

Sibship size and parental involvement in stepfamilies: Resource dilution with full, half and step siblings

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Background The resource dilution hypothesis states that the negative association between sibship size and children's outcomes is the result of the dilution of parental resources when the number of siblings increases. However, despite the increasing prevalence of divorce, the literature focuses mostly on full siblings: half siblings and stepsiblings are not taken into account or simply added to the total number of siblings.

Objectives This study presents an alternative approach to examine the sibship size effect in divorced families. After remarriage, parents distribute their resources among different types of children and they do not always share biological ties and/or a residence with these children. Therefore, this study examines how the availability of parents' non-material resources is affected by the presence of full, half and stepsiblings in stepfamilies.

Data and methods The dataset Parents and Children in the Netherlands contains an oversample of adults (age 25 to 45) who were raised in stepfamilies. In addition, the data include information on the involvement of respondent's parents with respect to school, personal matters and leisure time. The focus in this study is on the involvement of divorced parents who had a new stable partner during childhood (Fathers, N = 1,366; Mothers, N = 1,425).

Results In line with the literature on serial fatherhood, the involvement of fathers decreases if he has biological children with his new partner (half siblings). For the involvement of mothers the number of full siblings is more important.

Conclusions This study shows that the simple framework of intact family needs to be reconsidered in stepfamilies. Siblings with whom respondents do not share a biological tie or a home can still dilute resources. However, some sibling types dilute parental resources more than others and this nuance is lost when the total number of siblings is used to measure sibship size.