# The living arrangements of children:

# Long-term changes and social variation in the Netherlands[1]

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Abstract

The demographic and social processes of the past 150 years radically changed the number of parents children grew up with. In this paper, we use two unique datasets to illustrate long-term changes in the living arrangements of children born between 1850 and 1985 in the Netherlands. We describe in detail changes in terms of whether fathers, mothers and stepparents lived with these children at birth and at age 15. We also examine whether siblings - and if so how many - lived with the child, and we discuss variations in the living arrangements of children according to social class and level of education. We observe a massive shift in the living arrangements of the 1850-79 cohort compared with the 1880-99 cohort of children and only a slight return to nineteenth-century conditions in the most recent birth cohort.

## Demographic transitions and the changing living arrangements of children

The transformation of Europe's demographic regime over the past three decades has led to considerable changes in the "configuration of family members" with whom European children "travel through life" (Hareven, 2000, 107). During what is now commonly known as 'Europe's second demographic transition', age at marriage rose, childbearing was postponed, and there was an increase in childlessness and in the popularity of cohabitation and nonmarital fertility (Lesthaeghe, 1995). There was also an increase in rates of union disruption, and a large proportion of men and women entering marriage or some other form of union did so in the wake of an earlier union disruption (Van De Kaa, 1987). These changes significantly affected the composition and size of the networks available to children (Andersson, 2002; Heuveline & Timberlake, 2002).

This transformation of the Western family led to popular and academic concern about its impact on children. Researchers considered the implications of this change in family structure in terms of a variety of outcomes. Sociological studies linked the living arrangements of children to such later-life outcomes as school dropout, drug use, age at marriage, marital dissolution, and adult and old-age mortality (Albrecht & Teachman, 2003; Hansagi, Brandt & Andréasson, 2000; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Modin, 2003; Teachman, 2004). Psychologists studied the effects of parental divorce during childhood and of growing up in an incomplete family on children's adjustment, on cognitive ability, on behavior problems and on the mental health of young adults (Amato & Keith, 1991; Aughinbaugh, Pierret, & Rothstein, 2005; Chase-Landale & Cherlin, 1995). The reduction of the number of siblings children grew up with was studied in relation to the child's educational progress and occupational status in adulthood (Downey, 1995; Steelman, Powell, Werum, & Carter, 2002). Academics such as Francis Fukuyama (1999) argued that the decline of nuclear families in the West, a key element in what he called the Great Disruption, had strongly negative effects on social capital and was related to an increase in poverty for people at the bottom at the social hierarchy, to increasing levels of crime and to declining trust.

Debates about the implications of children growing up in a specific family situation tend to set the complexity and instability of the contemporary family against the pattern of family life that was, until recently, considered normal for children – namely "a single marriage for two adults, contracted at a relatively early age and enduring for perhaps 50 years, with children spending their entire early lives in this family, with both natural parents and usually one or a few siblings" (Cherlin, 1992, 1-2, 6-30). This style of family was regarded as the 'summit of social evolution', and the standard against which all other forms of families were measured (Scanzoni, 2001) but was itself the result of demographic changes that took place between the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of World War II. Large numbers of siblings, a high proportion of lone parents and a high frequency of broken marriages - the essential characteristics of the pre-transition regime –gave way to the quintessential model of family life - the nuclear family.

This led some authors to point to similarities between the experiences of children in present-day families and those born in the 19th century (Griffith, 1980; Hareven, 2000, 123-125). Some suggested that children born after the mid-1960s had to contend with a degree of family instability and family complexity similar to that of children born before the beginning of the 20th century. High adult mortality during this period meant that these children often experienced the disruption of their parents' marriage, and it was also common for a surviving parent to remarry following the loss of their spouse. The net result was a complex family structure in which children co-resided with stepparents and stepsiblings (see Dupâquier, Helin, Laslett, Livi-Bacci, & Sogner, 1981). Another parallel is that lone parenthood and cohabitation outside marriage were not unusual in the 19$^{th}$ century either. Many working class people preferred to form a household without marrying (see e.g. Matovic, 1990) and, up until 1880, a high proportion of children in large cities were born out of wedlock (Shorter, Knodel, & Van de Walle, 1971). Contemporary issues such as 'family fragmentation' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1994) and the impact of the ambiguous role of quasi-kin, coupled with the current high incidence of nonmarital childbearing and the presence of stepsiblings, played a role in this historical context as well.

Studies focusing on changes in the living arrangements of children have rarely attempted to simultaneously analyze the impact of the first and the second demographic transitions. Historians rarely go beyond the heyday of the 'intimate

family', whereas the 'decline' of nuclear families generally forms the starting point for sociological analysis.

It is primarily the paucity and poor quality of historical data that limits the potential of research in this area. Comparisons between the living arrangements of contemporary children and those of children raised in the second half of the 20th century or the later decades of the nineteenth century are usually made by contrasting the demographic parameters of the periods in question. But demographic parameters do not provide information about the actual living arrangements of children: they do not deal with coresidence, take no account of the continuously changing fertility and mortality conditions, and do not factor in the strong interdependencies between demographic parameters. Studies of the contemporary living arrangements of children can be based on retrospective surveys or panel data, but these datasets only go back to cohorts born in the 1930s or 1940s. For children born prior to that period, historical data has to be used. Aggregate census listings are commonly used for this purpose, but these rarely give information about the position of children within a family or their relationship to adults living in the household. It is not possible, for example, to distinguish between children who are part of a reconstituted family and those who are the child of a new couple. Census listings at the individual level, which give the ages of *all* household members and their relationship to the head of the household unit, often only survived in the case of small and specific segments of the population, and this, too, makes it difficult to distinguish between biological and step relations between children and parents. Census listings are essentially cross-sectional in nature and are therefore unable to show the sequence of events children have experienced (Kertzer, 1985; King, 1990; Ruggles, 1990).

As a way round this lack of historical data on the living arrangements of children, demographers and historians have turned to theoretical models of which in particular *micro simulation* models have become particularly popular (Smith, 2000). What theoretical models basically do is describe the family composition as the outcome of demographic events (Pullum, 1982). Virtually all of these theoretical models include only demographic parameters and, as such, are abstractions from reality that cannot be used as substitutes for empirical data. Most models relate to populations where there is no change in the demographic parameters over time, and are based on simplified assumptions about demographic processes, particularly for the pre-1900 period (Watkins, Menken, & Bongaarts, 1987). Simulation outputs are

therefore not equivalent to the outcomes of empirical studies and hardly do justice to the historical reality. Thus, to describe long-term changes in the living arrangements of children empirical data have to be used.

For the Netherlands such empirical data are available. We analyze data from two different sources, namely municipal population registers and a retrospective survey, which between them span the experiences of children born between 1850 and 1985. These datasets had two things in common: firstly, they enable us to obtain a child-centered perspective on the type and number of people the child was living with during the first stage of its life and, secondly, they allow us to follow children on a day-by-day basis. Data that permit such an approach is virtually non-existent, particularly for historical populations. Another common feature of the datasets is that they enable us to examine whether the living arrangements of children differed according to social class. Mortality, extramarital and marital fertility, marriage and divorce have always been characterized by variation between social groups, and living arrangements are profoundly affected by residential decisions based on economic and cultural considerations, such as the family economy and social norms. Both factors will have led to a large degree of variation in family situations between social classes, and it is advisable to take this into account if one wishes to present a realistic picture of the living arrangements of children.

We focused particular attention on the presence or absence of two groups of key people in the child's development during the first 15 years of its life: namely, the biological parents and the siblings. After introducing our data, we begin by mapping time trends in the percentage of children raised in a complete family. We then describe the trends over time of various situations in which at least one of the biological parents is absent. We briefly describe trends in the number of siblings, and then focus on differentials by social class and education in the various family situations.

Although our emphasis is on changes in the living arrangements of children in the Netherlands, the results of our research also apply more generally to the countries of Western and northern Europe. The Netherlands has been characterized by a family form that was comparable to that of most other countries in Western and northern Europe (Lynch, 2003, 8-12), and it underwent the first demographic transition at roughly the same time and pace (Reher, 2004). Similarly, there was a large degree of consistency in the shifts in patterns of partnership formation and dissolution and in the

strength of the association between marriage and childbearing occurring in European countries after the mid-1960s, although there are differences in detail, depending in part on religion and welfare policies (Allan, Hawker, & Crow, 2001).

Table 1 summarizes the developments in mortality before age 15, mortality in adulthood, fertility, extramarital fertility, divorce and remarriage for four time periods for the Netherlands as a whole.

*Table 1 here*

## Studying the living arrangements of children in historical and contemporary populations

To study the living arrangements of children, we combined survey data for children born from 1923 onwards with historical data obtained from population registers for children born between 1850 and 1922.

Population registers as they exist in Belgium, the Netherlands and parts of Italy combine census listings with vital registration in a linked format for the entire population of a municipality (Alter, 1988). Continuous population registers, which recorded the population that was legally residing within the municipality, began in the Netherlands with the 1849 census. The returns from this census were copied into the population register, and from then on, all changes occurring in a household over the next decade were recorded in the register. In most municipalities, this procedure was repeated with each subsequent 10-year census. The register recorded the date and place of birth of each individual, their relation to the head of the household, and their sex, marital status, occupation and religion. New household members who arrived after the registration had started were added to the list of individuals already recorded, and those who died or migrated and were therefore no longer part of the household were deleted, and the place and date of migration or date of death was recorded. Residents were required by law to report migration between municipalities at both the place of origin and at their destination. The registers therefore provide information about demographic events leading to changes in the composition and size of households, including characteristics of the person undergoing that particular event. In most municipalities, population registers remained in use until 1910 or 1920, after which date a new form of

continuous registration was introduced, consisting of loose sheets - so-called *gezinskaarten* or family cards. The unit of registration then ceased to be the household and became the family. This situation continued until 1939, when the individual person became the registration unit and since then, the population register in each municipality consisted of a collection of personal cards, containing largely the same information as the population register. In 1994 this system, while containing essentially the same data, was replaced by an electronic database, the so-called *Gemeentelijke Basis Administratie* (GBA: Municipal Basic Administration). The information recorded on the personal cards and the extracts from the GBA is only available to the public as far as it relates to deceased persons. The Central Genealogical Bureau is the organization which makes copies of these records available. By tracking individuals in the consecutive registers and personal cards, and, in the case of migration, in the population registers of the new place of residence, it is theoretically possible to track the living arrangements of children from the cradle to the grave (Janssens, 1993, 50-51). For this paper, we only make use of information from the population registers.

It would be unwise to assume that the information given in the registers was always accurate (Knotter & Meijer, 1995). The first register, for example, which covered the period 1850-1859, did not include a separate column stating the relationship of individuals to the head of the household. Having said that, in virtually all cases, it was relatively easy to infer their most likely relationship to the head of the household based on such characteristics as the order of registration, their sex, name and date of birth or on the basis of the vital registration system. Underreporting of co-residing extended kin members will also have occurred, particularly when co-residence was only for a brief period. In practice, it was sometimes difficult to determine which members belonged to which household at a given point in time. Some individuals left their place of residence without correctly registering their place of destination, which made it very difficult to track them. In several municipalities, (parts of) the population registers failed to survive WWII or other calamities.

The historical data on the living arrangements of children, as recorded in the population registers, were collected within the context of the so-called Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN), a national database containing information on the complete life histories of a 0.5% random sample (76,700 birth records) of men and women born in the Netherlands between 1812 and 1922 (Mandemakers, 2001). As the

living arrangements of children from the moment of birth on can only be studied on the basis of the population registers, HSN-data could be used only in so far as they related to birth cohorts 1850 and later. At this moment, only for three of the eleven Dutch provinces (and for the city of Rotterdam) data have been entered for birth cohorts 1850 to 1922. Only from birth cohort 1883 on, information is available for the other provinces as well. Nonetheless, as a group, the provinces of Zeeland, Utrecht and Friesland together with the city of Rotterdam can be regarded as fairly representative of the demographic regime of the early birth cohorts in the Netherlands as a whole.

We had information on about 18,900 individuals born in the period 1850-1922. Many newborn children officially entered a household only days after their date of birth. That had to do with the fact that notification of a live birth could take place until three days after the date of birth. As a consequence, the date of entry of a newborn child was based on the date of notification of the birth at the vital registration office. We assumed that registration within three days of the date of birth implied that the newborn was part of the household from the beginning. Children who could not be followed from the date of birth on but showed up at a later age were treated as left-censured observations and included in the dataset. For some individuals dates of departure out of the household were not accurately given and they seemed to have lived in two households at the same time. To solve this problem we inspected the register date in detail to give us a clue on how to handle these inconsistencies.

Although generally more lacking in depth, data from historical population registers are comparable to the household data which have enabled sociologists and demographers over the past two decades to study the living arrangements of children in contemporary societies. In this paper, we used retrospective data on the childhood living arrangements of respondents derived from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) - a large-scale survey of the nature and strength of family ties in the Netherlands carried out between 2002 and 2004. Computer-assisted personal interviews were conducted with over 8,150 men and women aged 18 to 79 who formed a random sample of adults residing in private households in the Netherlands. The collection of data from the main respondents – the *anchors* - involved a face-to-face interview about the anchor's life course and actual living situation and their relationship with family members - the so-called 'alters'. At the end of the interview, the anchor was given a questionnaire to complete. The response rate was 45%, which is comparable to that of other large-scale family surveys in the Netherlands (Dykstra

et al., 2005). Response rates in the Netherlands tend to be lower than elsewhere and they appear to be on the decline (De Leeuw & De Heer, 2001). The Dutch seem to be particularly sensitive about privacy issues. The weighted data converted the random sample of households into a representative sample of all individuals in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005). In this paper, we used retrospective data from the NKPS on the childhood of the main respondent, which depicted their successive living arrangements during the first 15 years of their life, as was the case in the HSN dataset.

Compared with prospective data, retrospective data on living arrangements suffer from several limitations, such as recall problems and selection effects. Yet studies have shown retrospectively collected factual data - such as fertility histories, family characteristics and employment careers – to be reasonably accurate (Blossfeld & Rohwer, 1995). Another drawback of retrospective studies is that they are, by definition, based only on survivors. Those who have died or migrated are excluded, giving rise to biases; this selection effect will of course be more marked in older cohorts. One thing we can be certain of is that children growing up in an incomplete family were probably underrepresented in the sample we used, because children born out of wedlock or who grew up in a family that had experienced divorce or the death of the parent were less likely to survive (Hansagi, Brandt, & Andréasson, 2000; Modin, 2003; Van Poppel, 2000). Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of both the HSN data and the NKPS data.

*Table 2 here*

## Childhood living arrangements and the presence of biological parents and stepparents

To ascertain the living arrangements of the children in our study, we calculated at each year of the child's life what percentage of children were still living (a) with their biological parents, (b) without either biological parent, or (c) with a stepparent. Although data were available for children at every age, we only used data relating to the child's situation at birth and at age 15. To depict time trends, we differentiated between seven birth cohorts. The first coincided with the period before the decline in

fertility and infant and childhood mortality (1850-79). The second cohort coincided with the first stage of the first demographic transition, which was characterized by decreases in fertility and mortality (1880-99) and the third cohort coincided with the last stage of that transition (1900-22).[4] The data for these three early birth cohorts were derived from the Historical Sample of the Netherlands; data for the post-1922 cohorts were all derived from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study. We distinguished the pre-WWII (1923-39) and post-WWII birth cohorts (1940-64) from children born in the early stage (1965-74) and more recent stage (1975-85) of the second demographic transition. Data for later birth cohorts were not available. Figures 1 to 3 summarize for each of the seven birth cohorts the percentages of children living in one of the six types of family situation

The overwhelming majority of children in all birth cohorts grew up with both their biological parents. Yet Figure 1 shows that the percentage of children living with both biological parents changed dramatically across the birth cohorts. This is particularly true if we compare the situation of children born in the mid-19th century with those growing up in later periods. In the 1850-79 cohort, about 9% of children lived with only one or none of their parents at birth and at age 15, that percentage had increased to 31%, whereas children from particularly the 1880-99 birth cohort had a strongly increased chance of growing up in a *complete* family. This was due to the increased survival rates of fathers and mothers, and a decrease in the percentage of children born out of wedlock. The further decline in adult mortality and out-of-wedlock fertility that occurred after 1900 - and which was not offset by the modest increase in divorce - enabled the generations born between 1900 and 1940 to pave the way for the complete family to eventually become the standard living arrangement of children. The cohort born in the early stage of the second demographic transition (1965-74) was the first to experience something of a return to the situation which was characteristic for children born in the mid-19th century; a sharp rise in divorce and an increase in the percentage of children born out of wedlock were the factors behind this

[4] The basic household and family structures of Western and northern Europe changed very little until the start of the demographic transition of the 1870s and 1880s (Lynch, 2003, 216-217; Thornton, 2001). We therefore believe that our findings in relation to the living arrangements of children from the 1850-79 birth cohort also apply more generally to the early 19th century.

reversal of trends. In the most recent cohort - children born after 1975 - as many as 85% of children at age 15 were living in a 'complete' family.

But the differences compared with the situation of children born in the mid-19th century are still enormous. A comparison of the earliest and most recent of our cohorts clearly illustrates that growing up in a non-intact family today remains far less common than it was a century ago. [5]

## Living in an incomplete family

If children were not being raised in a complete family, what sort of family situation *were* they living in? Figure 2 shows that in the mid-19th century, at the time of birth, a considerable percentage – almost 5% - of children lived with their mother, but without a father or stepfather - in most cases, these were children living with an unmarried mother. Figure 3 shows that, at age 15, approximately 7% of the children were in this situation. The reason these latter children were living in this type of one-parent family was primarily due to the woman losing her spouse and not remarrying. The percentage of children growing up in a mother-only family fell until the 1940-65 cohort, but increased again in the more recent birth cohorts. But here again, children born after 1975 were less frequently raised in this sort of situation than children born in the 1850-79 period. This recent increase was due not only to a rise in extramarital fertility, but also to a rise in the divorce rate, thereby making divorce, rather than death, the main reason for a mother-only living arrangement.

A much smaller percentage of children lived without their biological mother or a stepmother. In the older generations, living without a mother was mainly due to death of the biological mother, often shortly after the birth of the child. Although it was, and continues to be, much more common for widowers to remarry than it is for widows, a relatively high percentage of widowers failed to find a new spouse (Van Poppel, 1995; 1998). As time went on, single fatherhood increasingly became due to the divorce of the biological parents. Young children tended to remain in the custody of the mother, which is why the gradual increase in the divorce rate only resulted in a

[5] We compared for the two latest HSN-cohorts the outcomes for the two regions Utrecht, Friesland, Zeeland and Rotterdam with those of the rest of the country and observed only very small differences in the living arrangements of children. That supports our idea that the data for the first cohort 1850-1879 that only relate to these three provinces can be considered representative for the country as a whole.

modest increase in lone parenthood among fathers. In the most recent cohort, fewer than 2% of the 15-year-olds lived with their father only.

Figures 2 and 3 show interesting gender disparities in the changing frequencies of lone parenthood. These disparities are the result of the different chances of widows and widowers and female and male divorcees finding a new spouse for themselves and a stepparent for the child. As Figure 3 shows, it was not very common in the 19th century for a child to co-reside with a biological mother and a stepfather: even among 15-year-olds born in 1850-79, this was only the case for 2% of the children. This percentage continued to decrease until WWII. Since then, this living arrangement has become slightly more common, and in the most recent birth cohort (1975-85), 3% of children were living with a stepfather. Once again, the rising divorce rate resulted in increasing percentages of children living in reconstituted families that included the biological mother. On the other hand, 6% of the 15-year-olds in the oldest birth cohort (1850-79) lived with their biological father and a stepmother. This percentage fell sharply after 1920; since the 1920s, fewer than 1% of all 15-year-old children have lived with their father and a stepmother.

The likelihood of growing up without either biological parent fell sharply over time: at age 15, 7% of children born in the mid-19th century found themselves in such a situation. This percentage fell to 2% for the 1960-75 cohort and to 3% for the 1975-85 cohort. In the oldest cohorts, most of these children lived in a family grandparent(s) (18 percent), with other kin (uncle and/or aunt: 30 percent), or with older brothers and sisters (12 percent): living without members of the kin network was very much the exception. In more recent cohorts, living without either biological parent meant children were either living with foster parents or were in a boarding school.

*Figures 1 to 3 here*

Instead of simply focusing on one particular age, we were also able to summarize the children's situation throughout their childhood. Figures 4 and 5 present a summary of the fractions of time that children spent in various types of family during the first 15 years of their life. These percentages were calculated by dividing the number of years that children lived in the various types of family between ages 0-

15 by the total number of person years that children might have lived in any type of family (15 years). Figures 4 and 5 show the results for time spent in complete and incomplete families.

*Figures 4 to 5 here*

Figure 4 shows a massive increase in the percentage of childhood time spent in a complete family between the 1850-79 cohort and later cohorts. This increase came to a halt in the more recent cohorts. Children born between 1975 and 1985 were found to have spent as many years with both their biological parents as children born between 1900 and 1922. The amount of time spent in an incomplete family decreased until 1960-64. This had an impact on all forms of this particular living arrangement, but particularly affected children living in father-only and mother-only families. Children also spent much less time in a family with a father and stepmother. After 1964, some of these living arrangements regained importance and were characterized by an increase in the amount of time children spent in them; this applied in particular to situations in which children lived only with their mother, or with a mother and stepfather.

## Children and the presence of siblings

Siblings - including stepbrothers and stepsisters - were by far the most numerous group in Dutch households[6] and this category of kin was more sensitive to demographic changes than any other group: between 1880 and 1937, the average number of children Dutch women had fell from 5.57 to 2.57, whereas after 1966 the total fertility rate (TFR) decreased further to 1.65. This decline in the potential number of siblings was partly offset by a fall in infant and child mortality. Newborn children in 1850 had a 71% chance of reaching the age of five; for children in the

[6] Dutch families as far back as the 17th century included extremely small numbers of non-kin (Damsma, 1993; Haks, 1982; Van der Woude, 1972). In our study, from the earliest cohort onwards, non-kin were only present in very small numbers, and they had virtually disappeared from the household from the 1860s onwards. Members of the wider kin network also gradually vanished from the household in which children grew up. It was very rare for grandparents to co-reside with their children. The conjugal family therefore increasingly became the norm from the 1860s onwards.

1990s, the figure was more than 99%. So what impact did this historical shift towards small families have on the number of brothers and sisters children grew up with? To find this out, we calculated how many siblings were living in the household at the time of the child's birth.

As Figure 6 shows, the mean number of siblings in the household at the time of birth of the child first showed an increase between 1850 and 1890-1900. This was due to increased fertility, which was itself a consequence of a fall in the age at marriage, but above all to a decrease in early childhood and infant mortality. For a number of decades, children spent their childhood in the company of, on average, 2-2.5 brothers and sisters. The number of siblings decreased only after 1900 when the decline in fertility, which had begun around 1880, gained momentum. After 1920, and again after 1960, the mean number of siblings children grew up with fell dramatically. Thus, it was only from the cohort born in the years 1923-39 on that children grew up with a significantly lower number of siblings than in the 19th century.

*Figure 6 here*

## Childhood living arrangements: Variation according to socio-economic status

The revolution in living arrangements experienced by Dutch children did not affect all parts of society to the same extent and at the same time. The demographic parameters that determine the living arrangements of children – such as adult and childhood mortality levels, extramarital and marital fertility levels, ages at marriage, and remarriage and divorce rates - have always been characterized by variation between social groups. In the 19th century, there was a clear social class gradient in adult mortality levels. The chances of children experiencing the death of a parent will therefore have differed according to social class. Nonmarital fertility was concentrated in certain social classes, resulting in noticeable differences in the percentages of children living without a biological father. The risk of divorce also varied according to social class (Van Poppel, 1997). Such differences in the relevant demographic parameters are also evident in the most recent period. Innovators of demographic change in the Netherlands, for example, were predominantly found in the 1970s and

1980s among better educated couples (De Feijter, 1991; Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). We might therefore expect there to be a considerable degree of variation in family situations according to social class (in the case of the historical cohorts) and the educational levels of the parents (in the case of the more recent cohorts).

As far as we are aware, no one has ever studied historical differences in the living arrangements of children from various social classes. The two datasets we used allowed us to examine whether the living arrangements of children differed, and still differ, according to social class and educational status. For our historical cohorts, we classified all occupations of individuals in a social class system. For that purpose we used data on the highest occupation of the child's father during the life of the child. This occupation was classified according to a recently developed coding scheme called HISCO (*Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations*) (Van Leeuwen, Maas, & Miles, 2002). HISCO translates occupational descriptions covering a long historical time, various languages and countries into a common code, compatible with the International Labour Organisation's *International Standard Classification of Occupations* (ISCO68) scheme. These HISCO-codes were classified according to a social class scheme, called the SOCPO-scheme, proposed by Van de Putte and Miles (2005). The SOCPO- (Social Power) scheme has as leading principle social power, defined as the potential to influence one's 'life chances' through control of (scarce) economic and cultural resources. The merging of economic and cultural power dimensions leads to a scheme with five levels but given the relatively small number of cases in a later stage these groups had to be merged. We denote these groups as respectively the upper class, the middle class (grouped together now), the skilled workers, the semi-skilled workers, and the unskilled workers (also grouped together) and farmers.

In the NKPS dataset, children were classified according to the highest level of education the father had completed with a qualification. A distinction was made between fathers with high/middle and low educational levels.

Table 3 presents the fractions of time that children spent in various types of family during the first 15 years of their life by birth cohort and social class/level of education. The most striking feature is the reversal that has taken place in the position of high and low social groups in the percentages of time that children lived with both biological parents: whereas living in a complete family was a little bit less common for working class children born before 1923, in more recent cohorts, the lowest

percentage of time spent in a complete family was found among the group with high/middle educational levels.

In the 19th-century cohorts, children living without a (step)father were equally frequent among workers as among the middle/upper social classes. Here, too, there has been a reversal of the position of the lower and upper/middle social classes: from birth cohort 1923-45 on, it was more common for children from upper/middle class backgrounds to live without a (step)father. The situation changed again from birth cohort 1975-85 on. Whereas in the first half of the twentieth century divorce rates were still higher among the highly-educated, from the 1970s on divorce became more frequent among the lower-educated parts of society. In the past, children from the higher social classes spent almost the same amount of time without a (step)mother as was the case in other social groups; in the more recent cohorts, children from all social classes spent only a very restricted amount of time in such a family situation. Living with a stepmother and a biological father was very uncommon for children in cohorts born before WW I but living with a father and stepmother became more common in more recent cohorts, in particular among children from the highly-educated parts of society.

*Table 3 here*

## Conclusion and discussion

Compared with the nineteenth century, the nuclear family in the Netherlands is still very much alive. Today, growing up in an incomplete family remains much less common than it was a century and a half ago. For children born between 1880 and 1964, there was a continuous increase in the percentage living with both their biological parents. It is only in the most recent generation that this trend began to reverse. The percentage of children growing up without a biological father or a stepfather or without a biological mother or stepmother has decreased until the generations born directly after WW II before it started to rise again. Growing up with a mother but without a (step)father became more common again for children born after the mid-1960s, reaching almost 19th-century percentages again. One very

interesting finding was the opposing trend in the percentage of children living with their mother and a stepfather (which showed an increase) and the percentage living with their biological father and a stepmother (where a decrease was visible). We also found that children in the mid-19th century grew up with a limited number of siblings and that that number increased until the end of the 19th century. It was only from the 1920s onwards that small families became the norm for some decades.

We observed differences over time in the living arrangements of children from different social classes. In the past, spending one's childhood in a complete family was a little bit less common among the working classes, whereas in the more recent cohorts, it was less common for children of better educated parents than for children of less well-educated parents to be living in a 'complete' family. There was also a change in the percentages of children living only with their mother; in the past, it was as common for working class and middle class children, whereas today this is more common among children with high/middle levels of education.

Although our study focuses on *historical* changes in living arrangements in only one fairly small country, we believe our findings have relevance for other countries and for other disciplines as well. Explanations for family behaviors require comparisons across contemporary and historical social and cultural contexts to establish which characteristics of family life are common aspects and which are not (Seltzer et al., 2005). Many of the demographic factors which affect the living arrangements of children have developed in an identical way in other countries in the Western world.

We realize that the changes in the structural characteristics of living arrangements of children tell only part of the story. Commonalities in measurable and countable structures might hide important qualitative differences in the situation of children (Coontz, 2000). We give here three examples. In the nineteenth century it was open to discussion whether or not servants or lodgers were part of the household but the question of who is a family member nowadays raises much more fundamental issues. Membership of key persons in households and families can no longer be categorized in an unproblematic way: children may be thought of as members of different households for different activities or be partial members of households (for example of their nonresidential biological father) for some periods of the week but not others. In particular the physical boundaries around both one-parent and stepfamily households have become more permeable. The emphasis on continued parental

involvement has as consequence that parents are encouraged to sustain a relationship with their children even when they no longer live together. This has implications for the ways in which living arrangements of children have to be understood (Allan et al., 2001).

The current pattern of a great number of fatherless children and blended families has some resemblance with the past patterns but there are also differences. Most of these differences are caused by the differing reasons of becoming fatherless. In the past, children would end up fatherless due to the death of the father. Nowadays, the most likely reason is that the biological parents divorce or break up. The biological father therefore remains in the life of children, but he not live in their household anymore. Another difference is that in the past, if the surviving parent began a new relationship, it usually resulted in marriage; in contemporary single-parent families, the mother or father does not always marry his or her new partner (Hareven, 2000, 123-125).

In the past three decades a growing diversity in family patterns was brought about by increasing levels of migration into European societies from countries with quite distinct religious and ethnic traditions. The migration process often involved family members moving a considerable time before others, and thus itself generated disrupted family patterns (Allan et al., 2001). In both our datasets children from migrants were included: approximately five percent of respondents in the NKPS study were nonnative Dutch, meaning that both parents were born outside the Netherlands (Van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006) and of the parents of children in the HSN-data set 2.2 percent were born outside the Netherlands. The numbers of migrants were much too small to focus on living arrangements of this group specifically yet the background of these migrants has completely changed over the past century and a half.

The issue of how the living arrangements of children are structured and change over time is relevant to a variety of disciplines. Our data are important to historians because they provide us with information about empirical changes in the living arrangements of children that is better than theoretical models can provide. They help to explain how demographic changes in the past century and a half have changed the opportunities for children to interact with key family members. Due to the decline in adult mortality, the decrease in out-of-wedlock fertility, and rather low divorce frequencies, the number of years of shared lives between generations in the cohorts born between 1900 and 1965 was greater than at any time in history.

Demographic opportunities enabled fathers, mothers and children to go through life together and it is reasonable to suppose that this has increased the significance of the intergenerational bond between children and parents (Bengtsson, 2001). In light of today's high incidence of divorce and nonmarital childbearing and childrearing, the part that quasi-kin, such as non-biological parents, can play in the child's welfare has received a great deal of attention. Our study has shown that, in the historical context of the Netherlands, stepmothers were indeed fairly frequently part of the living arrangements of the child and that stepfathers were rather rare. The finding that, historically, a substantial minority of children did not spend their entire childhood in a two-parent family, and that this was particularly the case among lower social classes, is also relevant to debates on changing gender inequality in the division of household labor (Goldin, 2006) and on the changing roles of fathers and mothers in the past. From the mid-19th century onwards, the home increasingly became the woman's domain. Within the domestic sphere there was growing male resistance to participating in day-to-day domestic activities, making women wholly responsible for childcare, for the organization of household affairs and for arranging the family's social life. The increase in the number of families in which both parents were available will have affected the scope for women to exclusively occupy the role of housewife.

A great deal of research by sociologists and psychologists uses individual development across the life course and the role of context in shaping family behavior as orienting conceptual frameworks. Social context and individual experiences, together with biological constraints, are the factors that contribute to individual development. Establishing how the network of family members of children changed, and how it varied according to social class, is essential information that can help broaden our insight into the factors that shape behavior (Coontz, 2000; Seltzer et al., 2005). Our study has brought to light the uniqueness of the historical experiences of children in the past and variations in the processes that determined their familial situation. Changes in context may have a direct impact on children. Sigle-Rushton et al. (2005), for example, point to decreases over time in the link between growing up in a particular living arrangement and subsequent wellbeing. For example, as growing up in a broken home becomes more commonplace, the average child of a divorced family comes from a less troubled family; as alternative family structures become

more widely accepted, divorce will be less of a stigma and the negative effects of community disapproval should lessen.

But the finding that the happy family of father and mother living together with a moderate number of their biological children cannot be used as a baseline category for the experiences of children from recent birth cohorts also has much wider implications. It is clearly at odds with popular ideas about how the contemporary living arrangements of children in northwest Europe compare with those of the pre-1960 period or with those of children born in the mid-19th century. Given the fact that descriptions of the past may affect not only people's attitudes, but also social movements and government policies and programs, we believe it is essential to bring these ideas about the past more into line with the demographic reality of the recent and more distant past (Thornton, 2001).

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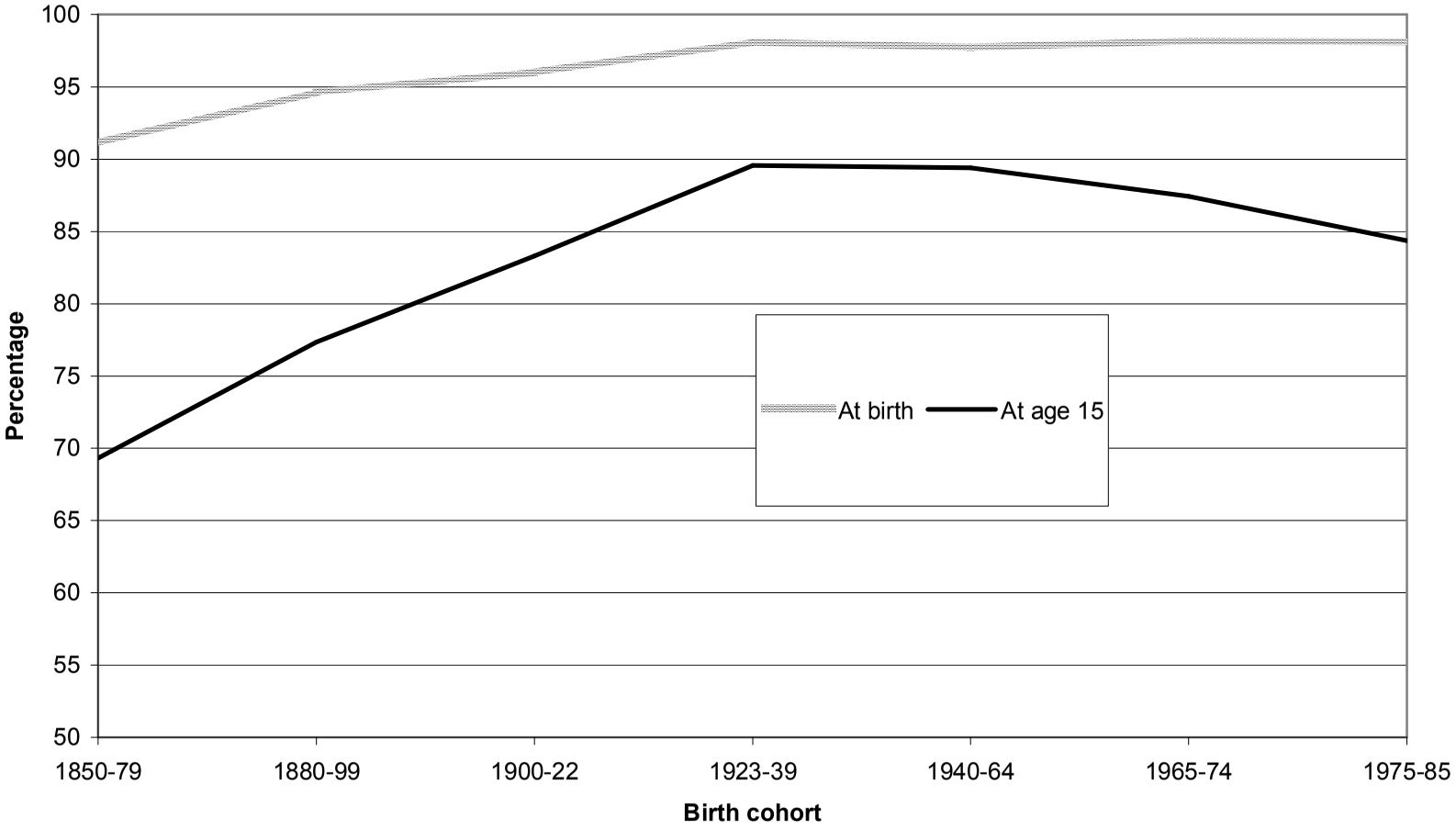
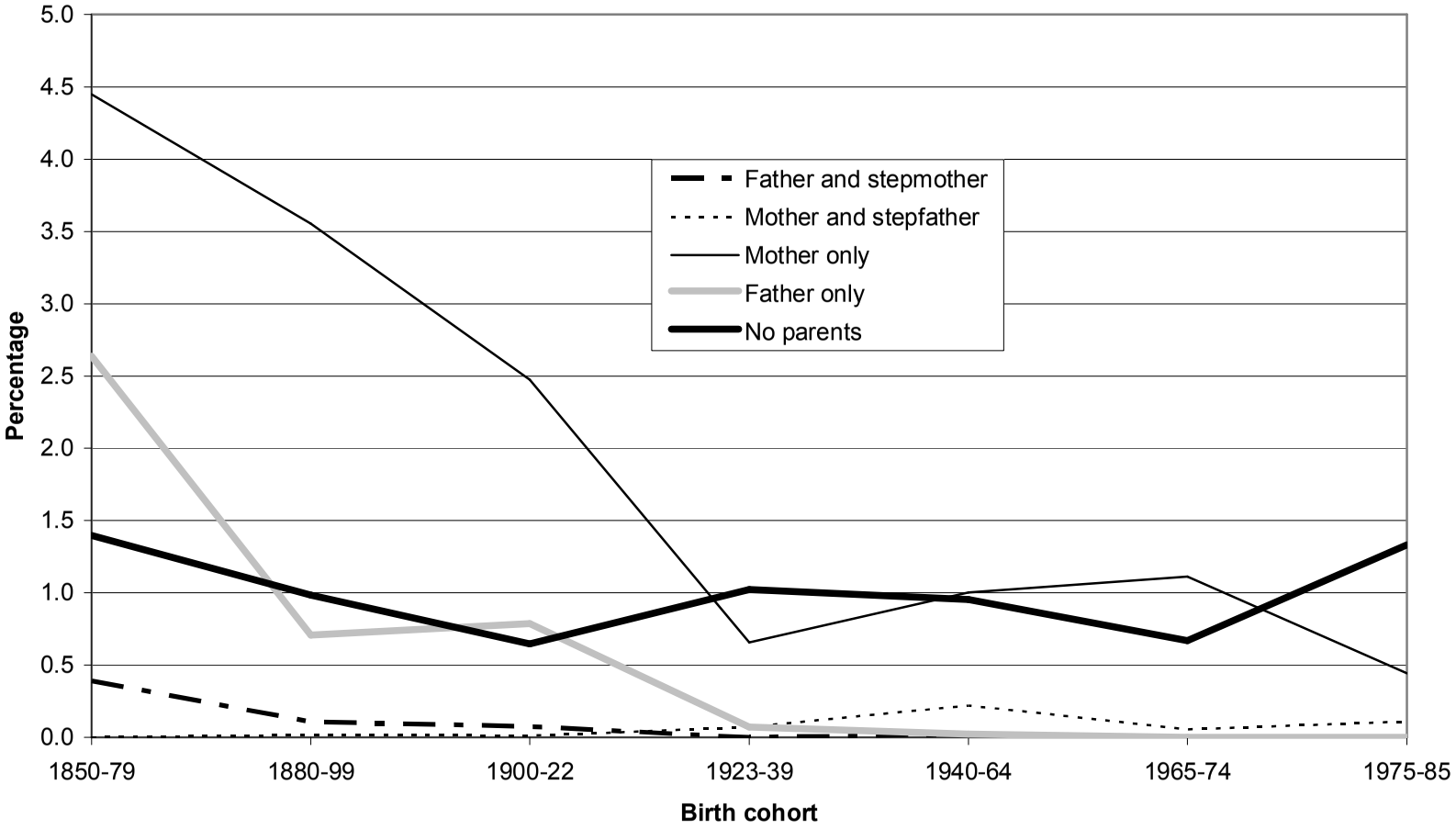
**Figure 1. Percentage of children living with both biological parents by family form at birth and at age 15, by birth cohort**



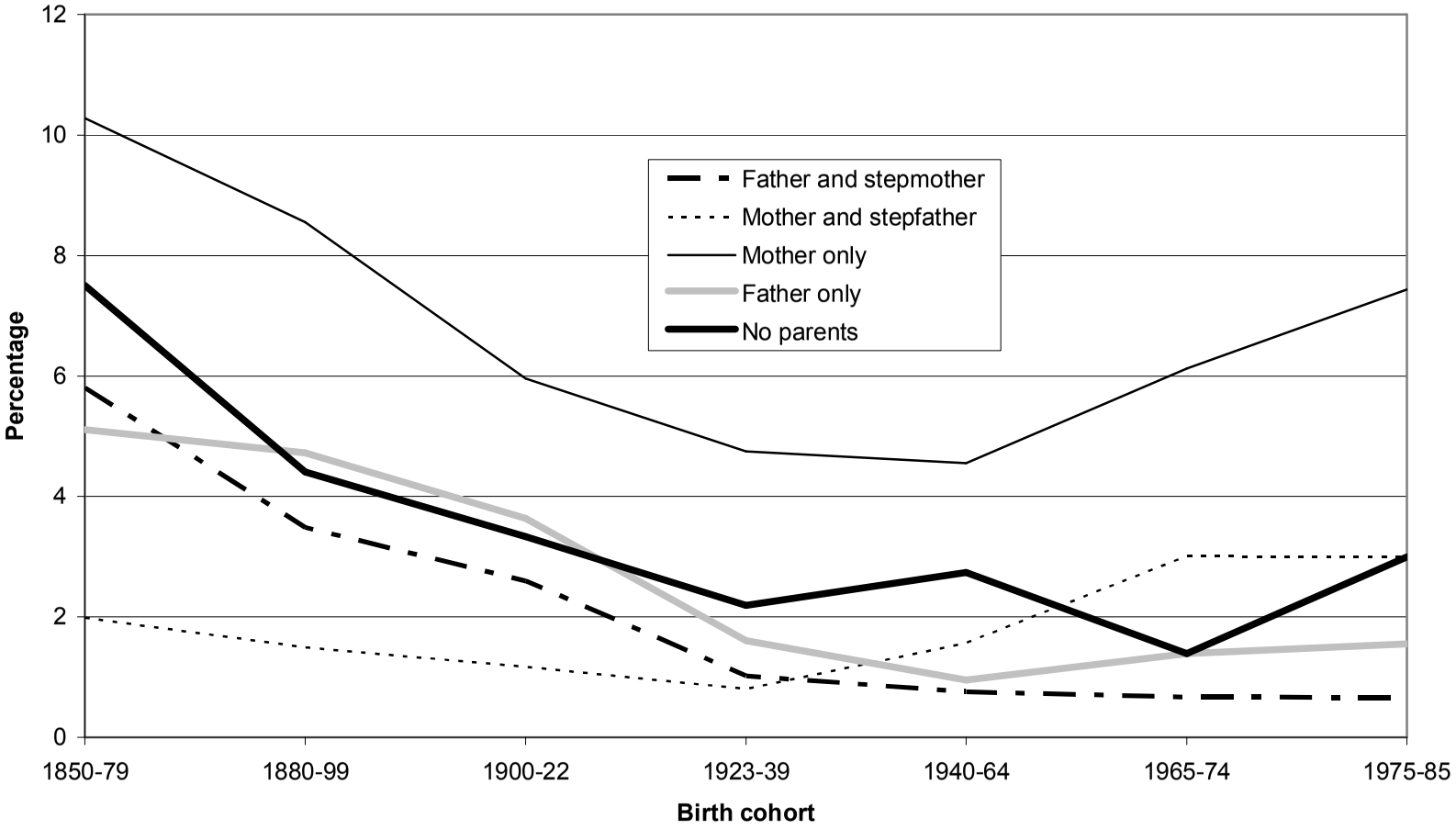

Source: Cohorts 1850-1922 HSN; Cohorts 1923-1985 NKPS

**Figure 2. Percentage of children not living with both biological parents by family form at birth, by birth cohort**



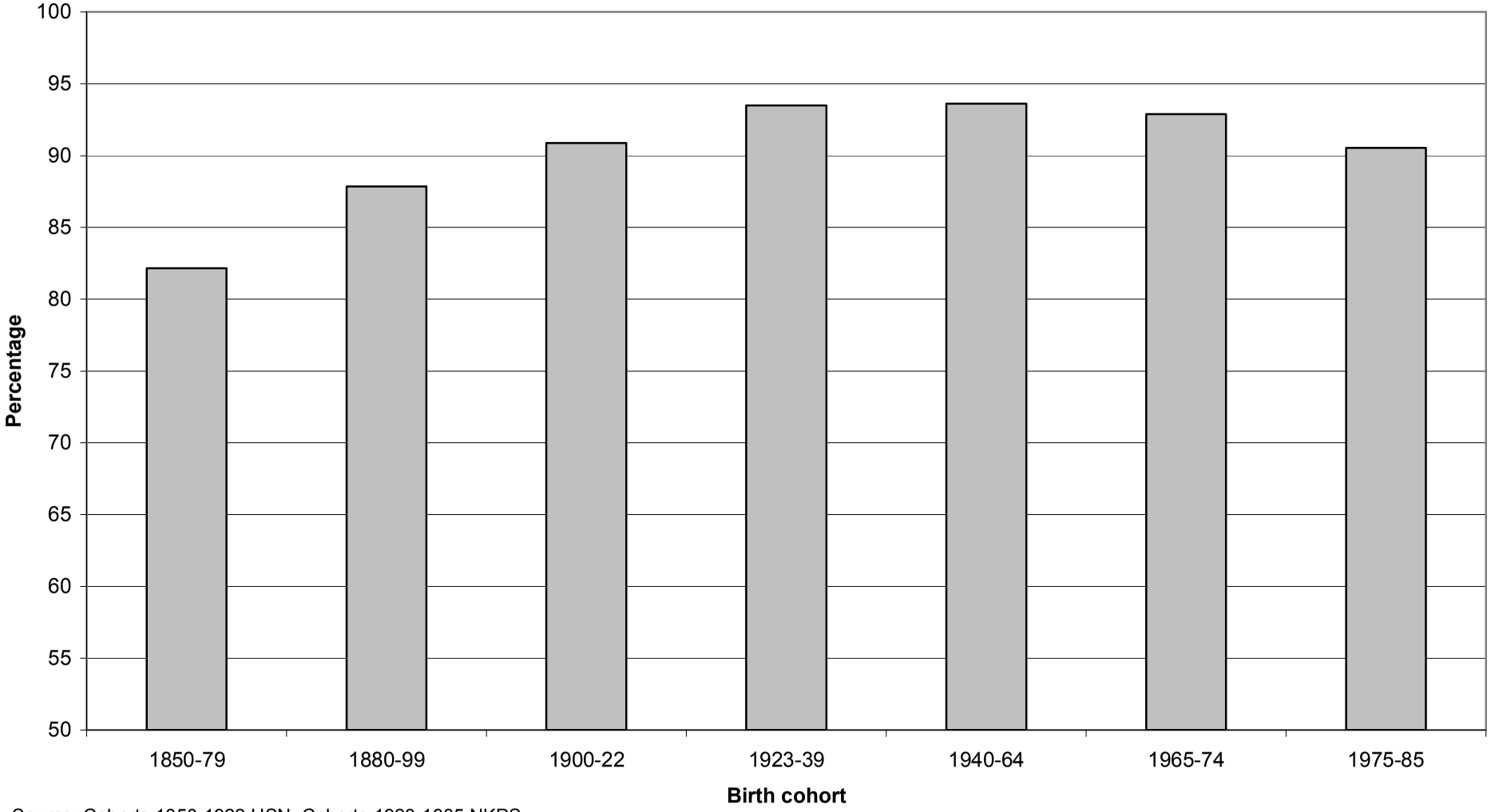

Source: Cohorts 1850-1922 HSN; Cohorts 1923-1985 NKPS

**Figure 3. Percentage of children not living with both biological parents by family form at age 15, by birth cohort**



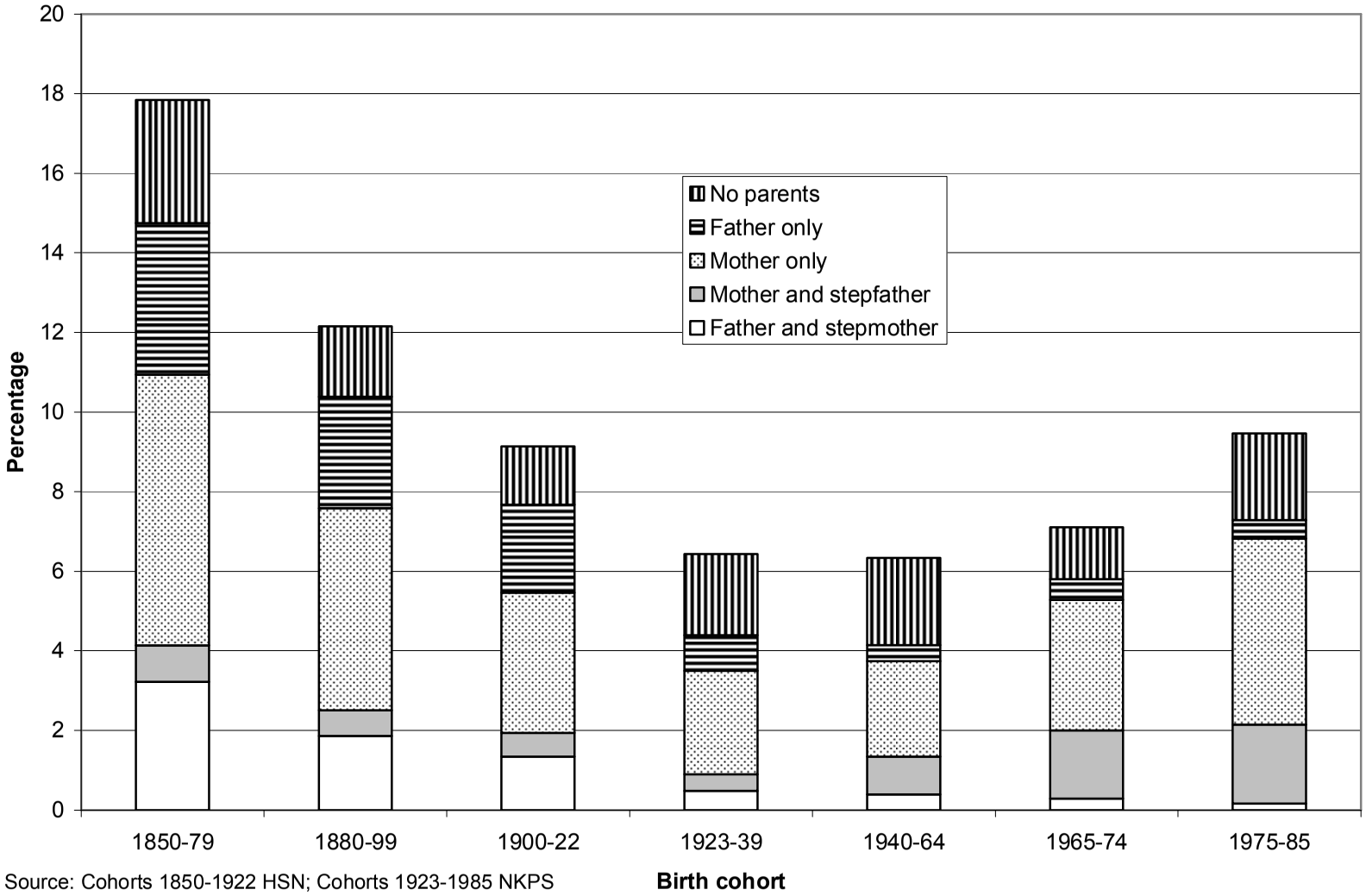

Source: Cohorts 1850-1922 HSN; Cohorts 1923-1985 NKPS

**Figure 4. Percentage of time spent in different types of family between age 0-15 years, by birth cohort. Time spent with own mother and father**



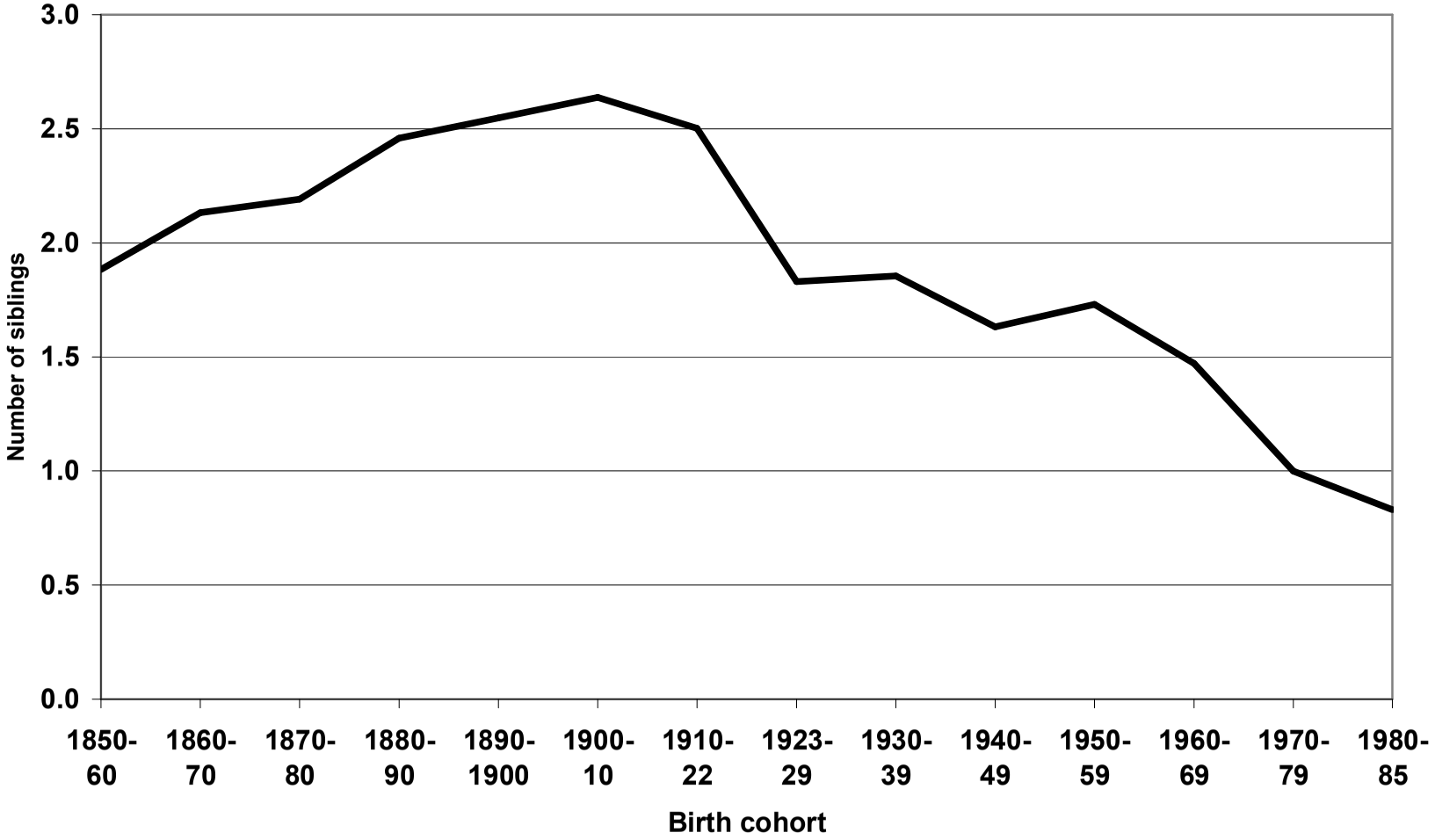

Source: Cohorts 1850-1922 HSN; Cohorts 1923-1985 NKPS

**Figure 5. Percentage of time spent in different types of family between age 0-15 years, by birth cohort. Time spent in incomplete families**




Source: Cohorts 1850-1922 HSN; Cohorts 1923-1985 NKPS

**Figure 6. Mean number of siblings alive at the time of birth of the child, by birth cohort of the child**




Source: Cohorts 1850-1922 HSN; Cohorts 1923-1985 NKPS

Table 1. Demographic indicators for the Netherlands, 1850-1980

| | Around 1850 | | Around 1900 | | Around 1930 | | Around 1980 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Netherlands Males | Netherlands Females | Netherlands Males | Netherlands Females | Netherlands Males | Netherlands Females | Netherlands Males | Netherlands Females |
| Probability of death (per 1000) between | | | | | | | | |
| - ages 0 and 15 | 384 | 362 | 249 | 224 | 95 | 76 | 15 | 11 |
| - ages 25 and 55 | 368 | 352 | 223 | 210 | 134 | 140 | 78 | 44 |
| Mean number of children per marriage | | 4.71 | | 4.68 | | 3.13 | | 1.69 |
| Extramarital births (per 100 births) | | 4.7 | | 2.6 | | 1.8 | | 4.6 |
| Divorces per 10,000 married couples | | 1.2 | | 6.3 | | 30.5 | | 75.1 |
| Male remarriages (per 100 marriages) | 19.2 | | 9.7 | | 8.8 | | 12.5 | |

Table 2a. Description of the HSN and NKPS data by age and birth cohort

| | Birth cohort | N Total | % Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | At birth | |
| HSN | 1850-79 | 4,587 | 24.2 |
| | 1880-99 | 6,500 | 34.3 |
| | 1900-22 | 7,877 | 41.5 |
| | Total | 18,964 | 100.0 |
| | | At age 15 | |
| HSN | 1850-79 | 3,171 | 22.0 |
| | 1880-99 | 4,677 | 32.4 |
| | 1900-22 | 6,577 | 45.6 |
| | Total | 14,425 | 100.0 |
| NKPS | 1923-39 | 2090 | 25.6 |
| | 1940-64 | 3374 | 41.3 |
| | 1965-74 | 1796 | 22.0 |
| | 1975-85 | 901 | 11.0 |
| | Total | 8161 | 100.0 |

Table 2b. Description of the HSN and NKPS data by age, social class and educational level

| | Social class father | N At birth | N At age 15 | | % At birth | % At age 15 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| HSN | Elite | 250 | 196 | | 1.3 | 1.4 |
| | Middle class | 2,750 | 2,136 | | 14.7 | 14.9 |
| | Farmers | 1,782 | 1,448 | | 9.5 | 10.1 |
| | Skilled workers | 3,608 | 2,679 | | 19.3 | 18.6 |
| | Semi-skilled workers | 3,141 | 2,714 | | 16.8 | 18.9 |
| | Unskilled workers | 6,672 | 4,986 | | 35.7 | 34.7 |
| | Without or unknown | 510 | 208 | | 2.7 | 1.4 |
| | Total | 18,713 | 14,367 | | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| NKPS | Education low | - | - | - | 4733 | 57.9 |
| | Education middle | - | - | - | 2063 | 25.3 |
| | Education high | - | - | - | 1366 | 16.7 |
| | Total | | | | 8161 | 100.0 |

Table 3. Percent of time spent in different living arrangements between birth and age 15, by birth cohort and social class, respectively educational level of father

| | Social class of father | | Educational level of father | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Percent of time spent in complete family | | | |
| Birth cohort | Workers | Elite and middle class | Low | Middle and high |
| 1850-79 | 83.3 | 82.3 | | |
| 1880-99 | 88.4 | 90.6 | | |
| 1901-22 | 91.2 | 92.2 | | |
| 1923-45 | | | 95.3 | 87.7 |
| 1946-64 | | | 96.4 | 90.6 |
| 1965-74 | | | 95.3 | 90.2 |
| 1975-85 | | | 90.2 | 90.7 |
| | Percent of time spent in family with father only | | | |
| Birth cohort | Lower | Middle and higher | Low | Middle and high |
| 1850-79 | 3.5 | 4.4 | | |
| 1880-99 | 2.7 | 2.1 | | |
| 1901-22 | 2.2 | 1.6 | | |
| 1923-45 | | | 0.7 | 0.9 |
| 1946-64 | | | 0.4 | 0.5 |
| 1965-74 | | | 0.3 | 0.7 |
| 1975-85 | | | 0.7 | 0.3 |
| | Percent of time spent in family with mother only | | | |
| Birth cohort | Lower | Middle and higher | Low | Middle and high |
| 1850-79 | 6.5 | 6.7 | | |
| 1880-99 | 4.6 | 4.2 | | |
| 1901-22 | 3.3 | 3.2 | | |
| 1923-45 | | | 1.6 | 5.3 |
| 1946-64 | | | 1.1 | 3.9 |
| 1965-74 | | | 1.9 | 4.8 |
| 1975-85 | | | 6.0 | 3.8 |
| | Percent of time spent in family with mother and stepfather | | | |
| Birth cohort | Lower | Middle and higher | Low | Middle and high |
| 1850-79 | 0.8 | 0.6 | | |
| 1880-99 | 0.6 | 0.6 | | |
| 1901-22 | 0.6 | 0.3 | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1923-45 | | | 0.2 | 1.4 |
| 1946-64 | | | 0.4 | 1.8 |
| 1965-74 | | | 1.1 | 2.4 |
| 1975-85 | | | 1.1 | 2.6 |

| | Percent of time spent in family with father and stepmother | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Birth cohort | Lower | Middle and higher | Low | Middle and high |
| 1850-79 | 3.2 | 3.7 | | |
| 1880-99 | 2.0 | 1.1 | | |
| 1901-22 | 1.3 | 1.4 | | |
| 1923-45 | | | 0.5 | 0.8 |
| 1946-64 | | | 0.3 | 0.4 |
| 1965-74 | | | 0.1 | 0.5 |
| 1975-85 | | | 0.2 | 0.1 |