antokolskaia et al., 2014): when the ex-partner lived with a new partner, support was lower. Whether or not people themselves were a stepparent bore little association with support levels, except that support was less likely in case they had nonresident stepchildren living with the ex-partner of their new partner. These findings highlight the role of emotional and relational reasons for supporting stepparent rights. Though the higher support among partnered people may be due to both greater practical needs and the desire to legitimize their new partner's role as a stepparent, emotional reasons drive support in the other stepfamily situations. Despite the likely greater practical needs for legal rights, people seem to begrudge legal rights for the new partner of their ex-partner, leading to less support. Also when people are stepparents themselves, the higher practical needs seem to be canceled out or even outweighed by the wish to not interfere with or put pressure on existing family relationships, particularly so when the parents of the stepchild share parenting tasks or when the ex-partner is the main caretaker.

Third, people's own (step)family experiences were more important in high-conflict situations, which further underscores the role of emotional reasons for supporting legal rights of stepparents. This pattern was most strongly observed for whether or not people's ex-partner had shared children with their new partner. Whereas no difference in support was found in case of low conflict between ex-partners, support for legal rights was more than twice as low when their ex-partner had started a new family. Apparently, an already conflict-laden situation fuels feelings of begrudging the new partner of their ex-partner any legal rights as a stepparent if this stepparent and their ex-partner have started their own family. Note that the role of child residence and people's relationship status also depended on conflict levels, with stronger effects in case of high conflict, but only in case of support for parental responsibility and differences being less pronounced than for the ex-partner having new children.

Overall, the findings seem to imply that support for establishing parental rights for stepparents is not self-evident among divorced and separated parents and geared towards partial (instead of full) rights. Although this study did not directly ask for parents' opinions about the recent legislative proposal on partial parental responsibility for other parental figures such as stepparents and no firm conclusions can be drawn in this respect, the findings suggest that parental roles – likely both in practical and legal respects – may be ambiguous in stepfamilies. Because the multiple parents did not jointly decide to have and raise children together (Antokolskaia, 2014; Cammu, 2019a), parenting may be a balancing act in stepfamilies, which is likely reflected in parents' overall cautious attitudes toward stepparent rights. Moreover, the findings suggest that parents' views on such rights are likely to differ between the different parental figures and that not only practical, but also emotional reasons drive support for legal rights of stepparents. In practice, this could mean that in a situation where one of the former partners has entered a new relationship, but the other has not, the repartnered parent endorses partial parental responsibility for the stepparent (being his/her partner) whereas the other, single, parent does not – with this opposition in views being more likely in a conflict-laden relationship. Because of this difference in parents' views and the apparent emotional charge of granting legal rights, the implementation of stepparent rights in legal practice could be difficult, particularly in case agreement by both legal parents would be required.

This study had some methodological issues. First, the high percentages answering 'don't know' to the questions, especially those about legal parenthood, may indicate that legal concepts are difficult to understand for some respondents. The descriptive findings should therefore be interpreted with caution, keeping in mind that some respondents may not have grasped all the implications of the studied legal rights. Qualitative research leaves more room for explaining and could provide in-depth insight into which implications of a certain legal status (*e.g.*, inheritance, decisionmaking) are preferred by people in a stepfamily. Second, the sample was not completely representative for the population of divorced parents. People with lower socioeconomic status and people from non-western descent for example were underrepresented. Though the descriptive findings were weighted, the weights may not have been able to completely adjust for patterns of under- and overrepresentation (Poortman, Brons, Koster & Bosma, 2021). Whether this has led to an over- or underestimation of observed levels of support is difficult to say though, and the same holds for the extent to which the associations between family situation and support may be biased. More substantively, it is important to realize that this study pertains to legal rights for stepparents only and that the findings may not be readily generalized to rights of parental figures in other multiparent situations, such as foster families or same-sex families. Stepfamilies are 'not intentional' by their very nature and may have a higher likelihood of strenuous relationships between the different parental figures. Other research is necessary among other types of multiparent families to see whether similar views and processes are at play (see *e.g.*, Smit et al., 2015 or Vonk et al., 2020 about foster parents; Cammu, 2019b about intentional multiparent families). Finally, this study

lacks the perspective of the child. The data were gathered among divorced and separated parents in different (step)family situations only. Given the importance of legislation being in 'the best interest of the child', future research may want to examine children's views on granting legal rights to stepparents.

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## Appendix

### Main analyses

**Table A1** *Multilevel/OLS regression of support for stepparents' legal rights: overall support for any right, support for parental responsibility and for legal parenthood if resident stepparent*

	Any right		Parental responsibility		Legal parenthood	
	b	SE(b)	b	SE(b)	b	SE(b)
Type of right: legal parenthood		.007				
Fictive resident stepparent	.209***	.007				
<i>Residence child (ref. nonresident)</i>						
Full-time resident child	.046***	.014	.069***	.026	.158***	.023
Part-time resident child	.012	.017	.040	.030	.017	.023
<i>Relationship respondent (R) (ref. no partner)</i>						
LAT partner	.055**	.021	.097**	.037	.064*	.032
Cohabiting	.123***	.020	.203***	.034	.129***	.030
Married		.022		.036		.036
<i>Relationship ex-partner (Ex) (ref. no partner)</i>						
LAT partner	-.025	.018	-.044	.031	-.051~	.027
Resident partner (cohabiting/ married)		.015		.026		.023
<i>Residence stepchildren (ref. no stepchildren)</i>						
Full-time resident stepchildren	-.031	.024	-.051	.041	.020	.038
Stepchildren living with ex		.020	-.115***	.035		.031
Stepchildren living independently		.022	-.049 <sup>g,h</sup>	.037	-.047 <sup>g,h</sup>	.034
R children with new partner	-.047~	.025	-.048	.041	-.031	.039
Ex children with new partner	-.016	.018	-.021	.033	-.039	.029
Number of conflicts	.004	.003	.004	.005	.012*	.005
R woman		.013	-.080**	.025	-.001	.020
R age	-.001	.001	.001	.002	-.003~	.002
R Educational level	-.005	.004	-.011	.006	.007	.005
Main sample: wave I	.023	.016	.016	.027	.008	.024
Refreshment sample	.006	.015	.016	.027	.001	.023
N observations	8563					
N respondents	2371		2258	1898		
N former households	2042		1952	1687		

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**Table A1** (Continued)

	Any right		Parental responsibility		Legal parenthood	
	b	SE(b)	b	SE(b)	b	SE(b)
Sigma (person level)	.224					
Sigma (residual)	.304					
R2 (overall)	.150		.058	.097		

~ two-sided  $p < .10$ ; \* two-sided  $p < .05$ ; \*\* two-sided  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* two-sided  $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup> Difference with part-time resident child: any right  $b=.033$ ;  $p=.044$ /responsibility  $b=.030$ ;  $p=.328$ /parenthood  $b=.141$ ;  $p<.001$ .

<sup>b</sup> Difference with LAT: any right  $b=.068$ ;  $p<.001$ /responsibility  $b=.106$ ;  $p=.001$ /parenthood  $b=.065$ ;  $p=.013$ .

<sup>c</sup> Difference with LAT: any right  $b=.131$ ;  $p<.001$ /responsibility  $b=.207$ ;  $p<.001$ /parenthood  $b=.204$ ;  $p<.001$ .

<sup>d</sup> Difference with cohabitation: any right  $b=.063$ ;  $p=.001$ /responsibility  $b=.100$ ;  $p=.001$ /parenthood  $b=.139$ ;  $p<.001$ .

<sup>e</sup> Difference with LAT: any right  $b=-.027$ ;  $p=.091$ /responsibility  $b=-.037$ ;  $p=.183$ /parenthood  $b=-.029$ ;  $p=.212$ .

<sup>f</sup> Difference full-time resident stepchildren; any right  $b=-.052$   $p=.029$ /responsibility  $b=-.064$ ;  $p=.138$ /parenthood  $b=-.133$ ;  $p<.001$ .

<sup>g</sup> Difference full-time resident stepchildren; any right  $b=-.010$ ;  $p=.703$ /responsibility  $b=.002$ ;  $p=.965$ /parenthood  $b=-.067$ ;  $p=.096$ .

<sup>h</sup> Difference stepchildren with ex-partner: any right  $b=.042$ ;  $p=.043$ /responsibility  $b=.066$ ;  $p=.085$ /parenthood  $b=.066$ ;  $p=.040$ .

**Table A2** *Multilevel/OLS regression of support for stepparents' legal rights (any right/parental responsibility/legal parenthood for resident stepparent): interactions with conflict*

	Any right		Parental responsibility			Legal parenthood			
	b	SE(b)	Chi2 <sup>a</sup>	b	SE(b)	F <sup>a</sup>	b	SE(b)	F <sup>a</sup>
Type right		.007							
Resident	.209***	.007							
Nr. of conflicts	.006	.008		-.009	.014		-.002	.012	
Residence child									
Full time	.026	.017		.018 <sup>b</sup>	.031		.136***	.027	
Part time	.011	.019		.023	.034		.014	.027	
Full	.013*	.006		.036*** <sup>b</sup>	.011		.015	.010	
Part	-.001	.008	5.84~	.011	.016	5.54**	.003	.013	1.18
LAT	.053*	.026		.091*	.045		.034	.039	
	.111***	.024			.041		.096***	.035	
Married	.164***	.027			.045		.218***	.043	

Table A2 (Continued)

	Any right			Parental responsibility			Legal parenthood		
	b	SE(b)	Chi2 <sup>a</sup>	b	SE(b)	F <sup>a</sup>	b	SE(b)	F <sup>a</sup>
	.005	.010		.011	.018		.024	.016	
	.013	.009		.030*	.015		.028*	.014	
	.017~	.010	3.67		.015	3.39*	.036*	.017	1.85
LAT	-.005	.021		-.010	.037		-.041	.031	
Resident partner	-.033~	.017		-.051~	.031		-.068*	.026	
	-.016~	.009		-.026~	.014		-.008	.014	
	-.014~	.007	4.34	-.021~	.012	1.99	-.009	.012	0.30
Presence									
Full time	-.036	.031		-.089~	.051		.040	.046	
Living with ex		.025		-.094*	.042			.038	
Living	-.036	.026		-.041	.044		-.029	.040	
Full	.000	.011		.017	.018		-.014	.020	
Living with	-.005	.009		-.019	.017		-.010	.016	
	-.004	.010	0.41	-.007	.017	1.17	-.013	.016	0.30
R children new partner	-.057~	.030		-.069	.051		-.060	.047	
R new	.003	.010	0.10	.007	.017	0.17	.014	.018	0.58
Ex children new partner	.018	.022		.042	.041		-.007	.036	
Ex new		.008	6.78**		.015	7.65**	-.019	.013	2.06
		.013			.025		.000	.020	
Age	-.001	.001		.001	.002		-.003~	.002	
	-.006	.004		-.011~	.006		.006	.005	
Main sample: wave I	.022	.016		.012	.027		.008	.024	
	.008	.015		.020	.027		.004	.023	
N	8563								
N	2371			2258			1898		
N of former	2042			1952			1687		

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**Table A2** (Continued)

	Any right			Parental responsibility			Legal parenthood		
	b	SE(b)	Chi2 <sup>a</sup>	b	SE(b)	F <sup>a</sup>	b	SE(b)	F <sup>a</sup>
sigma (person level)	.223								
sigma	.304								
R2 (overall)	0.154			.073			.105		

~ two-sided  $p < .10$ ; \* two-sided  $p < .05$ ; \*\* two-sided  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* two-sided  $p < .001$

Note. Significance of all contrasts only shown in case the Chi2 test/F test for the interaction terms is statistically significant.

<sup>a</sup> Chi2/F-test of whether the interaction terms for the categories of this independent variable are simultaneously 0.

<sup>b</sup> If part-time residence is reference category:  $b(\text{full time}) = -.005/p = .887$  and  $b(\text{full time} * \text{conflict}) = .024/p = .119$ .

<sup>c</sup> If LAT is reference category:  $b(\text{cohabiting}) = .081/p = .038$  and  $b(\text{cohabiting} * \text{conflict}) = .019/p = .241$ .

<sup>d</sup> If LAT is reference category:  $b(\text{married}) = .151/p < .001$  and  $b(\text{married} * \text{conflict}) = .034/p = .041$ .

<sup>e</sup> If cohabiting is reference category:  $b(\text{married}) = .071/p = .062$  and  $b(\text{married} * \text{conflict}) = .015/p = .261$ .

## Additional analyses

**Table A3** *Multilevel regression of support for any right for stepparents: interactions between central independent variables and the type of right/fictive residence of stepparent.*

	Type right			Residence stepparent		
	b	SE(b)	Chi2 <sup>a</sup>	b	SE(b)	Chi2 <sup>a</sup>
Type of right: legal parenthood			.020			.007
Fictive resident stepparent	.209***	.007		.134***	.019	
<i>Residence child</i>						
Full time	.008 <sup>b</sup>	.018		-.014 <sup>b</sup>	.013	
Part time	.016	.022		-.003	.016	
Full time*right/residence	.083*** <sup>b</sup>	.016		.123*** <sup>b</sup>	.017	
Part time*right/residence	-.007	.020		.031~	.018	
<i>Relationship status respondent (R)</i>						
LAT	.066*	.028		.023	.021	
Cohabiting	.156*** <sup>c</sup>	.026		.073*** <sup>c</sup>	.020	
Married		.028			.022	
LAT*right/residence	-.026	.026		.066**	.025	
Cohabiting*right/residence		.024		.103*** <sup>c</sup>	.023	
Married*right/residence		.027	11.95**		.027	
<i>Relationship status ex-partner (Ex)</i>						

Table A3 (Continued)

	Type right			Residence stepparent		
	b	SE(b)	Chi2 <sup>a</sup>	b	SE(b)	Chi2 <sup>a</sup>
LAT	-.027	.023		-.006	.017	
Resident partner	-.054**	.019		-.023 <sup>f</sup>	.014	
LAT*right/residence	.004	.021		-.037 <sup>~</sup>	.022	
Resident partner*right/residence	.005	.019	0.08	-.060** <sup>ff</sup>	.018	10.42**
<i>Residence stepchildren</i>						
Full-time resident	-.041	.032		-.038	.023	
Living with ex-partner		.025		-.049* <sup>g</sup>	.020	
Living independently	-.044	.028		-.028 <sup>h,i</sup>	.022	
Full-time resident*right/residence	.025	.030		.015	.029	
Living with ex*right/residence	.051*	.024			.025	
Living independently*right/residence	.009	.026	5.43	-.025 <sup>h,i</sup>	.026	10.87*
R children with new partner	-.054 <sup>~</sup>	.031		-.045 <sup>~</sup>	.024	
R children new partner*right/residence	.017	.029	0.34	-.002	.032	0.00
Ex children with new partner	-.016	.024		-.006	.016	
Ex children new partner*right/residence	.001	.021	0.00	-.020	.023	0.78
Number of conflicts	.004	.003		.004	.003	
R woman		.013			.013	
R age	-.001	.001		-.001	.001	
R Educational level	-.005	.004		-.005	.004	
Main sample: wave I	.023	.016		.024	.016	
Refreshment sample	.006	.015		.006	.015	
N observations	8563			8563		
N respondents	2371			2371		
N of former households	2042			2042		
sigma (person level)	.222			.225		

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**Table A3** (Continued)

	Type right			Residence stepparent		
	b	SE(b)	Chi2 <sup>a</sup>	b	SE(b)	Chi2 <sup>a</sup>
sigma (residual)	.303			.300		
R2 overall	.154			.160		

~ two-sided  $p < .10$ ; \* two-sided  $p < .05$ ; \*\* two-sided  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* two-sided  $p < .001$

Note. Significance of all contrasts only shown in case the Chi2 test for the interaction terms is statistically significant.

<sup>a</sup> Chi2 test of whether the interaction terms for the categories of this independent variable are simultaneously 0.

<sup>b</sup> If part-time residence is reference category: type right  $b(\text{full time}) = -.008/p = .709$  and  $b(\text{full time} * \text{type right}) = .090/p < .001$ ; residence  $b(\text{full time}) = -.011/p = .0464$  and  $b(\text{full time} * \text{residence stepparent}) = .092/p < .001$ .

<sup>c</sup> If LAT is reference category: type right  $b(\text{cohabiting}) = .090/p < .001$  and  $b(\text{cohabiting} * \text{type right}) = -.047/p = .031$ ; residence  $b(\text{cohabiting}) = .050/p = .003$  and  $b(\text{cohabiting} * \text{residence stepparent}) = .037/p = .086$ .

<sup>d</sup> If LAT is reference category: type right  $b(\text{married}) = .149/p < .001$  and  $b(\text{married} * \text{type right}) = -.039/p = .100$ ; residence  $b(\text{married}) = .064/p = .001$  and  $b(\text{married} * \text{residence stepparent}) = .136/p < .001$ .

<sup>e</sup> If cohabiting is reference category: type right  $b(\text{married}) = .059/p = .012$  and  $b(\text{married} * \text{type right}) = .008/p = .712$ ; residence  $b(\text{married}) = .015/p = .426$  and  $b(\text{married} * \text{residence stepparent}) = .099/p < .001$ .

<sup>f</sup> If ex-partner has LAT relationship with new partner is reference category:  $b(\text{resident partner}) = -.017/p = .259$  and  $b(\text{resident partner} * \text{residence stepparent}) = -.022/p = .247$ .

<sup>g</sup> If full-time residence is reference category:  $b(\text{with ex}) = -.011/p = .636$  and  $b(\text{with ex} * \text{residence stepparent}) = -.085/p = .004$ .

<sup>h</sup> If full-time residence is reference:  $b(\text{independent}) = .010/p = .678$  and  $b(\text{independent} * \text{residence stepparent}) = -.040/p = .188$ .

<sup>i</sup> If with ex-partner is reference category:  $b(\text{independent}) = .021/p = .296$  and  $b(\text{independent} * \text{residence stepparent}) = .044/p = .103$ .

**Table A4** Multilevel/OLS regression of support for stepparents' legal rights (any right/parental responsibility for resident stepparent/legal parenthood for resident stepparent): interactions between residence child and relationship status of respondent (R) and of ex-partner (Ex)

	Any right		Parental responsibility		Legal parenthood	
	b(SE)	Chi2	b(SE)	F	b(SE)	F
<i>Residence child</i>						
Full time	.004 (.033)		-.007 (.057)		.029 (.055)	
Part time	-.041 (.037)		-.051 (.068)		-.072 (.052)	
<i>Relationship status R</i>						
LAT	.046 (.030)		.108~ (.055)		-.019 (.040)	
Cohabiting	.068** (.026)		.109* (.045)		.007 (.035)	

Table A4 (Continued)

	Any right		Parental responsibility		Legal parenthood	
	b(SE)	Chi2	b(SE)	F	b(SE)	F
Married	.132*** (.029)		.200*** (.049)		.134** (.044)	
*Residence						
LAT*full time	.033 (.035)		-.035 (.066)		.180** (.054)	
LAT*part time	-.018 (.040)		.004 (.079)		.044 (.051)	
Cohabiting*full time	.109** (.034)		.176** (.061)		.271*** (.054)	
Cohabiting*part time	.084~ (.045)		.166* (.078)		.127* (.060)	
Married*full time	.135*** (.037)		.259*** (.064)		.302*** (.064)	
Married*part time	.026 (.045)	21.89**	.071 (.079)	4.56***	.130~ (.070)	6.79***
<i>Relationship status ex</i>						
LAT	-.044 (.027)		-.056 (.047)		-.070~ (.037)	
Resident partner	-.045* (.021)		-.080* (.037)		-.066* (.031)	
*Residence						
LAT*full time	.024 (.042)		.024 (.072)		.035 (.068)	
LAT*part time	.055 (.044)		.022 (.080)		.031 (.063)	
Resident*full time	-.036 (.033)		-.022 (.056)		-.051 (.055)	
Resident*part time	.038 (.037)	5.98	.049 (.069)	.41	.029 (.055)	.92
N observations	8563					
N respondents	2371		2258		1898	
N of former households	2042		1952		1687	
Sigma (person level)	.222					
Sigma (residual)	.304					
R square (overall)	.155		.071		.118	

~ two-sided  $p < .10$ ; \* two-sided  $p < .05$ ; \*\* two-sided  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* two-sided  $p < .001$

Notes: Chi2/F- test of whether the interaction terms for the categories of this independent variable are simultaneously 0; Estimates for covariates not shown; not all contrasts shown.