Introduction: economic and social consequences of partnership dissolution – what do we know and what are we looking for?

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WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

Over the last several decades, the probability of divorce and separation among married or cohabiting couples has increased significantly in most European countries, although the level and pace at which this has occurred differs across countries. Much research has been devoted to the causes of this change – for example, to the effects of increased secularization and increased women's employment on marriage stability. Nevertheless, an equally important area of research is the analysis of the consequences of partnership dissolution. Separation and divorce do not only end unhappy partnerships and open up new perspectives for life. They are also connected with psychological distress, financial strain and many changes in individual living conditions. As we all know, couples are not only bound by love and affection. They live together in one common household, share economic resources, support each other emotionally and practically, try to be good parents to their children and enjoy social relationships with relatives, neighbours and friends. As a consequence, separation and divorce also imply a new organization of personal finances, taking up or increasing employment, applying for financial support from the state, arguing about childcare and custody, and searching for social support and new social relationships. Each of these changes can be problematic in itself, and will thus increase the emotional stress caused by partnership disruption.

As we have already mentioned, the causes of divorce are an area of intensive research (see the reviews in Wagner and Weiß, 2006). In contrast, not so much attention is directed to the consequences of divorce, at least in the European context. As the examples show, the consequences of separation and divorce are manifold, and they are noticeable both at the individual and the societal levels. This book deals with consequences of partnership dissolutions.
dissolution at the individual level and focuses on their economic and social aspects, leaving aside all kinds of psychological and somatic changes. In an early meta-analysis of 37 studies dealing with the long-term consequences of parental divorce for adult well-being, Amato and Keith (1991a) distinguished 15 different areas in which people are affected by divorce, ranging from psychological well-being to physical health. We focus here on what they have called occupational quality and material quality of life. More specifically, we are interested in men’s and women’s occupation, income, housing and living conditions, unemployment and welfare dependency. Admittedly, this list excludes important topics such as social networks and family relationships. But it still includes a lot of important topics that deserve thorough empirical investigation, especially in the European context.

WHAT DO WE KNOW SO FAR?

Most research on the consequences of partnership dissolution has been conducted using US-American data and focuses on economic well-being. A classical example is the study by Weitzman (1985), who argued that women’s average post-divorce economic well-being deteriorates by no less than 73 per cent, while men experience an improvement of 42 per cent. The accuracy of such high averages has been strongly questioned (Peterson, 1996), but the overall finding is that women experience a drop in economic status after a divorce, while the economic impact is not so great for men (some studies even find that men’s economic position improves after divorce). A nice summary of the corresponding US studies can be found in McKeever and Wolfinger (2001). Depending on the methodology of each study (time period, data source, income operationalization, measure of change), women lose between 9 and 51 per cent of their former income during marriage. The few studies focusing on men’s incomes (for example, Andreß and Bröckel, 2007a; Burkhauser et al., 1990, 1991; Finnie, 1993; Jarvis and Jenkins, 1999; Poortman, 2000) report slightly negative or slightly positive changes (ranging between −7 and +6 per cent).

This body of research was recently contested by McManus and DiPrete (2001), who argued that many of the aforementioned studies do not adequately deal with men’s support payments and that recent changes in gender-role specialization and law enforcement have levelled off the gender gap in post-divorce incomes. Contrary to conventional thinking, they found that the majority of partnered men in the USA lose economic status when their unions dissolve. A primary source of economic decline after union dissolution is their inability to compensate for the loss of their
partner’s income, which constitutes an increasing part of the household income as women become more and more active on the labour market (for a related finding in the British context, see Jenkins, 2008). A secondary source of economic decline is an increase in compulsory and voluntary support payments.

Another strand of research focuses on changes in labour supply. Given the aforementioned economic decline after partnership dissolution, (increased) employment is one of the ways to cushion the income loss. Correspondingly, many studies find that the majority of women increase their employment after partnership dissolution (Andreß and Bröckel, 2007a; Bradbury and Katz, 2002; Duncan and Hoffman, 1985; Finnie, 1993; Haurin, 1989; Johnson and Skinner, 1986; Morgan, 1991; Peterson, 1989). However, there are also some research findings that are not fully consistent with this view. For example, Mueller (2005) finds no change in women’s labour supply and Jarvis and Jenkins (1999) even detect a decrease. These conflicting results may be due to anticipation (women increase employment in advance because they expect a divorce) or to institutional effects (women decrease employment because welfare payments guarantee their standard of living). Using more recent survey data, Jenkins (2008), for example, shows that employment rates for British mothers rose steadily throughout the 1990s and were given a particular stimulus by the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit in 1998. Both changes had positive effects on the labour supply of separated women with children and reduced the number of solo mothers living on welfare.

Contrary to research on women’s employment, little is known about the divorce effect on men’s labour supply – which is quite surprising given the extensive literature on the positive effects of marriage on men’s careers and wages (for an overview, see Waite and Gallagher, 2000). One plausible hypothesis to be drawn from this body of research is the assumption that if there is a ‘marriage premium’, there should also be a ‘divorce penalty’. In line with this assumption, Kalmijn (2005) finds that after divorce, Dutch men experience an increased chance of becoming downwardly mobile, an increased chance of becoming unemployed and an increased likelihood of becoming disabled. On the other hand, most men living in partnerships work full-time even before separation, so that further increases in employment are hardly feasible for them. Hence, it is only a minority for which we can expect positive changes, while for the majority, any change in employment status implies either a lateral or a downward move. But in a recent German study (Andreß and Bröckel, 2007a), the latter event is observed as often for women as it is for men. Hence, there is evidence that men’s labour supply is negatively affected by partnership dissolution, but it is not quite clear whether this effect is gender specific.
In addition to changes in income and employment, separation and divorce are almost always connected with a household split. Sooner or later, at least one of the two partners leaves the common home (Feijten and van Ham, 2007). Surprisingly little is known about this residential mobility, although it is a necessary by-product of partnership dissolution. According to Dieleman and Schouw (1989), the high number of divorces has a strong impact on the housing market. Their analysis shows that in any given year, the increased demand for housing in a particular region is equal to about one-third of the number of divorces which occurred six to seven years previously.

Quite generally, residential mobility can either be a forced choice or a voluntary decision. In the latter case, researchers usually assume that people will only change their residence if the benefits of the new home exceed the costs of moving. Hence, voluntary residential mobility is usually associated with improved housing conditions and upward mobility on the housing market. Accidental circumstances such as unemployment and divorce often result in involuntary residential mobility, in which the individuals have to accept inferior housing conditions compared with their former home. Separation also causes a decrease in household size and disposable income, both of which lead people to look for smaller and less expensive homes. Furthermore, researchers have found that part of the residential mobility is preliminary (Andreß et al., 2003; Holmans, 1990; Wasoff and Dobash, 1990). Hence, living with family and friends is one option; temporarily accepting an inadequate home is another. Finally, if a couple separates, there is the question of how to divide savings and assets. If they own a house jointly, this is usually their greatest asset. Splitting up this asset requires one partner to buy the other partner out, which may be difficult given the limited financial capacities of both partners (apart from the fact that the house may be much too large and expensive for one partner alone). Overall, it is a plausible assumption that separation and divorce are associated with a great deal of downward mobility on the housing market, both in terms of residential status (from owner-occupied housing to rented apartments or temporary living arrangements) and in terms of size and quality of the dwelling.

Correspondingly, many studies have observed a negative effect of partnership dissolution on people’s housing careers (see, for example, Andreß and Bröckel, 2007a; Andreß et al., 2003; Feijten, 2005; Holmans, 1990; Sullivan, 1986). But it is not quite clear whether men and women are affected differently, or what happens if the couple has children. It seems to be common practice in most countries for the children to stay with their mother in the majority of cases. If there is a dispute about child custody, family courts will usually decide in favour of the children’s well-being, which often means assigning the former parental home to the mother.
and children. However, women experience financial difficulties much more often than do men (see the previous discussion), and hence may have problems retaining the former family home. Tentative data from an analysis of home ownership points in this direction. According to Feijten’s (2005) analysis of Dutch event-history data, women have a consistently higher probability of dropping out of owner-occupation than do men (see also Symon, 1990). Feijten argues that women’s lower degree of economic independence is the most likely cause of this finding. However, an analysis of German data shows that both genders have to cope with residential mobility to the same extent (Andreß and Bröckel, 2007a). Focusing on individuals with minor children, the overall mobility rate is slightly lower, but contrary to the expectations, mobility is higher for mothers than it is for fathers. On the one hand, this result is in accordance with the common assumption in divorce proceedings that children should stay in their familiar environment and not change homes. On the other hand, it is surprising that this is particularly true for men and less so for women. Yet a more refined analysis of the German data shows that residential mobility is a forced choice, especially for women and most particularly for mothers. Staying in their former family home would have meant having to cope with disproportionately high housing costs.

Both the Dutch and the German studies seem to tell the same story that is already familiar to us from the analysis of household incomes: separation and divorce have negative economic and social consequences, but it is women who bear the brunt of the burden—and among them, mothers are an especially vulnerable group. Yet we should not forget the aforementioned results, which indicate that this picture may be gradually changing due to increased women’s employment, enforced support payments and possible negative effects of partnership dissolution on men’s work careers. A careful reading of the literature on residential mobility provides additional clues. For example, low-income men seem to have very limited options on the housing market. Sullivan (1986) shows that the parental home is an extremely important source of housing for young, working-class men. Those men who cannot afford to stay in owner-occupation and who do not find suitable accommodation in the private rental sector have to rely on temporary arrangements such as bed and breakfasts, hostels, caravans or even homelessness. Furthermore, the social and psychological costs of divorce for men are very well documented in the literature (for an overview, see Amato, 2000; for a recent German study see, for example, Andreß and Bröckel, 2007b). Taking all this into account, it is no surprise that studies looking at a wider range of indicators find that divorce results in an increase of lifestyle deprivation both for men and for women. For instance, in an earlier study comparing ‘multidimensional’ poverty in Belgium and
Britain, Dewilde (2004) found that divorce significantly elevates the risk of entering situations of housing deprivation, financial stress and limited financial resources for both genders. In sum, all of these findings call for a much more comprehensive analysis of the consequences of partnership dissolution than those that focus exclusively on changes in income.

Another drawback is certainly the predominance of US-American data in divorce research. Research on the economic and social consequences of partnership dissolution in European countries is still scarce and often restricted to specific countries where the necessary statistical information is available through large-scale representative household surveys. The situation is somewhat better with respect to household income, which has been researched both in single countries (Andreß et al., 2003; Andreß and Bröckel, 2007a; Fritzell, 1990; Gähler, 1998; Jarvis and Jenkins, 1999; Jenkins, 2008; Manting and Bouman, 2006; Poortman, 2000) and comparatively across the EU member states (Dewilde, 2002; Uunk, 2004). But analyses of changes in employment, housing, and living conditions are hard to find (see, however, Andreß and Bröckel, 2007; Feijten, 2005; Kalmijn, 2005). On the other hand, the great variation in institutional arrangements between European countries and the availability of cross-nationally equivalent survey data like the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) or the European Union Statistics of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) also give us the opportunity to study the effects of different welfare regimes and family policy models on the consequences of partnership dissolution. The analyses by Dewilde (2002) and Uunk (2004) are examples of this approach. Both use welfare state typologies to describe their results. Additionally, Uunk (2004) uses quantitative indicators to study the effects of income-related and employment-related welfare provisions on women’s post-divorce incomes. Both types of welfare provisions improve women’s economic well-being. Uunk (2004) finds that higher social welfare payments increase women’s post-divorce income position more than higher public childcare provision does. Overall, both studies demonstrate that not only individual factors such as gender, children and labour force experience, but also institutional characteristics of the societal context determine the consequences of partnership dissolution.

HOW CAN WE EXPLAIN THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF PARTNERSHIP DISSOLUTION?

A necessary step towards explanation is to present a good description of what actually happens at the individual level. Thus, this book has two basic
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aims. First, we try to provide a comprehensive picture of the social and economic consequences of partnership dissolution. Who moves out of the family home? Who takes care of the children? How is the resident parent remunerated for childcare? How do the separated individuals earn a living on their own? Do they increase or decrease their labour supply? Do they get financial help from their former partners? Do they have to rely on state support? Do they suffer from material hardships, and so on? Second, based on this account, we try to explain differences between the two genders, between our target group and the continuously married, and between their present living conditions and those during their former partnership. For example, if women experience larger income declines than men, as the evidence from many studies suggests, what are the causes of this gender inequality? Is it a result of less economic activity on the part of women? If so, what are the causes of low female labour supply? Are women restricted in their employment possibilities because of childcare? If not, do women earn lower incomes than men, and why is that the case? Do they have lower qualifications? Have they lost part of their human capital during marriage due to temporary retreats from the labour market? What about the rights that family law provides for claiming maintenance payments from former partners? How are they used and enforced? And, finally, does the state help out in cases of financial need, insufficient maintenance payments or a lack of childcare?

Understanding the social and economic consequences of partnership dissolution necessitates economic and sociological theories, which can provide answers to at least three broad questions: (1) What are the gains involved in consensual or marital unions, and which of these are lost in cases of separation and divorce? (2) Why are the losses unequally distributed between the genders? (3) What incentives and restrictions do both partners have to improve their situation after their partnership has broken down?

Economies of Scale

Beginning with the first question, a natural starting point is the economic theory of private households. It describes such an association of individuals as a small firm, which allows for the production of private and public goods, as well as protection against common life risks, at a much lower price than those individuals would have had to pay were they to produce or buy these goods on their own at market prices (for a textbook summary see, for example, Bryant, 2006; Cigno, 1991). In cases of separation or divorce, most of these advantages are lost: separate homes are necessary, someone is needed to care for the children or to earn money for living,
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life becomes more expensive because economies of scale are lost, and so on. Sørensen (1994: 178) has estimated these losses of economies of scale at between 27 and 36 per cent. It should also be noted that economies of scale are reinforced by state policies in some countries, which redistribute money to married families (for example, by joint taxation). These benefits are lost when couples divorce.

Gender Differences

Gender differences in post-separation incomes – the subject of our second question – are usually attributed to the division of labour within the family, for which strong economic incentives exist when the two partners have different levels of productivity in home and market activities. Economic theory of the household asserts that it is efficient if the partner with the lower market income (usually the wife) specializes in home work and childcare, while the other partner (usually the husband) specializes in market activities (Becker, 1981). Additional incentives may result from the institutional context, which in some countries benefits the male breadwinner family (for example, by granting tax privileges), while other countries strive for more gender-neutral policies. This unequal division of labour remains efficient as long as the relationship between the two partners continues. But as rising divorce rates demonstrate (data on consensual unions are not available), marriage is no longer a lifelong commitment. In case of an early breakup, the chances of an unequal distribution of marital gains and losses between both partners are high (Ott, 1999). In this case, we can usually identify four risk factors (Holden and Smock, 1991: 68; Sørensen, 1994: 173):

- **Risk 1**: If there are children, economic needs after separation are higher for the resident parent, which in most cases is the mother. Because she has to care for the more economically dependent household members, she is often restricted in her earning capacities, especially if childcare facilities are scarce.

- **Risk 2**: Moreover, the risk that the resident parent will not receive the necessary child maintenance costs from the non-resident liable parent is high.

- **Risk 3**: Income sharing during marriage allows women to benefit from men’s market incomes, which are higher on average than women’s market incomes. It is questionable whether the amount of maintenance payments women receive from their former spouses after separation compensates for the loss of the economic support they received during marriage.
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- **Risk 4**: Changes in material wealth, pension entitlements and human capital that both partners experience during marriage are only imperfectly measurable and therefore hard to equalize after separation. Even if they are measurable, the economic loss may be high when they are sold to pay off the partner (for example, in the case of a common house).

Risk 4 is especially true for gains and losses in human capital. Given the frequent division of labour in many countries – with a husband employed full-time and a (maximum) part-time working wife who takes care of the household and children – it is probable that the gains in human capital achieved by continued employment on the part of the husband (Kenny, 1983) are not set off against the losses of human capital caused by interrupted or delayed working careers on the part of the wife.

At least three objections have been made against this gendered view of divorce outcomes. One is that married women’s employment has increased significantly within the past decades such that their economic dependency on the male partner’s income may be less pronounced than expected. This introduction is not the place to discuss the mechanisms underlying this secular trend (but for further exploration, see Stier, in this volume). However, it should be mentioned (1) that welfare states increasingly support women’s employment (Gornick and Meyers, 2003) and (2) that women may increase their labour supply simply in order to be secured against the pitfalls of marriage instability (Beck and Hartmann, 1999; Diekmann, 1994; Johnson and Skinner, 1986; Poortman, 2005; Rogers, 1999). A second objection is that complaints about the unreliability of support payments may be a little bit outdated, since many countries have introduced advanced maintenance systems and have tried to improve the legal regulations and the practice of support payments (see Part II of this volume). Thirdly, it has been noted that an increasing number of partnerships consist of consensual unions which are not regulated by a (marriage) contract, and thus may be less binding relationships in which each partner is more or less economically independent from the other.

**Coping with Separation and Divorce**

Finally, looking for theories to address the third question is a difficult task, simply because there are so many options open to both partners after separation. They can economize on their expenses, they can improve their financial situation by increased employment, they can search for additional economic and social support, both from the state and from their family and friends, and so on. To keep this theoretical overview short, we focus on two
aspects, housing and employment, which have already been discussed in our literature review.

Given the financial strain that occurs during the process of separation, both partners have high incentives to economize on their expenses. Housing costs usually make up a large portion of their monthly budget, and due to the household split, both partners have less demand for housing. Thus, residential mobility is one of the first options, and since household size decreases and financial resources are scarce, the chances are high that this mobility will be downward (less living space, less quality, but also lower costs). This economic motive is a function of each partner’s post-separation income, and since the economic strain seems to be much greater for women than it is for men, downward residential mobility is much more probable for women than for men. A second motive is the wish of both partners to separate physically from each other, which is an incentive for both men and women to decrease the emotional stress. It is quite probable that questions of guilt and redemption play a role in this process (for example, that the partner who initiated the breakup should also leave the couple’s home). Thirdly, there is the child protection motive, which assumes that children of separated parents should stay in their parental home in order to minimize their emotional stress. This implies that the custodial parent – which is often the mother – is less affected by residential mobility. Although the child protection motive is enforced in some legal systems, it is unclear how this motive fits in with the rather strong economic incentives for women – especially for women with dependent children – to economize on their expenses. Finally, there is the question of property division. Although this pertains mostly to homeowners, it should be noted that the percentage of owner-occupation is quite large in some countries, especially in Southern Europe, where outright ownership is the common tenure status (Dewilde, in this volume). Thus, the question of how to divide the common home is a relevant problem in some countries. Most legal systems expect an equal division of the property acquired during marriage, which implies all the problems described in our literature review. Unless one partner is able to buy out the other, property division is usually a financial disaster for both partners. However, in those cases in which the economically dependent partner does not receive any kind of support payments from the breadwinner, the takeover of the common house may be a form of compensation and serve as an economic safeguard for the (formerly) dependent partner.2

Instead of economizing on their expenses, both partners could also increase their employment. The mechanics of labour supply are very well described by microeconomic theories (see, for example, Ashenfelter and Layard, 1987) which model the choice between different uses of time (for
example, working time and leisure time). According to these theories, the amount of (paid) labour an individual supplies to the market is a function of his or her market wage and reservation wage (that is, the lowest wage the individual would accept). Market and reservation wages, in turn, are functions of the individual’s human capital and alternative income sources. The better educated the individual, the higher the market wage and the incentive to work. The more alternative income sources he or she has, the higher the reservation wage and the lower the incentive to work. Given their financial needs after separation, both men and women have a high incentive to increase their employment. This will be especially true for better educated individuals. They have more employment opportunities and are better remunerated. Income transfers from the former partner or the state (both an alternative source of income) may not only ease the financial strain, but may also be a disincentive to work, especially for those with low market wages and correspondingly low prospects on the labour market.

However, decisions about labour supply are not free of constraints. For example, men often work full-time before separation, and increasing their employment is simply impossible. Even searching for a better remunerated job is often not a feasible alternative. The incentive to increase labour supply can also be low if the man feels that his additional incomes will be illegitimately taxed away by support payments. Finally, one should not forget the social and psychological costs of separation and divorce for men. As Kalmijn (2005) notes, there should be a male ‘divorce penalty’ corresponding to the male ‘marriage premium’. For example, lost female support may result in less career stability and more downward mobility for men. Women, on the other hand, who are often the caregivers of the common children, face certain restrictions when combining care and work. Public childcare facilities and family-friendly jobs (for example, part-time jobs) may be scarce, making the (re-)entry into paid employment a difficult task. In sum, although both genders have strong incentives to increase their labour supply, there are certain subgroups for which this assumption is not true (or simply incomplete, because it does not take into account all the relevant costs and benefits).

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Thus far, we have discussed socio-economic theories of individual behaviour. They explain how individuals use the resources at their disposal – for example, time and human capital – to create outputs which contribute to their own well-being. Based on their individual preferences and given the
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incentives and restrictions of the specific situation, they choose between different options for individual behaviour. This scheme of resources, options and individual action (within given individual preferences and restrictions) is a popular explanatory tool in research on families and partnerships. But it places a strong focus on individual characteristics and properties of the partnership in explaining individual behaviour, too often neglecting the societal context in which individual action takes place. As we have learned, for example, from the results of Dewilde (2002) and Uunk (2004), the economic well-being of women after divorce depends not only on individual-level variables (for example, age, number of children, education, and so on), but also on the general characteristics of the welfare state – for example, whether the state provides cash transfers in cases of economic need or whether it provides childcare services to support the employment of mothers. In other words, when coping with the consequences of separation and divorce, individuals also utilize more general systems of support besides family and friends.

Theories of welfare production usually distinguish between three main providers of welfare (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Rainwater et al., 1986; Zapf, 1984). These are (1) the market providing goods, services and income opportunities, (2) the state providing rights, cash transfers and social services, and (3) the extended family and the social network providing social and material support. This institutional context – in addition to many individual factors – provides specific incentives and may alter the constraints faced by individuals in cases of separation and divorce. It makes a difference, for example, whether the institutional setting encourages women’s labour force participation, whether the labour market provides enough opportunities for the gainful employment of both genders, whether the state and the legal system offer rights and financial support for dependent family members and how the kinship network operates in case of family failure. In sum, the national configuration of family, market and state institutions moderates the consequences of partnership dissolution.

In order to understand the institutional effects, one has to vary the national context systematically. Thus, an analysis of the economic and social consequences of partnership dissolution in different European countries provides us with the opportunity to test these institutional effects more thoroughly. That is why this book is organized as a comparative study. Overall, we try to explain economic and social consequences of partnership dissolution by means of a combination of individual risk factors (for example, low earnings capacity, parenting, lost network contacts) and context effects due to the institutional setting in each country. The importance of the institutional explanation is easily illustrated with some examples from the literature. One could hypothesize, for example,
that employment-friendly public policies for women (Gornick et al., 1996, 1997) are also advantageous for separated and divorced women in terms of labour market (re-)entry and financial well-being. But it is also possible that employment-friendly policies result in a two-income norm, and this may make single women even poorer relative to married families. Generous cash transfers, on the other hand, are usually assumed to act as strong incentives not to work, because cash transfers like child benefits, home care allowances or social assistance payments may already provide a sufficient income. In sum, cash benefits may buffer the decrease in economic well-being after separation, although at a rather low level. In the long run, however, only gainful employment guarantees participation in the economic benefits of society. It is also well known that female educational attainment and labour market participation has increased dramatically in recent years. This should be a safeguard in case of separation and divorce, but it also depends on the question of whether national labour markets provide sufficient and remunerative jobs for (better educated) women.

Current research on welfare states usually assumes that there are more or less coherent clusters of institutional arrangements that embody distinct values and rationales. This assumption has been operationalized in the concept of welfare regimes (Arts and Gelissen, 2002; Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999), and it is tempting to use one of the existing welfare state typologies to characterize the institutional context of partnership dissolution. But many scholars argue that such a typology should be domain-specific (for example, Gallie and Paugam, 2000), and especially in the field of family relations, several typologies have been proposed. These include the classical distinction between liberal, conservative, social democratic and Mediterranean (rudimentary or familialistic) welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996; Leibfried, 1993), but also different kinds of ‘gender-sensitive’ typologies (for example, Ostner and Lewis, 1995; Leitner, 2003; Siaroff, 1994), family policy models (for example, Andreß, 2003; Gauthier, 1996) and classifications of legal traditions (Kaufmann, 2002).

Historically, two ways of ensuring the welfare of families have emerged: some welfare states primarily provide monetary transfers and fiscal relief, while others focus on public infrastructure enabling family members to participate in the labour market (Gauthier, 1996). With respect to partnership dissolution, another task of the state is to enact laws which protect children and former partners from negative economic consequences. The market, in turn, can secure individual welfare by providing opportunities to earn one’s keep. Finally, as we already mentioned, family and social networks can offer social and financial support, especially in case of a separation or divorce.

Andreß (2003) suggested a typology of family support in industrialized
countries which shows how the particular national configuration of state, market and family influences the economic consequences of separation and divorce. One dimension of this typology is public policy orientation, and it distinguishes between extensive and rudimentary family policies.\footnote{As we already mentioned, extensive family policies can have two different orientations. If family policies are only rudimentarily developed, either the market or the family has to step in. Including these subdivisions, four different models of family support result:}

1. Welfare states with an \textit{extensive family policy} can be found in the Continental European and Northern European countries. There are two different types of governmental support: either through financial compensation for children and other dependent household members in the form of cash transfers or tax relief, or through support for sufficient care facilities and gainful employment for all adult family members. Accordingly, Andreß distinguishes between what he calls:
   (a) the male breadwinner model and
   (b) the dual-earner model.

   In the \textit{male breadwinner model}, policies support a traditional, gender-specific division of labour. This model assumes that men are the main breadwinners, while women at most contribute a supplemental income, especially if they have children. Given additional financial support from the state for the dependent family members, the male breadwinner’s income should suffice to support the family. In contrast, women’s employment is more supported in the \textit{dual-earner model}, and childcare responsibilities should be more evenly distributed between men and women. Family policy is oriented towards employment; thus, sufficient care facilities for children and/or the elderly are offered. Accordingly, double-income households should prevail among married couples and consensual unions.

2. Welfare states with a \textit{rudimentary family policy} support families to a minor degree, if at all. This policy orientation is dominant in the anglophone and Southern European countries. In countries with rudimentary family policies, the few existing benefits are established only to prevent poverty. Here, the safeguard occurs either via the market or through the family, which Andreß calls
   (a) the market model and
   (b) the model of extended family solidarity.

   The \textit{market model} emphasizes the individual freedom of the members of a society, and therefore prefers private solutions based on the market to state intervention in family matters. The model of \textit{extended family solidarity} (the family model, for short) also prefers private solu-
tions to state intervention; but in this case, the family network and its support capabilities should play a greater role than the market.

Andreß assumes that these four types of family support create specific dependencies within the family, which in case of separation or divorce may have negative economic consequences for the economically weaker partner. More specifically, one can ask how much ‘autonomy’ (Orloff, 1993) is granted to the weaker family members within each of the four models. Obviously, gainful employment and own income are the basis of financial autonomy. On the basis of Andreß’s typology, it can be supposed that there is little gender-specific division of labour in the dual-earner model. Both partners have more or less equal chances to combine work and family life. In the two rudimentary family policy models, a definite form of labour division is not explicitly encouraged by the state. Rather, it is left to the partners to coordinate employment and childcare. The male breadwinner model ranks somewhere in between: On the one hand, a traditional division of labour is supported by granting tax privileges for marriages with one principal earner and by not offering sufficient full-time childcare facilities. Therefore, full-time employment for married mothers is inefficient or utterly impossible. On the other hand, this model affords a compatibility of childcare and work based on the part-time employment of the mother.

Like every typology, these four models of family support are Idealtypen in a Weberian sense. They represent hypothetical configurations of state, market and family, while the real world of nation states consists of mixtures and combinations of these models. Although Andreß (2003: 635) – based on a thorough analysis of various national statistics – identifies Germany, Sweden, the USA and Spain as typical examples of the four models of family support, the typology is still a hypothesis in a twofold sense: first, in the sense of whether it is a useful classification of real-world family policies and, second, as to whether it helps to explain the variance of economic and social consequences of partnership dissolution across different countries. As Stier (in this volume) argues, the typological approach has certain methodological limitations. Alternatively, one could utilize direct measurements of the relevant characteristics of the institutional context (see the discussion in Stier and the empirical analyses in van Damme and Uunk, both in this volume).

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Studying the consequences of separation and divorce is a difficult matter. Ironically, it is the small number of divorces that is problematic. Why is that
the case? The answer is that although divorce rates are high and increasing, recently divorced individuals are still a small fraction of the population at any given point in time. And we need data from recently divorced individuals in order to measure what has changed since the time of marriage. Respondents who were divorced five years ago may have forgotten important details or may provide a biased report of what has actually happened. Because retrospective information may be unreliable as a result of memory loss and memory bias, many scholars prefer prospective research designs. A typical prospective design samples a representative cross-section of the population and then collects information on how these individuals change over time, both in terms of partnerships and living conditions. But again, since divorce is a rare event, one usually needs a long observation period in order to find sufficient numbers of divorcees in such panel data.

It is therefore no surprise that many studies of divorce consequences are based on small numbers of cases. Only in a few studies have researchers had access to large-scale surveys that included sufficient sample sizes or that used some kind of oversampling for the divorced. Long-running panel studies are another possibility, because they allow researchers to pool information from all divorces within a long observation period. But all of these alternatives are costly, and hence may not be available for the time point or country in question. This is also true for some of the following analyses. In some places, we have to restrict our analyses to the currently divorced, although the event of divorce may have happened years before and we have no information on the former marriage that allows us to assess the amount of change caused by the divorce. We also sometimes use information on single parents to describe the implications of having a child, although we are not sure about the timing and causes of single parenthood. It may be a result of divorce, but equally the other parent could have well passed away, or the child could have been born outside a partnership.

**Target Population**

Having talked about the problems of studying divorce consequences, we are now ready to define our target population more concretely. Naturally, *married couples* are a central focus of our study. But what is the main event of interest? Up to now, we have used the terms ‘separation’ and ‘divorce’ more or less interchangeably, because in many countries, a period of separation is a prerequisite for legal divorce. However, most of the aforementioned consequences are in effect long before the divorce decree is passed. Therefore, a natural starting point for most of the following analyses is the *period of separation*, which is often connected with a household split and residential mobility. Separation, on the other hand, is an event which
is observed not only for married couples. It equally applies to *cohabiting couples*, although – as we already mentioned – the average economic and social consequences may not be as severe, since cohabitation for many is less binding than marriage, and mutual dependence is less pronounced. We have made no *a priori* decision as to whether cohabiting couples should be included or excluded from the following analyses. Married couples are the prime target population of all the studies in this book, but some may also include cohabiting couples – for instance, because sample sizes would otherwise be too low. In other words, this book investigates the consequences of different kinds of partnership dissolution, but with a strong focus on marital disruption. Whenever possible, we use longitudinal information and compare living conditions before and after separation for the target population. Unfortunately, such detailed information is not always available, and we have to use retrospective surveys of separated individuals or cross-sectional data that compare presently divorced or separated individuals with continuously married couples.

Mainly for pragmatic reasons, we have decided to focus on the experiences of the adult members (husbands and wives, men and women) of these married and cohabiting couples. Obviously, this decision excludes one important subgroup: the children of the separating couples, who are no less affected by partnership dissolution than are the adults. But it is much more difficult to investigate divorce consequences for children than for adults, at least in the case of the socio-economic topics studied here. Representative survey data, on which most of the following analyses are based, usually sample the adult population and thus provide only indirect information about children. Basic socio-demographic data are provided by their (interviewed) parents, but their personal views are missing. Thus, analyses from the vantage point of children are absent from this book (but see the review articles by Amato and Keith, 1991b; Kelly and Emery, 2003; Rodgers and Pryor, 1998).7 But of course we discuss the economic and social implications of having children for the adults. We also give a detailed account of legal regulations concerning child custody and maintenance payments.

**Comparative Research Design**

How did we organize the comparative study? Lacking a common database of partnership dissolutions, we had to combine different comparative research strategies. A detailed account of possible methodological approaches can be found in Stier (in this volume), who discusses the conceptualization and measurement of institutional contexts. Basically, our research combines case-study methods with micro–macro analyses. Correspondingly, several chapters consist of in-depth case studies focusing...
on single countries and national statistics, while other chapters employ comparative analyses of several European countries using cross-nationally equivalent statistical data. The term ‘micro–macro analyses’ refers to the fact that the latter chapters combine micro data on individuals with macro data describing the institutional context. As Stier’s literature review (in this volume) shows, such macro data may include typologies or quantitative indicators – for example, typical family policy models like those discussed previously, or the number of children in public childcare like in the study by Uunk (2004).

But how did we select the countries for our case studies? First, this was a question of availability. We needed scholars who were experts on both the corresponding national context and on research in family relations. Starting from our own research contacts and from our knowledge of the literature, we were able to build a network of interested sociologists, economists and demographers from ten different European countries. The group met at several workshops, and this book represents the output of our collaborative work. Furthermore, when building up the research network, we tried to represent different national institutional settings in order to test the validity of our institutional hypothesis. As a guiding tool for the case selection, we used the aforementioned typology of family policy models (see the previous section).

Our case studies include Denmark, Finland and Sweden as representatives of the dual-earner model, Great Britain as a representative of the market model, Belgium and Germany as representatives of the male breadwinner model and, finally, Greece and Spain as representatives of the family model. Countries were assigned to the four models of family support based on the statistical analyses in Andreß (2003: 635). But as we have already stated, this typology is itself a hypothesis, and one of the aims of the corresponding case studies is to test the validity of this assignment.8 Each country chapter provides a descriptive overview of the incidence of divorce and the socio-demographic profile of the divorced together with an account of national family law, labour market institutions and welfare state provisions.9 In doing so, each chapter tries to present a comprehensive picture of partnership dissolution and its consequences in each country. At the end of any given chapter, the reader should know what is typical for the country in question, and what is a common experience that can also be observed in other European countries.

The single case studies are complemented by four comparative analyses focusing on specific consequences of partnership dissolution and using cross-nationally equivalent data sets of Western European countries (including the countries from the former case studies). Three analyses are based on the European Community Household Panel (ECHP). One
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analysis uses a pooled data file compiled from five national household panel studies which were post-harmonized by the authors. These comparative studies analyse the consequences of partnership dissolution with respect to labour market participation, residential mobility, household income and, finally, non-monetary indicators of well-being. In explaining these consequences, they refer both to individual determinants and to characteristics of the institutional context. Thus, all comparative analyses are based on a combination of micro and macro explanations.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

As can be seen from Figure I.1, this book is organized into four parts and one appendix. Part I discusses theoretical, methodological and measurement issues when analysing the economic and social consequences of partnership dissolution. Haya Stier’s chapter on conceptualization and measurements of institutional contexts has two major goals: first, to review the various approaches to exploring and understanding how macro-level mechanisms affect individuals’ behaviour and outcomes, and, second, to discuss and propose measurements commonly employed in defining the ‘institutional context’. In the first part of the chapter, she addresses two common strategies for comparative research. The first is the ‘case-study approach’, which often centres on comparisons of just a few countries. She elaborates on this strategy to include multiple-country comparisons and the more common approach of using country typologies in order to draw implicit conclusions regarding the way institutions and cultural characteristics affect individuals’ behaviours and destinies. The second approach is termed ‘macro–micro analyses’. It is based on a comparison of a large number of countries, and on a quantitative examination of the (direct) effect of specific institutional characteristics on social and economic behaviours and outcomes. In the second part of the chapter, she discusses specific institutional arrangements that affect – directly or indirectly – the economic position of women, and she reviews the major approaches to measuring them comparatively.

Following Haya Stier’s distinction between case studies and macro–micro analyses, we have organized the empirical chapters into two parts: single-country studies on the one hand (Part II) and comparative analyses based on several countries on the other (Part III). As Figure I.1 shows, Parts II and III are structured ‘vertically’ and ‘horizontally’ according to our typology of family policy models and according to four dimensions of divorce consequences. Part II consists of eight country reports (Germany, Belgium, Great Britain, Spain, Greece, Denmark, Finland and Sweden),
# Figure I.1 Structure of the book

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*Hans-Jürgen Andress and Dina Hummelsheim - 9781848447202*
which have tentatively been classified as members of the male breadwinner (Germany, Belgium), the dual-earner (Sweden, Denmark, Finland), the market (Great Britain) and the family (Spain, Greece) models. All the country reports have a similar internal structure including (1) a sketch of recent demographic and labour market trends, (2) a summary of how the family and family relations are treated in law and social policy, and (3) a description of the social and economic consequences of partnership dissolution using national statistical data.

**Part III** consists of four comparative chapters analysing these and other (Western) European countries with respect to four dimensions of divorce consequences: (1) labour force participation, (2) residential mobility and housing, (3) household income, and (4) poverty and lifestyle deprivation. In explaining these divorce consequences, the comparative chapters will make use of the proposed typology and of quantitative indicators characterizing the relevant institutional determinants.

Finally, the Conclusion in *Part IV* summarizes the results of the empirical chapters and discusses the validity of the proposed typology and alternative explanations of divorce consequences. All quantitative information that is used in the empirical chapters is summarized in the *Data Appendix*. This includes a listing of socio-demographic indicators and social policy measures for the years 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2005 as well as descriptions of the cross-national survey data (ECHP, GSOEP, BHPS, and so on) that are used in the comparative analyses.

**NOTES**

1. More specifically, economic theory argues that if women’s market skills relative to their domestic skills are lower than men’s relative skills, then women will remain in the home and men will specialize in paid work. It should be noted, however, that this model assumes that a marriage will last forever. If we introduce the possibility of divorce, it may be more efficient in the long run not to specialize.

2. Functionally, it is equivalent to the dower (also called morning gift), which in earlier times was a provision accorded by law to a wife for her support in the event that she should survive her husband (that is, become a widow). A dower (‘mahra’) is still an essential part of traditional Muslim marriages today. In cases of divorce, the bride does not have to give up her dower unless she is the one who requested the divorce.

3. Some authors (for example, Evers, 2004) also mention a fourth provider of welfare: the so-called ‘third sector’ or the ‘civil society’ (foundations, churches, cooperatives, service clubs, and so on).

4. Kaufmann (2002) distinguishes between explicit and implicit family policies. In the first case, a political discourse about family matters can be observed, and family policy is institutionally autonomous in the sense that either a specific ministry (for example, a Ministry of Family Affairs such as that in Germany) or a similar governmental institution exists. However, if certain political measures can be interpreted as family policies by an external scientific observer without this notion being specifically stated in official politics, Kaufmann terms them implicit family policies. Our distinction between *extensive*
When marriage ends

and rudimentary family policies only looks at the number and scope of political measures that support the welfare of families, irrespective of their interpretation in the political discourse. For example, Sweden could be termed a country with an extensive family policy, although in the Swedish political discourse, most measures have been motivated as instruments for gender equality.

5. Orloff (1993) defines autonomy as the freedom not to continue a potentially repressive relationship – for example, because of economic dependency.

6. This problem is easily illustrated using divorce data from Germany. That country experienced a total of 1,031,071 divorces between the years 2001 and 2005. Assuming that every divorcee founded a household of his or her own and relating twice the number of divorces to the total number of households in 2005 (n = 39,178,000) results in a percentage of about 5.3 per cent. Thus, a representative survey of the population – be it face to face or by telephone – will have a less than 6 per cent chance of sampling a person who has been divorced within the last five years. For example, a sample of 3000 respondents would include about 158 divorcees, provided non-response is not disproportionately high among divorced persons (which is doubtful, as the experience from specialized surveys of the divorced shows).

7. Specialized surveys interviewing children have mostly been used to investigate the psycho-social consequences of divorce, such as changes in subjective well-being, educational aspirations or anti-social behaviour (see, for example, Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Wallerstein et al., 2000). Another strand of research uses comparative micro data on children and teenagers available from international surveys of school achievement (Third International Mathematics and Science Study – TIMSS, Programme for International Student Assessment – PISA, and so on). Since family history (except for the actual marital status of the parents), is not measured in these studies, divorce consequences have to be addressed indirectly by comparing children of single parents and children from complete families without having longitudinal information on the experiences of these children with their parents’ prior partnership dissolution. Hence, analyses like Pong et al. (2003) have to assume that single parents’ children have experienced a partnership dissolution (and not, for example, the death of one parent) and that the dates of these events are recent and more or less the same for all children in the target group – assumptions which may not be true in every case. Data from population registers (Steele et al., 2007) or from cohort studies of children (Sigle-Rushton et al., 2005) provide much more detailed information.

8. Belgium, for example, is such a borderline case, which some researchers would classify as a member of the dual-earner model (see also Andreß, 2003: 635).

9. Some basic statistical information about each country is summarized in the Data Appendix at the end of the book.

10. They are organized into seven chapters, because the situation in Sweden and Finland is discussed in one chapter.

REFERENCES


