

Child-perceived parental support and knowledge in shared physical custody and other living arrangements for children

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Abstract

Objective: The aim of this paper is to develop an understanding of how child-perceived parental support and knowledge among children in Sweden differ across ten forms of residential arrangement.

Background: Shared physical custody has become an increasingly common arrangement for children in separated families in many European countries. In an international comparison, Sweden has a high rate of parental union dissolution but also the highest prevalence of shared physical custody arrangements following divorce or separation. Over a third of all children with divorced or separated parents spend an equal amount of time living in both parental households.

Method: We used data from the Swedish HBSC survey from 2013/14, which are focused on children in grades 5, 7 and 9 in the Swedish comprehensive school system (n= 7360) and used perceived parental support and perceived parental knowledge scales as dependent variables in multiple ordered logistic regressions conducted separately by the sex of the parent.

Results: The results show that children in shared physical custody report higher levels of parental support and knowledge than children in sole physical custody and equally high as those who live in a two-parent family. Children living in non-symmetrical physical custody arrangements report lower levels of paternal support and knowledge than children whose parents share physical custody equally. Maternal support and knowledge does not differ between children living in symmetrical and non-symmetrical shared physical custody arrangements, whereas paternal support and knowledge is lower in families where the child lives in an unequal residential sharing arrangement with the mother as the main co-residential parent.

Conclusion: Post-divorce living arrangements are clearly associated with the relationship between parents and children, with children in shared physical custody reporting stronger relationships than children in sole physical custody. The cross-sectional nature of the data prevents us from drawing conclusions on causality, however.

Key words: child custody, joint custody, divorce, separation, health behavior in school-aged children



1. Introduction

Experiencing a parental union disruption is common among children in Sweden, as it is in many other countries. Recent research shows that 28 percent of Swedish children have experienced a parental union disruption by age 15 (Andersson et al. 2017). Of the children whose parents were divorced or separated, 72 percent lived in a shared legal custody arrangement (Statistics Sweden 2013a), which is the legal presumption following divorce or non-marital parental separation. Shared legal custody means that both parents have the right to decide in matters regarding the child, such as school-choice etc. While the parental separation rate has stabilized since the turn of the millennium (Statistics Sweden 2013b), shared legal custody has increased (Statistics Sweden 2013a), as has shared physical custody (Statistics Sweden 2014), which means that the child lives with both parents, alternating between the two households.

This study focuses on the Swedish case. Sweden is the country with the highest prevalence of shared physical custody among the 37 European and North American countries studied by Steinbach and colleagues (2021), and the proportion living in such arrangements grew rapidly during the decades around the turn of the millennium (Lundström 2009). The proportion of children with separated parents living in equally shared physical custody increased from one percent in the 1980s to 35 percent in 2013 (Statistics Sweden 2014). The definition of this practice varies internationally between jurisdictions, and also between academic studies, where spending a minimum of 30% of one's time in one of the parental households is starting to become established as a threshold for what can be considered shared physical custody (Steinbach 2019). Thomson and Turunen (2022) have argued for a lower bound of 35% for a residential arrangement to be considered shared physical custody, since this would require living with each parent on weekdays and not just weekends. Unlike some other countries, Sweden has no official legal definition of shared physical custody in terms of a minimum amount of time lived in each parental home. A ruling from the Supreme Court of Sweden has determined, however, that living one-third of the time with one parent is not considered co-residence but visitation (NJA 1998:43). When determining payments of maintenance support to divorced or separated parents, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency considers a 40/60 division to be the minimum for what is considered a co-residential or shared physical custody arrangement (Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2022). However, by far the most common form of sharing involves spending equal time in both households (Lundström 2009; Statistics Sweden 2014).

Although the literature on shared physical custody has expanded during the past decade, it remains limited in comparison to the research on divorce, lone parenting and other post-divorce family forms. Most of the studies published in recent years have focused on different health and wellbeing outcomes for children, largely based on cross-sectional studies (for summaries, see for example Nielsen 2011; 2013a; 2013b). Shared physical custody has been assumed to affect children's wellbeing both positively and negatively. In an overview of the literature, Sodermans and Matthijs (2014) suggested that shared physical custody can influence children positively, as they will benefit from the continuity of parental involvement and resources. Sharing physical custody may also have an adverse effect, however, as the adjustment of children depends on stability, and living in alternating households might increase children's stress levels. There is still a lack of evidence however for causal links between forms of physical custody and children's psychological wellbeing (Steinbach 2019), and several studies have shown that families with shared physical custody have higher educational attainment, income and material standards than sole physical custody parents (Fransson et al. 2016; Hjern et al. 2020; Kitterød & Lyngstad 2012). A number of cross-sectional studies have shown a positive association between shared physical custody and different aspects of children's wellbeing (see for example Bergström et al. 2013; 2014; 2015; 2018; Fransson et al. 2016; Turunen 2017; Turunen et al. 2017 for the Swedish context). Recently, several studies have shown differences by family type in parent-child relationship quality, which is an important factor in relation to children's wellbeing. For example, Fransson and colleagues (2018) have shown that children in shared physical custody have better relationships with their parents than those who live in sole physical custody. The children's relationships with their fathers were even stronger than in two-parent families.

Several studies on shared physical custody have investigated the role of parent-child relationships as a mediator between family structure and child wellbeing. A Swedish study based on population data for 9th graders in Stockholm showed that children in shared physical custody were more likely to talk to their parents about things that bothered them than children living with one parent. This did not however explain the somewhat lower levels of health found among the sole physical custody children (Låftman et al. 2014).

Similarly, a study by Turunen (2017) tested for an interaction between post-separation family type and parent-child relationship quality without finding any interaction effect on children's experience of stress.

Using a more nuanced measure of parent-child relationships, Hagquist (2016) did however show that whereas children in shared physical custody fared better than those in sole physical custody, as measured using the Psychosomatic Problems (PSP) scale, there was a significant interaction effect between relationship quality and the type of residential setting, whereby children who had a poor relationship with their parents were worse off in post-divorce families.

Vanassche and colleagues (2013) found that shared physical custody helped maintain a strong parent-child relationship. Their analysis showed that when the quality of the relationship was held constant, the children in shared physical custody actually had worse psychological outcomes than those in the sole physical custody of their mother. Further, Bastaits and Mortelmans (2016) have found that whereas there was no direct relationship between family structure and children's self-esteem or life satisfaction in Flanders, the higher wellbeing among children in shared physical custody, compared to those living with a lone parent, was explained by an indirect effect mediated by higher parental support and monitoring. Studies from Flanders have also shown that authoritative parenting by fathers was more common in shared physical custody arrangements than among non-residential fathers (Bastaits et al. 2012) and that parent-child communication was better in shared physical custody arrangements compared to sole custody arrangements (Bastaits and Pasteels 2019). The literature is still based on cross-sectional observations, however, and we cannot rule out that the differences found in psychological outcomes or parent-child relationship quality might be due to selection into different physical custody arrangements.

The present study is also based on cross-sectional data but adds to the previous research by analyzing differentials in parent-child relationships, i.e., children's perceived parental support and knowledge, by type of residential arrangement. Besides living with both parents and in sole physical custody, i.e., full time with one parent, our HBS data allow us to distinguish between equal sharing, regular sharing that is not equal, and also arrangements that involve living with one of the parents sometimes or almost never. It is important to be able to distinguish between different types of residential arrangements since few studies have examined whether the amount of time spent living in each household affects child wellbeing. Fabricius and colleagues (2012) found that spending at least 30% of the time in shared physical custody is necessary to achieve qualitative parenting outcomes. In contrast to this finding, data from Belgium presented by Vanassche and colleagues (2013) suggest that the main difference is found between those who do not have any shared residence at all and those who have at least some during a typical month in the child's life. Living in shared physical custody at least one-third of the time was not required to produce positive psychological outcomes. Previous studies from Sweden have used relatively coarse measures of non-equally shared physical custody, using a heterogeneous category for all children living in non-symmetrical shared residential arrangements. The results are inconclusive, with work by Turunen and colleagues (Turunen 2017; Turunen et al. 2017) showing no difference in wellbeing between equal and non-equal sharing, while a study by Bergström and colleagues (2013) based on a large survey of the full population of 12 and 15-year-olds found that children in equally shared physical custody had better outcomes than those living with only one parent. Bergström and colleagues did not however find any conclusive pattern with regard to the difference between children who lived only with one parent, and those who mostly lived with one parent.

2. Parental support and knowledge

Parental support and knowledge are two aspects of positive and effective parenting that have been linked to a wide variety of child outcomes both in original two-parent families and post-divorce family types (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999; Barnes & Farrell 1992; Bastaits et al. 2012; Carlson 2006; Kerr & Stattin 2000; Stattin & Kerr 2000; Vanassche et al 2013). This type of parenting is based on Baumrind's influential theory of parenting styles, which focuses on child socialization through parent-child interactions in which children learn the values, habits and skills they need (Baumrind 2013).

Children's socialization for competence requires parents to foster self-confident and autonomous behaviors by responding to children's individual characteristics and needs as well as by demanding compliance with parental standards of socially acceptable behavior. Supportive parenting is based on lovingness and emotional warmth as well as acts that help the child to manage his or her daily life and

needs and plans for the future (Baumrind 2013). These acts may, for example, involve helping the child with schoolwork or making the child feel better when sad or worried etc. Parental knowledge simply refers to the parents having information about the child's daily life, such as in the form of his or her whereabouts after school, who his or her friends are, how he or she spends money etc. This knowledge can come either by means of voluntary disclosure by the child or via parental solicitation or surveillance (Stattin & Kerr 2000). However, parental control and monitoring, with the parent as the agent and the child as the object of control and monitoring, have been shown to be less effective in promoting children's wellbeing than parental knowledge (Kerr & Stattin 2000; Stattin & Kerr 2000; Stattin et al. 2010).

3. Family structure and parent-child relationships

A parental union dissolution can negatively affect parent-child relationships, including in the form of parental support and knowledge (Amato & Gilbreth 1999; Pagani et al. 1998; Thomson et al. 1994). Even though divorced parents may do their best to maintain a strong bond to the child and help him or her through a period that can be stressful, two parents in a home have greater possibilities to give the child the attention it needs while also working and running the household. The co-resident parent's possibility of offering love and affection, help when needed, or of keeping track of the child's daily life, activities and peers, may also be reduced by a lack of time, as the parent also needs to work and do household tasks etc., while having full or the main responsibility for childrearing (Crouter & Head 2002). The non-residential parent's ability to interact with the child is arguably reduced by having less access. The introduction of a stepparent following a parental union dissolution may further reduce the contact between the child and the non-residential parent (Ganong & Coleman 2017) but may also affect the relationship with the co-resident parent (Pagani et al. 1998). In a study of Swedish children, Låftman and colleagues (2014) showed that children in shared physical custody families were less likely to turn to a parent for emotional support than were those living both parents, although the differences were rather small. However, children living in sole physical custody arrangements were much less likely to turn to a parent compared to children in two-parent families. Among the children living in sole physical custody, more than half reported not turning to any parent for emotional support (Låftman et al. 2014).

Between 80 and 90 percent of children in Sweden, depending on age and the gender of the child and parent, have regular contact with the non-residential parent even if they do not co-reside (Statistics Sweden 2011). A post-divorce residential arrangement with shared physical custody of the child may facilitate supportive parenting, as both parents maintain an active role in the child's life. If the child alternates living between two parental households equally, or roughly equally, both parents will be part of the child's daily activities, will help with homework, console when sad, meet their friends, and pick them up from school or drive them to sports practice etc. Both will also have to be there to set rules and boundaries and to enforce them. Compared to an original two-parent family, shared physical custody offers fewer possibilities to support the child and to know about his or her life, since interactions between the parent and the child are reduced by the child also living in the other parent's household. However, compared to a sole physical custody arrangement, the sharing of physical custody arguably increases the attention the child will receive from the parent who would otherwise not have access to his or her daily life (Bastaitis et al. 2012; Fransson et al. 2018; Låftman et al. 2014). It could also be argued that sharing physical custody will allow the parent who would otherwise have been the sole custodian to be more effective when engaging with the child, since sharing physical custody makes it easier to combine work, family and leisure by sharing the burden of childrearing (Botterman et al. 2015; Thomson & Turunen 2022; Van der Heijden et al. 2016). On the other hand, it is conceivable that a parent who is sharing physical custody may lose the ability to engage with the child to a degree that is not compensated by the engagement of the other parent.

Other forms of physical custody sharing may be beneficial in the same way. Having shared physical custody that involves regular stays in both parental households, even if time is not shared equally between the two, also gives both parents the possibility of engaging in the child's everyday life, and to support and gain knowledge about the child. Thomson and Turunen (2022) have argued that a regular residential sharing arrangement should not be limited to weekends, which means that the lowest threshold for what can be considered a meaningful definition of shared physical custody should be at least 35% in each parental home. A residential arrangement with weekend visits to the non-residential parent may not provide the same possibilities for the parent and child to engage in everyday activities, but might instead be

more focused on having fun together. However, it is important to bear in mind that this could provide more possibilities to support the child and to gain knowledge about the child's life than a living arrangement in which there was no co-residential contact. In an arrangement where the child stays at the other parent's home only on rare occasions, the possibility of maintaining a supportive parenting style may be reduced for the non-residential parent (Bastaitis et al. 2012), and the reduction in the burden of child rearing and household work for the co-resident parent is smaller or even non-existent (Van der Heijden 2016).

Given the knowledge gap regarding how different forms of physical custody sharing are associated with the relationship between children and their mothers and fathers, we pose the following research questions:

1. Is the form of physical custody associated with parent-child relationship quality, here operationalized as the mother's and father's support and knowledge as perceived by the child.
2. If so, is there a difference between equally shared physical custody and non-symmetrical sharing?

4. Data and method

4.1 Data

The analysis is based on Swedish data from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) survey from 2013/14. The HBSC survey was designed to measure health and health-related behaviors in adolescents across countries, and is repeated every four years in 50 countries. The survey was carried out by Statistics Sweden among children aged 11, 13 and 15, in grades 5, 7 and 9 of the Swedish comprehensive school system. The sampling was conducted using a two-step cluster design: schools were first randomly selected, and in the second step one class in each school was randomly selected to answer the questionnaire. The response rate was 69.4 % giving a total sample size of 7867 children. In addition to the battery of questions common to all HBSC surveys, the Swedish survey also included questions on among other things shared residence and the child-parent relationship (Public Health Agency of Sweden 2015). For the present analysis we have excluded children who were not living with either parent (148 children), children who had not reported their living arrangements (123 children), children whose living arrangements were reported inconsistently, i.e., who reported having a shared residential arrangement but not a second home (136 children), and those who had a missing value on all the dependent variables (100 children). The final sample size was 7360, but due to missing values on the dependent variables the analytical sample sizes were 6827 (father's support), 6909 (father's knowledge), 7140 (mother's support) and 7171 (mother's knowledge). Respondents with missing values on control variables were retained in the analyses with a category for missing values being employed for each covariate (see Table 2).

4.2 Measures

4.2.1 Child-perceived parental support and knowledge

The first dependent variable, *Child-perceived parental support*, was constructed for both the mothers and the fathers. Child-perceived parental support was constructed by summing the responses to four survey items retrieved from the 12-item Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) (Parker et al. 1979). These items asked how often the respondent's mother or father: "helps me as much as I need", "understands my problems and worries", "makes me feel better when I am upset", and "is loving". The questions were answered on a four-point Likert-type scale with the options: "almost always", "sometimes", "never", or "I don't have or see a mother/father". The fourth response option, not having or seeing the parent, was coded as missing following the procedure used in previous research (see for example, Madkour et al. 2010). In the present sample, the alpha was 0.79 for mothers and 0.87 for fathers. The index was coded to a range of 1–9, with higher values indicating higher perceived support. The distribution was highly skewed, with most children obtaining the highest scores. In order to meet the proportional odds assumption for ordered logistic regression, the indexes were recoded into three-category variables, using scores of 6 and 8 as cutoff points (see Table 1).

The second dependent variable, *Child-perceived parental knowledge*, was also constructed for both the mothers and the fathers by summing the responses to five survey items asking how much the respondent's

mother or father knew about “who your friends are”, “how you spend your money”, “where you are after school”, “where you go at night”, and “what you do with your free time”. This is a widely used measure for gauging parental knowledge about their children’s daily lives (Stattin et al. 2010). In some studies (see for example Kalian et al. 2013; Lenciauskiene & Zaborskis 2008) these items are used as an operationalization of parental monitoring although they describe knowledge of the child rather than parental behaviors intended to obtain this knowledge (see discussions in Kerr & Stattin; Stattin & Kerr 2000; Stattin et al. 2010). The questions were answered on a four-point Likert-type scale with the options: “knows a lot”, “knows a little”, “doesn’t know anything”, or “don’t have or see this person”. Again the fourth response option was coded as missing. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.78 for mothers and 0.82 for fathers in the present sample. The index was coded to a range of 1–11 with higher values indicating higher perceived knowledge. The distribution was highly skewed with most children obtaining the highest scores. Again, in order to meet the proportional odds assumption for ordered logistic regression the indexes were recoded into three-category variables using scores of 7 and 9 respectively as cutoff points between low and medium and medium and high knowledge (see Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics. Dependent variables: Child-perceived parental knowledge and support

	Low		Medium		High		Missing	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Father’s support*	1099	15	1629	22	4099	56	533	7
Mother’s support*	594	8	1306	18	5240	71	220	3
Father’s knowledge**	1303	18	1978	27	3628	49	451	6
Mother’s knowledge**	552	7	1687	23	4932	67	189	3

Note: * Based on an index ranging from 1-9 with 6 as the cutoff for the Middle category and 8 the as cutoff for the category High,

** Based on an index ranging from 1-11 with 7 as the cutoff for the Middle category and 9 as the cutoff for the category High

Source: Swedish Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) 2013/14)

4.2.2 Living arrangements

The measure for the child’s living arrangements is based on four items: 1. Whom the child lives with in his or her primary household (mother, father, other), 2. Whether the child also lives in a secondary household, and if so, 3. How much the child lives in the secondary household, and 4. With whom the child lives in the secondary household. Using this information, we constructed a measure with ten categories: In a two-parent family the child lives with both of his or her parents in the same household; in a sole mother family the child lives with the mother only; in a sole father family the child lives with the father only. If the child reported living in two households, he or she was offered four pre-defined options regarding the amount of time lived in the second home in the form of an ordinal survey item. In a 50/50 shared physical custody arrangement, the child lives equally with both the mother and the father in two separate households. The child could also report living in two separate parental households regularly but not equally, and living in one of the parental households “sometimes” or “almost never”. The data do not allow for a detailed analysis of the proportion of time lived in the two households for the non-symmetrical living arrangements. These children have considered both parental residences as their homes, but it is not unreasonable to assume that the arrangements for children who report living in the secondary household sometimes or almost never are more like visiting arrangements than shared physical custody in a meaningful sense, i.e., parental engagement in everyday activities. Children in the three non-symmetrical residential arrangements were divided into separate categories based on whether their main residence was with the mother or the father (see Table 2 for the distribution).

4.2.3 Controls

The multivariate analysis controls for the child’s school grade (5, 7 or 9, corresponding to the ages 11, 13 and 15), sex, immigrant background (born in Sweden or not), whether he or she lives with a stepparent in either home, whether he or she lives with siblings (biological or stepsiblings), and perceived family affluence. Perceived family affluence is measured using the Perceived Family Affluence Scale, a four-item measure of family wealth, developed in the HBSC study (Boyce et al. 2005). The children where asked

“Does your family own a car?” (0/1/2 or more); “Do you have your own bedroom for yourself?” (1/0); “During the past 12 months, how many times did you travel away on holiday with your family?”; “How many computers does your family own?” A score of 3 on the third and fourth questions (on vacations and computers) was coded as 2 giving a total score ranging from 0 to 7. In accordance with the recommendation suggested by Due and colleagues (2009), scores of 0 through 3 were considered as low, those of 4 or 5 as mid-range, and those of 6 or 7 as high.

5. Data analysis

We used ordered logistic regression to analyze the correlation between children’s living arrangements and both child-perceived parental support and child-perceived parental knowledge, controlling for the independent variables. The models met the proportional odds assumption once the skewed dependent variables had been recoded as described above. Weights were used to adjust for the sampling design. Reports concerning the mothers’ and fathers’ knowledge and support, as perceived by the child, were analyzed separately.

6. Results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the independent variables. We can see that 71 % of the children reside with both of their parents in the same household. The second largest residential category is 50/50 shared physical custody, which accounts for 10 % of the children in the sample. Seven percent report living in sole physical custody without any residential sharing. The vast majority of these live in the sole physical custody of the mother. Four percent have a regular arrangement of residential sharing but do not live an equal amount of time in both households. Three-fourths of these have their mothers’ household as their main residence. 4 % report living with one of the parents “sometimes” and 4 % “almost never”. In both of these categories, three-fourths of the children live mainly with their mother.

Thirteen percent of the children have at least one co-resident stepparent, and 91 % have co-resident biological or stepsiblings. Perceived family affluence is heavily skewed, with three-fourths of the children belonging to the high affluence category, 20 % to the mid-range and only 1 % to the low category (with 4 % missing). This reflects the high standard of living in Sweden as measured by the scale employed.

Tables 3 and 4 present the results of the multivariate ordered logistic regression models. We tested for interactions between residential arrangements and the children’s age, sex, immigrant background, siblings and the presence of stepparents. The only significant interaction effect found was between residential arrangement and the child’s perceived family affluence for the mother’s perceived knowledge outcome. Since the other three regressions did not show any interaction effects, we present only the main effects for all models but our other results are available upon request.

Table 3 provides the results of the multivariate ordered logistic regression analysis of the fathers’ and mothers’ support as perceived by the child. There is no statistically significant difference between children living in equally shared physical custody arrangements and two-parent families, but those living in the sole physical custody of the mother report lower levels of both maternal and paternal support. Children living in sole paternal physical custody report lower levels of maternal support but no difference in paternal support compared to children in equally shared physical custody. When comparing the children in sole physical custody to those in non-symmetrical residential arrangements, we can see an interesting pattern. Children living regularly but not equally in both parental households report lower levels of perceived paternal support when the mother’s household is their main residence, but do not report lower levels of maternal support when living mainly with the father. Children whose main residence is with the mother but who live sometimes or almost never with the father reported significantly lower paternal support, as did children who lived mainly with their fathers and almost never with their mothers. Almost never living with the father while mainly staying with the mother was also negatively associated with child-perceived maternal support.

The control variables show a negative age gradient for the perceived support of both mothers and fathers, with levels of child-perceived support diminishing with the child’s age. Boys report higher levels of

perceived paternal support than girls, but there is no statistically significant gender difference when it comes to child-perceived maternal support. The children in the high affluence families report higher levels of support from both mothers and fathers, but the children in low affluence families only differ significantly from those in the mid-range category with regard to maternal support. Having siblings, a co-resident stepparent or an immigrant background are not significantly associated with either perceived maternal or paternal support.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics. Independent variables

	Freq.	Percent
Living arrangement		
Both parents	5182	71
Sole mother	475	6
Sole father	83	1
Shared; 50/50	764	10
Mother main; regularly share	185	3
Father main; regularly share	72	1
Mother main; sometimes shared	224	3
Father main; sometimes shared	84	1
Mother main; almost never shared	226	3
Father main; almost never shared	65	1
School grade		
5th	2482	34
7th	2162	29
9th	2657	36
Unknown/missing	59	1
Child's sex		
Boy	3577	48
Girl	3734	51
Unknown/missing	49	1
Born in Sweden		
Yes	6568	89
No	713	10
Unknown/missing	79	1
Stepfamily		
Yes	988	13
No	6372	87
Siblings		
Yes	6732	91
No	628	9
Family affluence		
Low	68	1
Mid-range	1442	20
High	5322	75
Unknown/missing	313	4
N	7360	100

Source: Swedish Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) 2013/14.

Table 3: Ordered logistic regression. Child-perceived parental support

	Fathers		Mothers	
	OR	Std. Err.	OR	Std. Err.
Living arrangement				
Both parents	0.92	0.09	0.95	0.11
Sole mother	0.44***	0.08	0.72*	0.10
Sole father	0.62	0.16	0.28**	0.12
Shared; 50/50 (ref.)	-	-	-	-
Mother main; regularly share	0.50***	0.09	0.78	0.15
Father main; regularly share	0.74	0.21	0.74	0.22
Mother main; sometimes shared	0.57***	0.09	0.71	0.13
Father main; sometimes shared	0.69	0.16	0.43**	0.11
Mother main; almost never shared	0.21***	0.04	0.56**	0.10
Father main; almost never shared	0.47*	0.15	0.25***	0.09
School grade				
5th	1.63***	0.11	1.68***	0.13
7th	-	-	-	-
9th	0.68***	0.04	0.64***	0.04
Child's sex				
Boy (ref.)	-	-	-	-
Girl	0.78***	0.04	1.01	0.06
Born in Sweden				
Yes (ref.)	-	-	-	-
No	1.00	0.10	0.94	0.10
Stepfamily				
Yes	0.91	0.10	0.95	0.11
No (ref.)	-	-	-	-
Siblings				
Yes	1.15	0.12	0.98	0.10
No (ref.)	-	-	-	-
Family affluence				
Low	0.80	0.27	0.54*	0.14
Mid-range (ref.)	-	-	-	-
High	1.23***	0.08	1.17*	0.09
N	6827		7140	

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. Source: Swedish Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) 2013/14.

Table 4 presents the results of the multivariate ordered logistic regression analysis of how the child perceives the father's and mother's knowledge of his or her daily life. We find a similar pattern as in the analysis of perceived parental support, with the perceived knowledge of mothers and fathers not differing significantly between children who live in equally shared physical custody and those who live with both parents. In sole physical custody families we find a predictable pattern, with children reporting lower levels of maternal knowledge in sole father physical custody arrangements and lower paternal knowledge in sole mother families, compared to children in equally shared physical custody.

Children who live regularly with their father while having the mother's household as their main residence report significantly lower levels of perceived paternal knowledge, as do the corresponding group who mainly reside with the father. Perceived paternal knowledge is in fact lower in all non-symmetrical shared arrangements when compared to equally shared physical custody. Children who live mainly with their mother and regularly, sometimes or almost never with the father do not however perceive the mother

as knowing less about them than children living in shared physical custody. The only cases in which the children report that their mothers know less about their lives, compared to their peers in shared physical custody, are those where the child lives solely or mainly with the father.

Turning to the control variables, we can see a clear negative age gradient in perceptions of both mothers' and fathers' knowledge about the children's daily life, with the parents of the oldest children being perceived as knowing the least about their children's lives, while parents of the youngest children are perceived to know most. We find a positive affluence gradient, although perceived parental knowledge is not significantly different in low-affluence families compared to the mid-range category. There is also an interesting gender pattern, with girls reporting higher levels of maternal knowledge and lower levels of paternal knowledge than boys. Children with an immigrant background report lower levels of both maternal and paternal knowledge than their peers born in Sweden.

Table 4: Ordered logistic regression. Child-perceived parental knowledge

	Fathers		Mothers	
	OR	Std. Err.	OR	Std. Err.
Living arrangement				
Both parents	0.90	0.09	1.14	.12
Sole mother	0.21***	0.04	0.99	0.14
Sole father	1.12	0.28	0.22**	0.10
Shared; 50/50 (ref.)	-		-	
Mother main; regularly share	0.25***	0.05	1.06	0.20
Father main; regularly share	0.58*	0.13	.50**	0.13
Mother main; sometimes shared	0.15***	0.03	0.80	0.14
Father main; sometimes shared	0.60*	0.15	0.41**	0.13
Mother main; almost never shared	0.07***	0.01	0.94	0.17
Father main; almost never shared	0.40**	0.12	0.11***	0.11
School grade				
5th	1.68***	0.11	1.93***	0.14
7th	-		-	
9th	0.68***	0.22	0.68***	0.05
Child's sex				
Boy (ref.)	-		-	
Girl	0.81***	0.04	1.61***	0.09
Born in Sweden				
Yes (ref.)	-		-	
No	0.76**	.07	0.80*	0.08
Stepfamily				
Yes	0.89	0.10	0.79*	0.08
No (ref.)	-		-	
Siblings				
Yes	0.90	0.09	0.92	0.09
No (ref.)	-		-	
Family affluence				
Low	0.53	0.18	0.65	0.21
Mid-range (ref.)	-		-	
High	1.26***	0.08	1.20**	0.08
N	6909		7171	

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. Source: Swedish Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) 2013/14.

7. Discussion

Our findings from the HBS data show that most children in grades 5, 7 and 9 in Sweden live in an original two-parent family but that 29 percent have parents who do not live together. Of these, over one-third live in equally shared physical custody arrangements, moving regularly between two parental households, and one in ten have a regular residential sharing arrangement without sharing equally.

The overall results of the analyses show that the form of physical custody sharing is clearly correlated with both child-perceived parental support and child-perceived parental knowledge for both mothers and fathers, which is in line with previous research on parent-child relationships in Sweden (Bergström et al. 2013; Fransson et al. 2018; Hagquist 2016) and also with the research conducted by Bastaitis and colleagues in Belgium (Bastaitis & Mortelmans 2012; 2016; 2017; Bastaitis & Pasteels 2019). First, there is a pattern whereby children report non-residential parents as having lower knowledge about their daily lives and providing less support. Children who live only with their mothers perceive their fathers as knowing less and vice versa. Given that the possibilities for everyday-like parent-child interactions are more limited in such living arrangements than when co-residing, these findings are perhaps not surprising, even though most children in Sweden have regular contact with their non-residential parent even when physical custody is not shared and the child only lives with one parent (Statistics Sweden 2011). The fact that children in both sole mother and sole father physical custody arrangements report lower levels of maternal support compared to those living in equally shared physical custody indicates that parental support may be structured differently than parental knowledge, which is only lower when the child does not have the mother's home as his or her main household.

Unlike previous research on parent-child relationships from Sweden (Bergström et al. 2013; Låftman et al. 2014), children in equally shared physical custody do not report any statistically significant differences in either maternal or paternal support or knowledge compared to those living in an original two-parent household. This indicates that having a co-residential relationship with the child half of the time is sufficient to facilitate the same kind of parenting as in a family where both parents live together. Since we cannot rule out that this finding is due to differential selection into different forms of physical custody, it could alternatively be interpreted as indicating that families with equally shared physical custody and those with co-residing parents are similar on characteristics that affect parent-child relationships.

Compared to equally shared physical custody arrangements, children in the other types of residential sharing arrangements report a negative gradient for paternal support when the child's main residence is with the mother. Children in non-symmetrical shared residential arrangements also report lower levels of perceived paternal knowledge compared to those in equally shared physical custody, regardless of the degree of sharing. Children who live mainly with their mothers do however only report lower maternal knowledge and lower support in families where they almost never live with their fathers. This suggests that strictly equal sharing is not necessary to provide a strong mother-child relationship, whereas it is required for the same type of active fathering. This should again be interpreted with caution, however, since it could also be due to selection effects. The pattern identified does however imply that using cutoff points lower than 50/50 when defining shared physical custody produces heterogeneous categories and increases measurement error, at least in the Swedish context, where equal sharing constitutes the modal form of shared physical custody arrangements.

The results also show interesting gender differences, with girls reporting lower levels of paternal support and knowledge than boys but higher levels of maternal knowledge, which suggests that same sex parent-child relationships are closer than opposite sex relationships. Since our test for an interaction between the child's sex and the type of residential arrangement was negative, we can conclude that the gender differences do not differ by type of residential arrangement. The children living in the most affluent families reported higher levels of support and knowledge compared to those in the mid-range affluence category. Children from the most affluent families reported levels of parental knowledge and support that differed significantly from those reported by children from less affluent families. The levels reported by children in the least affluent families did not differ significantly from those reported in the mid-range affluence families. The least affluent group is small, however, since the perceived family affluence scale is heavily skewed, with 75 percent of the children reporting material conditions that locate them in the highest affluence category. The perceived family affluence scale used in the 2013/14 HBS survey may no longer be sufficiently discriminatory in a rich country such as Sweden, since most children have their own room, go on holidays and live in households with cars and computers. A new version of the scale has been suggested

that takes account of current trends in family consumption patterns, including items such as receiving pocket money, having an iPod and parents paying for household work etc. (Hartley et al. 2015).

Although more nuanced than previously used measures focused on physical custody arrangements (see for example Bergström et al. 2013; Fransson et al. 2018; Turunen 2017; Turunen et al. 2017) the variable used in the HBSC survey does not provide the kind of exactness that would be obtained using the child's residential calendar for a "typical month", for example, as was used in the Leuven Adolescents and Families project (Sodermans et al. 2012). Instead of using a residential calendar, the Swedish HBSC survey measures residential arrangements using pre-defined response options combined into an ordinal scale item. Due to the categorical nature of these options, we cannot know the exact extent to which a child who reports "sometimes" living in a second home actually lives there. Using a more exact measure, such as a residential calendar, would be preferable in order to facilitate a better examination of potential threshold levels with regard to the proportion of time spent living in both households, not only when it comes to parent-child relationships but also to children's and parents' wellbeing in general. Such a measure could also help distinguish between children who have overnight stays and those who spend a considerable amount time with the non-residential parent but without staying overnight. In the present study, as in most others, we cannot know whether or not these children view this as having a second home. The downside of using a calendar based on a "typical month" in a child's life is that such a measure does not capture those who do not live with the other parent on a monthly basis but who do so during school holidays, for example. In addition, a residential calendar may be sensitive to recall bias if the data are collected retrospectively at a single point in time.

Other aspects that we have not been able to analyze in the present study but that should be included in future research on shared physical custody are differences based on more nuanced measures of the family constellation. Fallesen and Gähler (2020) have recently shown that children living in shared physical custody arrangements where the parental union status is non-symmetrical (i.e., one has repartnered but not the other) have lower levels of wellbeing than children living in such arrangements where both parents have the same union status. Another aspect to include in the future is residential cycles, i.e., the time between change of home and whether this interacts with the child's age.

It is important to note that the present study is based on cross-sectional data, which provide a snapshot at the time of the survey. We cannot therefore rule out reverse causality. Parents who are more child-oriented may have closer relationships with their children, know more about their lives and offer more support. Following a union dissolution, these parents may also be more likely to opt for a shared physical custody arrangement, which would imply selection effects. Research has also shown families who practice shared physical custody to be better off with regard to income and educational attainment (Hjern et al. 2020; Kittrød & Lyngstad 2012). The problem of cross-sectionality is common to most of the research on shared physical custody due to a lack of longitudinal data. It is therefore important to include detailed measures of residential arrangements in future longitudinal studies addressing residential arrangements and parent-child relations.

Most of the research on shared physical custody has focused on different forms of child outcomes, often in the form of internalizing or externalizing psychological behaviors. Knowledge and support are neither internalizing nor externalizing outcomes, but instead map the social relationships between parents and children that have been shown to mediate negative outcomes. It is therefore important to analyze how sharing responsibility for the daily task of childrearing may help to facilitate a positive parenting style.

Data availability statement

The data used in this study has been made available by the Public Health Agency of Sweden following an application from the researchers.

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Information in German

Deutscher Titel

Elterliche Unterstützung und Wissen aus der Perspektive der Kinder bei dem Wechselmodell und anderen Wohnformen für Kinder

Zusammenfassung

Fragestellung: Ziel dieses Beitrags ist es, ein Verständnis dafür zu entwickeln, wie sich im schwedischen Kontext die elterliche Unterstützung und Wissen aus der Perspektive der Kinder in zehn verschiedenen Wohnformen unterscheiden.

Hintergrund: Gemeinsames physisches Sorgerecht ist in vielen europäischen Ländern eine gewöhnliche Regelung für Kinder in getrennten Familien geworden. Im internationalen Vergleich hat Schweden eine hohe Scheidungs- und Trennungsrate, sowie das höchste Vorkommen an gemeinsamen Sorgerechtsregelungen nach einer Scheidung oder Trennung. Mehr als ein Drittel aller Kinder mit geschiedenen oder getrennten Eltern leben gleich viel in den Haushalten beider Elternteile.

Methode: Wir verwendeten Daten aus der schwedischen HBSC-Erhebung von 2013/14, die sich auf Kinder der Klassenstufen 5, 7 und 9 im schwedischen Grundschulsystem konzentrieren (n= 7360). Zudem bedienten wir uns Skalen zur wahrgenommenen elterlichen Unterstützung und zum wahrgenommenen elterlichen Wissen als abhängige Variablen in mehrfach geordneten logistischen Regressionen, die getrennt nach dem Geschlecht der Eltern durchgeführt wurden.

Ergebnisse: Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Kinder, die das gemeinsame physische Sorgerecht haben, ein höheres Maß an elterlicher Unterstützung und elterlichem Wissen angeben als Kinder, die das alleinige physische Sorgerecht haben, und ein ebenso hohes Maß wie Kinder, die in einer Zwei-Eltern-Familie leben. Kinder, die in nicht-symmetrischen Sorgerechtsverhältnissen leben, berichten über ein geringeres Maß an väterlicher Unterstützung und Wissen als Kinder, deren Eltern sich das Sorgerecht gleichermaßen teilen. Mütterliche Unterstützung und Wissen unterscheiden sich nicht zwischen Kindern, die in symmetrischen und nicht-symmetrischen physischen Sorgerechtsvereinbarungen leben, wohingegen väterliche Unterstützung und Wissen in Familien geringer sind, in denen das Kind hauptsächlich bei der Mutter wohnt.

Schlussfolgerung: Die Wohnform nach der Scheidung hängt eindeutig mit der Beziehung zwischen Eltern und Kindern zusammen, wobei Kinder, die das gemeinsame physische Sorgerecht haben, über stärkere Beziehungen berichten als Kinder, die das alleinige physische Sorgerecht haben. Aufgrund des Querschnittscharakters der Daten ist es jedoch nicht möglich, kausale Schlussfolgerungen zu ziehen.

Schlagwörter: Sorgerecht, gemeinsames Sorgerecht, Scheidung, Trennung, Gesundheitsverhalten bei Kindern im Schulalter

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