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## Distance between children and parents after a separation – which children have a close distance to the absent parent?

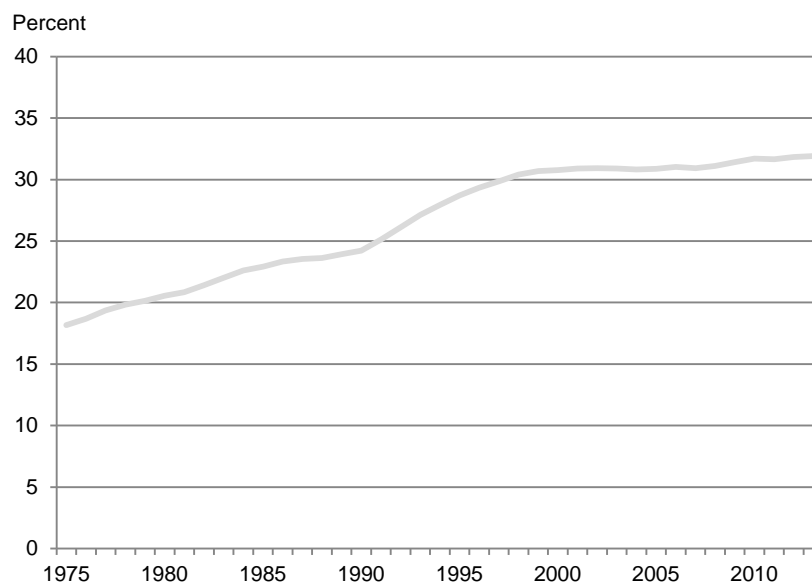
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### Introduction and background

Roughly one in four of all children under age 18 in Sweden have parents that do not live together. For these children, the distance to the parent that the child does not live with can have great significance for the child's possibility to meet this parent.

It has become more common that children have a short distance to the parent they do not live with. The percentage of children who have the parent they do not live with within 2 km distance has increased from 18 percent in 1975 to 32 percent in 2013. Most of this increase occurred before 2000.

### Children aged 0–17 who have a short distance (0–2 km) to the parent they do not live with. 1975–2013



A study from Norway shows that it is common that separated parents live close to each other. The study also shows that the distance is longer when the child lives with the mother compared to when the child lives with the father, i.e. if the father is the absent parent he in average lives further away than a mother who is not registered with her child. An increase in time since the separation is associated with a longer distance between the child and the absent parent. The study also shows that if one or both parents get married and/or have children with a new partner the distance increases (Dommermuth, 2014).

This study aims to give insight about the characteristics of the children in Sweden who have a close distance to the parent they do not live with.

## Data and methods

This study describes the distance between children and the parent they do not live with. The study is based on information on all children 0–17 years not living with both of their parents. Children with a parent living abroad, a deceased parent or an unknown parent are excluded. The information is collected from different registers at Statistics Sweden.

The analysis of which factors have the most significance for the distance between the child and the parent they do not live with is based on the period 2005–2013. The method used is logistic regression with the dependent variable being if the child has a short (0–2 km) distance to the parent they do not live with. Results are presented as odds ratios.

The independent variables used are if the child is living with the mother or the father, age of child, mother's and father's age at the birth of the child, parents country of birth, family type before separation, number of siblings, time since separation, mother's and father's new relationships, mother's and father's income level, type of municipality. Separate models are run for all children with parents not living together, for children living with their father and for children living with their mother.

## Results

The distance between children and the parent that they do not live with varies among different groups of children. It is more common with a short distance:

- to the mother, if the child does not live with her, than to the father
- if the parents were not young when the child was born
- if the parents were married or were cohabiting before the separation compared to if they did not live together
- if both parents are foreign born, compared to children with at least one parent born in Sweden
- if the parents have a high income or a high level of education
- if the separation took place during the last years. With time, fewer and fewer children have a short distance to the parent they do not live with

There is a connection between several of the above mentioned factors, for instance the level of education and income. A multivariate analysis can show which factors that have the most significance for the distance between children and the parent they do not live with.

In this analysis two new variables were added, number of siblings and if the mother or the father after the separation have had children with a new partner. The results show that it is less common with a short distance if one of the parents have children with a new partner. It is also less common with a short distance if the child has no siblings.

The model also shows that the significance of the parents' age and level of education decreases when income level is also included in the analysis. This indicates that it is not age or level of education that has significance on their own; above all, the different economic conditions are behind the differences that have been shown earlier.

**Less than 2 km to the parent they do not live with for children aged 0–17.  
 2005–2013. Odds ratios**

		Parent within 2 km	Father within 2 km	Mother within 2 km
Parent the child is living with	Lives with mother	1	-	-
	Lives with father	1,01*	-	-
Age of child	0-6 years	1	1	1
	7-12 years	1,06*	1,06*	1,14*
	13-17 years	0,92*	0,94*	0,9*
Mother's age at birth of child	-19 years	0,94*	0,95*	0,93*
	20-24 years	0,98*	0,97*	1,03*
	25-29 years	1	1	1
	30-34 years	1,00	1,00	1,01
	35- years	0,96*	0,96*	0,93*
Father's age at birth of child	-21 years	0,91*	0,92*	0,85*
	22-26 years	0,94*	0,95*	0,93*
	27-31 years	1	1	1
	32-36 years	1,02*	1,02*	1,05*
	37- years	1,00	0,98*	1,07*
Parents' country of birth	Both parents born in Sweden	1	1	1
	One parent born in Sweden and one parent foreign born	1,00	1,00	1,02
	Both parents foreign born	1,43*	1,44*	1,23*
Family type before separation	Married	1	1	1
	Cohabiting	1,13*	1,12*	1,15*
	Parents did not live together	0,54*	0,53*	0,54*
Number of siblings	No siblings	0,69*	0,69*	0,71*
	One sibling	1	1	1
	Two siblings	0,96*	0,97*	0,91*
	At least three siblings	0,97*	0,99*	0,87*
Mother has children with a new partner	No	1	1	1
	Yes	0,73*	0,70*	0,85*
Father has children with a new partner	No	1	1	1
	Yes	0,65*	0,64*	0,74*
Time since separation	0-2 years	1	1	1
	3-7 years	0,80*	0,79*	0,81*
	8-17 years	0,58*	0,58*	0,61*
Mother's level of education	Compulsory school	1,06*	1,09*	0,95*
	Upper secondary education	1	1	1
	Post secondary education	0,99*	0,98*	1,04*
Father's level of education	Compulsory school	0,96*	0,96*	0,93*
	Upper secondary education	1	1	1
	Post secondary education	1,08*	1,06*	1,15*
Mother's income level	Low	0,92*	0,94*	0,80*
	Medium-low	0,90*	0,91*	0,84*
	Medium	1	1	1
	Medium-high	1,11*	1,08*	1,21*
	High	1,18*	1,10*	1,43*
Father's income level	Low	0,76*	0,73*	0,89*
	Medium-low	0,86*	0,84*	0,94*
	Medium	1	1	1
	Medium-high	1,06*	1,08*	1,01
	High	1,13*	1,13*	1,11*
Type of municipality	Metropolitan areas and suburbs	1	1	1
	Large cities, suburbs to large cities and commuting municipalities	0,97*	0,98*	0,92*
	Other municipalities	1,05*	1,08*	0,93*

**References**

Dommermuth, Lars (2014) *Children as family commuters: The geographical distance between two parental homes after union dissolution* Preliminary draft for the European Population Conference 2014, Session 49: Separation and divorce