

# **Family Structure and Leaving Home:** **Why Do Young Adults From Non-Intact Families Leave Earlier?**

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ABSTRACT

This research asked why young adults from non-intact families are more likely to leave home early than young adults from intact families. The authors drew on data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) to examine the role of push and pull factors as mediators of the relationship between family structure and early home leaving. Using discrete-time event history models, the analysis combined information from a youth questionnaire at age 17 with prospective longitudinal data. Economic resources, mother's well-being and migration experiences in childhood mediated early home leaving among young adults from single mother families. Migration experiences in childhood and having a partner explained part of the effect of being from a stepfamily on early home leaving.

## INTRODUCTION

Leaving the parental home to start an independent household is considered a milestone in the transition to adulthood. This milestone is characterized by heterogeneity in timing. Some leave home before age 18, others well above age 30. An important factor explaining heterogeneity in age at leaving home is family structure. Young adults from non-intact families leave home earlier than young adults from “intact” families in which both biological or adoptive parents are present (Aquilino, 1991; Bernhardt, Gähler, & Goldscheider, 2005; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998; Mitchell, 2006; Sandberg-Thoma, Snyder, & Jang, 2015).

Early home leaving is considered a mediator of the harmful effects of parental divorce on children’s later life outcomes. Previous research has demonstrated that early home leaving is associated with several poor outcomes in adulthood. First, young adults who left home have fewer possibilities to draw on resources from their parental home. Leaving home is the most important predictor for living in poverty in young adulthood (Aassve, Davia, Iacovou, & Mazzuco, 2007). Moreover, leaving home, especially at a young age, increases the chance of experiencing debt problems (Oksanen, Aaltonen, & Rantala, 2016). Second, early home leaving is associated with early marriages which, in turn, are more likely to end in divorce (Lehrer, 2006). Third, early home leaving may negatively affect the parent-child relationship later in life (Leopold, 2012; Tosi & Gähler, 2016).

Although the relationship between family structure and age of leaving home is well-documented, we know little about how it can be explained. To our knowledge, only one previous study has examined mediating factors to explain why young adults from non-intact families leave earlier (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999). The present study examined several potential mediators of this effect. Specifically, we applied the feathered-nest hypothesis, which posits that young adults from non-intact families have less economic, social and

community resources and hence are more likely to be pushed out of the parental home at an early age (Avery, Goldscheider, & Speare, 1992). Moreover, we examined the role of pull factors towards independent living, given that young adults from non-intact families are more likely to have a partner and to have completed education earlier in life.

We used discrete-time event history models with longitudinal prospective data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) to examine to what extent these push and pull factors explain early home leaving, defined as leaving before age 21, among young adults from non-intact families. We combined dynamic data on family structure, employment, income, and housing conditions of both young adults and their mothers with detailed data on social relations and parental school involvement from a youth questionnaire answered by young adults at age 17. These rich data allowed us to go beyond previous research and to examine a wide range of mediating factors.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

### *Previous Research*

Ample research has shown that young adults from non-intact families leave home earlier than young adults from intact families (Aquilino, 1991; Bernhardt et al., 2005; Blaauboer & Mulder, 2009; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998; Mitchell, 2006; Sandberg-Thoma et al., 2015). Most of these studies found a medium-sized effect of family structure on (age at) leaving home. In general, these studies have argued that the difference in age of leaving home is most pronounced between young adults from stepfamilies and those from intact families, and is smaller when comparing young adults from single mother families to those from intact families (Aquilino, 1991; Bernhardt et al., 2005; Blaauboer & Mulder, 2009; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998; Iacovou, 2010).

*Push Factors*

*Parental Economic Resources*

Young adults from non-intact families are more likely to come from economically deprived parental homes than young adults from intact families: Young adults from non-intact families are more likely to grow up in poverty and to live in poor housing conditions (Martin, 2006). The disadvantage in economic resources can be explained by selection into divorce as well as the effects of divorce. Loss of an earner, loss of economies of scale, women's lack of experience on the labor market, and competing demands for child care limit the economic resources of single mother families (Andreß, Borgloh, Bröckel, Giesselmann, & Hummelsheim, 2006; Holden & Smock, 1991). Mothers who find a new partner are often able to overcome some of these financial constraints (Dewilde & Uunk, 2008).

Parental income “feathers” the parental home by sustaining the consumption of young adults, providing them with material comfort, and supporting them financially. Research has shown that this financial support is not fully transferable; parents in middle income groups are more likely to support co-resident children (Angelini & Laferrère, 2012). Parents with a low income have limited possibilities to support their children and might instead experience the economic burden of a co-residing child. Hence, these parents might “push” their adult children out of the home by asking them to move out or, less directly, by providing less material comfort that “feathers” the home (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999; Roberts, Noden, West, & Lewis, 2015).

The parental home might also be more feathered in terms of housing quality. Good housing conditions increase the quality of life in the parental home and provide more privacy to the child (e.g., own room, own bathroom). In contrast, poor housing conditions may render staying at home undesirable and push the child out of the parental home. In line with these

## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

considerations, previous studies have found that better housing conditions lead to a longer stay in the parental home (Buck & Scott, 1993; Mulder, Clark, & Wagner, 2002).

Previous findings on the effect of parental income on leaving home are mixed, but most studies have argued that higher parental income decreases the chance of leaving home (Blaauboer & Mulder, 2009; Buck & Scott, 1993; Mulder, Clark, & Wagner, 2006). The inconsistency in previous findings is partially due to differences in the effects of income at different ages: Whereas parental income prevents early home leaving, it promotes home leaving at later ages (Avery et al., 1992; Iacovou, 2010; Whittington & Peters, 1996).

Based on the feathered-nest hypothesis and previous findings, we hypothesize the following: *Early home leaving among young adults from non-intact families is mediated by economic resources in the parental home (Hypothesis 1a)*. In light of disproportionate economic disadvantages experienced by single mothers, we further expect that *parental economic resources explain more of the effect in single mother families than in stepfamilies (Hypothesis 1b)*.

### *Social Resources*

Young adults from non-intact families also face disadvantages in terms of social resources in the parental home. In particular, the relationship to the resident parent may be strained. This might be explained, first, by a selection effect: Parents who are more prone to conflict might be more likely to divorce and to have strained relationships with their children. Second, children of divorce might experience feelings of being caught in the middle between their parents (Afifi & Schrod, 2003). Children who feel caught in the middle might avoid talking to their parents about issues that could lead to conflict, such as topics related to the other parent. This, in turn, may reduce closeness to both parents. Third, divorce is a stressful event that affects the psychological well-being of parents, which in turn could strain the quality of

## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

relationships with their children and the amount of support that the parent is able to give (Williams & Umberson, 2004). Furthermore, the presence of a stepparent could disrupt social relations in the parental home even more and add to stress, as the child has to adjust to the new family situation and to the stepparent, whom they first regard as an outsider or even a competitor (King, 2009; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Sweeney, 2007).

Several studies have shown that children in non-intact families were less close to their parents than children in intact families (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003; Aquilino, 2005). Children in divorced families less often regarded their parents as a source for help or support and felt less obligations towards helping their step-parents (Amato, Rezac, & Booth, 1995; Ganong & Coleman, 2006; Kalmijn & Dronkers, 2015). Moreover, youth in single parent and stepfamilies received less support through less parental involvement in school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991).

The feathered-nest hypothesis argues that young adults are less likely to move out if they can draw on more resources in the parental home. Company and support of parents are mostly non-transferable resources that would be (partially) lost if the young adult moves out (Gierveld, Liefbroer, & Beekink, 1991). In line with the stress perspective, parental homes with high levels of stress might push the child out of the home (Amato & Kane, 2011).

Previous research has shown the importance of parent-child relationships for leaving home. Young adults were more likely to leave home if they were less close to their parents or had a conflict with their parents (Bernhardt et al., 2005; Cooney & Mortimer, 1999; Kiernan, 1992; South & Lei, 2015). Research on different pathways or reasons for leaving home (e.g. due to marriage or friction in the home) using retrospective questions has shown that young adults from non-intact families were especially more likely to leave home due to friction than young adults from intact families (Cherlin et al., 1995). Moreover, previous research has

## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

shown that early family formation of women is partially explained by higher levels of distress in stepfamilies (Amato & Kane, 2011).

Based on these considerations and previous findings, we hypothesized the following:

*Early home leaving among young adults from non-intact families is mediated by social resources in the parental home (Hypothesis 2).*

### *Community Resources*

Young adults from non-intact families might also have less community resources than young adults from intact families (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Non-intact families are more mobile, because family transitions such as the dissolution of marriage and remarriage often involve moving (Sweeney, 2007). Young adults from non-intact families less often live in the neighborhood in which they grew up and might have weaker ties in their local communities.

From a feathered nest perspective, young adults are more likely to stay in the parental home if the home is “feathered” with community resources. Living in an area for a longer period increases access to its resources through networks of friends and acquaintances (Goldscheider & DaVanzo, 1989; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). These resources would be lost if the young adult leaves home. Previous studies have shown that young adults are less likely to leave home (Goldscheider & DaVanzo, 1989; Hill, Yeung, & Duncan, 1996) and move across shorter distances (Leopold, Geissler, & Pink, 2012) when the duration of residence at that location is longer. To our knowledge, community resources have not yet been examined as a mediating factor between family structure and age of leaving home. In line with the feathered-nest hypothesis we tested the following mediation hypothesis: *Early home leaving among young adults from non-intact families is mediated by lower community resources (Hypothesis 3a).* Moreover, we expected that due to the higher number of family



## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

transitions in stepfamilies *community resources explain more of the effect in stepfamilies than in single mother families (Hypothesis 3b).*

### *Pull Factors*

Young adults might not only leave home because they are pushed out of the parental home, they might also leave because they are pulled towards independent living. We examined two pull factors that might render independent living more desirable.

### *Education and Employment*

Fewer resources among young adults from non-intact families – previously discussed as push factors – might also have an impact on their educational attainment. Disadvantages in economic, social and community resources limit parental investments in their children's education (e.g. helping with homework, hiring a tutor, extracurricular activities). Several studies have shown that educational attainment is lower among young adults from non-intact families (e.g. Amato, 2001; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Young adults who complete lower degrees are younger when they leave the educational system and enter the labor market. Employment, in turn, makes independent living affordable. Studies have shown that employment increases the chance of leaving home, whereas being enrolled in education decreases it (Avery et al., 1992; Iacovou, 2010; Mulder et al., 2006; South & Lei, 2015).

In our analysis, we tested the following mediation hypothesis: *Early home leaving among young adults from non-intact families is mediated by the young adult's employment status (Hypothesis 4).* We did not expect a difference in the strength of the mediating effect of employment status between single mother families and stepfamilies.

## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

### *Having a partner*

Although living with a partner is becoming less common as a route out of the parental home, having a partner remains an important factor that increases the likelihood that a young adult leaves the parental home (Mulder & Hooimeijer, 2002; South & Lei, 2015).

Research has shown that young adults from non-intact families, especially from families in which the parent is remarried, date, marry and cohabit earlier (Amato & Kane, 2011; Ivanova, Mills, & Veenstra, 2011; Kalmijn & Dronkers, 2015). This is partially explained by education. Young adults from non-intact families have less economic resources and are less often enrolled in higher education, which speeds up the process of family formation (Amato & Kane, 2011). However, it should be noted that having a partner might not only promote the wish to move out, but also vice versa. Young adults who would like to leave home might see a partnership as a feasible route out of the parental home and be more likely to search for a partner in order to “escape” from the parental home. The higher likelihood of having a partner among young adults from non-intact families and the pull effect of having a partner motivated our final mediation hypothesis: *The effect of early home leaving among young adults from non-intact families is mediated by relationships status (Hypothesis 5a)*. As the escape-from-stress hypothesis applies especially to stepfamilies, we further expected that *relationship status explains more of the effect in stepfamilies than in single mother families (Hypothesis 5b)*.

## METHOD

### *Data*

Our analyses were based on data from 14 waves (2001-2014; SOEP-long v31-1, release 2016) of the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP), see <https://www.diw.de/en/soep>. The SOEP is an annual longitudinal representative household and person study that contains

## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

both retrospective and prospective information (Wagner, Frick, & Schupp, 2007). Since 2000, children living in their parental household answer a youth biography questionnaire in the year in which they turn 17. The youth biography questionnaire contains a wide range of questions on topics relevant for youth, such as their schooling, activities, and (since 2001) social life. As we were interested in the social measures, we restricted our starting sample to young adults who participated in the youth questionnaire in one of the last 14 waves of the SOEP. Additionally, we used information provided by the mother in preceding and subsequent years, information provided by the young adults as regular respondents of the SOEP in subsequent years, and information on the economic conditions of the household through the household questionnaires answered by the head of the household.

### *Sample*

In total, 5,586 young adults have participated in the youth biography questionnaire since 2001. We proceeded in five steps to select an analytical sample. First, we dropped individuals who were observed only once and for whom we did not know whether and when they moved out (N=1,687). Second, we dropped individuals for whom we did not have information about their mother or who did not live with their mother at first observation (N=217). This group consisted of young adults whose mothers did not participate (N=59), who lived only with their father (N=136) or who had already left home at first observation (N=22). Young adults who lived with their father were dropped from the sample because our arguments apply less to single father families and the limited case numbers did not allow us to conduct separate analyses for single father families. Third, we dropped young adults who grew up in non-intact families due to widowhood (N=102). Previous research has suggested no significant differences in the age of leaving home between intact families and non-intact families through widowhood (Aquilino, 1991). Fourth, we dropped individuals who did not fit our age

## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

bounds, due to participation after age 18, or due to participation only at age 21 after the initial youth questionnaire (N=18). Finally, we dropped cases that had missing information on one of our key variables and for whom we could not use a lagged version of that variable (N=74). Our final sample consisted of 3,488 individuals.

### *Dependent Variable*

Our dependent variable was *early home leaving*, defined as leaving home before age 21.

There were two reasons for focusing on early home leaving rather than the entire process of home leaving. First, especially early home leaving has been shown to entail deleterious effects on outcomes later in life (such as poverty). Second, family structure mainly affects early home leaving. Descriptive analyses of our data showed that differences by family structure opened up until this age and remained largely unchanged at higher ages. Previous studies on leaving home also took age 20 or 21 as a cut-off for early home leaving (Billari, Philipov, & Baizán, 2001; Hill et al., 1996).

We defined a young adult's move-out if his or her household identification number (which is shared by all members living in one household) changed across two subsequent waves and the relationship to the head of the household is no longer child of the head of the household. Young adults might be more likely to drop out of the SOEP if they leave home. To prevent restricting home leaving to a possibly selective group of individuals who continued participating in the SOEP after having left home, we also coded individuals as having left home before age 21 if (a) they stopped participating in the SOEP after having participated in the youth questionnaire, (b) their parent(s) continued participating in the SOEP, (c) the number of members in the parental household aged 15 and older declined in the wave of drop out compared to the previous wave, and (d) the parent(s) of the young adult did not experience the death of a child between the two waves. We used an exit survey filled in by 54

## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

of the young adults after stopping participation in the SOEP to check whether our coding was correct. The check showed that all young adults who filled in the exit survey and whom we coded as having left home had indeed left home.

### *Independent Variables*

#### *Family Structure*

Our measure of family structure was based on the marital status of the mother, measured with retrospective questions on her marital history at panel entry and with prospective information of family status and the resident partner's identification number which is specific to the mother's partner in subsequent waves. We used a lagged version of the variable, indicating the family structure in the year before the current wave, in order to examine the effect of family structure on leaving home. We defined the mother's family structure as intact if the mother was married or living together with a partner when the child grew up (at least since the child was age four) and was still married or living together with the same partner at the current wave. Individuals were defined as living in a stepfamily if the mother was married or living with a partner who was not identified as the parent of the child (based on the partner of the mother around birth and early childhood). Individuals were coded as living in a single mother family if the mother was not married nor living together with a partner.

#### *Parental Economic Resources*

All measures for the parental economic resources were time changing and lagged by one survey year (i.e., pertaining to the preceding wave).

*Household income.* We measured annual post-government income of the parental household as the sum of total family income from labor earnings, asset flows, retirement income, private transfers (including alimony and child support payments), public transfers (including housing allowances, child benefits, subsistence assistance, maternity benefits,

### *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

unemployment benefits), and social security pensions minus family taxes. All income from co-resident children was subtracted. We equalized the income measure by the square root of 2 if the mother had a partner and adjusted it for inflation (reference year 2011). Next, we recoded this variable into four categories indicating the percentage of the median income (less than 60%, 60-100%, 100-150% (reference), and more than 150%) in the respective survey year calculated over the full sample of the SOEP. This categorical specification included a measure for poverty (the bottom category corresponding to the European Commission definition) and accounted for possible non-linear effects of income

*Housing conditions.* This variable was based on the following question in the household questionnaire: “How would you describe the condition of the building you live in?”. This variable was coded as a dummy variable with “good condition” as the reference category and “in need renovation/state of collapse” coded as one.

*Homeownership.* Homeownership could indicate better housing conditions and attachment to the house, because homeowners might be more willing to put effort in housing maintenance than tenants. A dummy variable was created which was coded as one if the head of the household owned the home.

### *Social Resources*

Two of the social resources measures, quality of the relationship with the mother and parental involvement in school, were based on the youth questionnaire and therefore time-constant. Mother’s life satisfaction was a dynamic measure specific to each wave. We used a one-year lagged version of mother’s life satisfaction.

*Quality of the mother-child relationship.* Quality of the relationship with the mother was measured with eleven questions covering different aspects of the relationship between the young adult and the mother. Examples for these questions are: How important is your mother

### *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

in life? How often does your mother talk about things that worry you? How often does your mother show that she loves you? How often do you argue or fight with your mother? Young adults answered on a 4-point Likert scale (*very important to unimportant*), and a 5-point Likert scale (*very often to never*). We standardized the items over the full sample of the youth questionnaire. This enabled us to determine the relative position of the young adult compared to others rather than the absolute score on each item, and to construct a scale even in the presence of missing values. The scale was the standardized average score of the valid standardized items. The reliability of the scale was  $\alpha=.82$ . A higher scores on this scale indicated a better relationship with the mother.

*Parental involvement in school.* Parental involvement in school was based on two questions in the youth questionnaire asking whether the parent(s) showed interest in school and helped with homework. Parental school involvement was dummy-coded as “not involved” if the parent did not help with homework and did not show interest in schooling.

*Mother's life satisfaction.* Life satisfaction of the mother was measured annually with the following question: “How satisfied are you with your life, all things considered?” Individuals rated their life satisfaction of an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 10 (*completely satisfied*). The scale was centered at the sample mean.

### *Community Resources*

As a proxy for community resources and the presence and strength of ties in the neighborhood, we used an indicator for whether young adults were still living in the area where they grew up. This was a dummy variable that was coded one if the young adult was still living where he or she grew up.

## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

### *Pull Factors*

Our indicators for pull factors were measured annually. A one-year lagged version was used for both measures.

*Main activity.* Young adults who reported that they did not yet finish education and were enrolled in school were coded as “in education,” the reference category. If the young adult was employed (part-time or full-time) and was not in education, he or she was coded as “employed.” A third category consisted of young adults who were “not in education and not employed.”

*Having a partner.* This measure was based on the following question: “Are you in a serious / permanent relationship?” Individuals who answered yes were coded as having a partner, those who answered no were in the reference category.

### *Control Variables*

*Location.* Age of leaving home (Silbereisen, Meschke, & Schwarz, 1996) and family structure (Engelhardt, Trappe, & Dronkers, 2002) differ between East (former German Democratic Republic) and West Germany. To control for this, we used an indicator variable for whether a young adult’s mother was living in East or West Germany in 1989 (before reunification).

*Number of children in the household.* The number of household members younger than 18 was included as a control variable to account for sharing housing and income with household members other than the parents. This measure was constructed as a time-changing and one-year lagged variable.

### *Models*

We estimated discrete-time event history models for the process of home leaving. We truncated the sample after age 21, focusing on early leaving. As previous research suggested



## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

that age of leaving home differs between men and women (White, 1994), we separated the analyses by gender. We first estimated the main effect of family structure on the probability of leaving home, and subsequently added the economic, social, and community variables, followed by the pull factors. Mediation effects cannot be examined by comparing log-odds or odds ratios of different models, because rescaling occurs when the model changes. Karlson, Holm and Breen (2012) introduced a method allowed us to examine mediation effects in logistic probability models. We used this method to estimate mediation effects.

### *Descriptive Analysis*

Figure 1 shows survivor curves for the process of leaving home for women (top panel) and men (bottom panel). The figure shows that both women and men from non-intact families left home earlier. For women, this applied primarily to those moving out from stepfamily households. Women moving out from single mother households left home at only slightly higher rates compared to those moving out from intact families. For men, both non-intact family types were similarly associated with earlier departures from the parental household. For both women and men, gaps between the survivor curves opened up until age 21 and remained stable thereafter.

[Figure 1 about here]

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for our analytical sample. Statistics on the time-constant variables pertain to the initial observation (i.e., upon completion of the youth questionnaire). In line with previous research, we found that young adults from non-intact families had fewer parental economic resources. This applied especially to young adults from single mother families. About 20 % of young adults from single mother families lived below the poverty line – compared to 4 % of young adults from intact families. Young adults from single mother families were also more likely to live in poor housing conditions than young

## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

adults from intact families (45 % compared to 29 %), and less likely to live in an owner-occupied housing unit (23 % compared to 71 %).

Young adults from non-intact families differed less from young adults from intact families in terms of parental social resources. Differences in school involvement and quality of the relationship with the mother were not significant. The mother's life satisfaction was significantly lower in non-intact families than in intact families. Especially single mothers had lower life satisfaction.

Consistent with previous research, young adults from non-intact families were less likely to live in the area where they grew up. Furthermore, as expected, young adults from non-intact families were more likely to have a partner, especially young adults from stepfamilies. In line with our considerations, they were also less likely to be enrolled in education. Especially men from stepfamilies, and men and women from single mother families were more likely to be employed, compared to their counterparts from intact families.

[Table 1 about here]

## RESULTS

### *Discrete-Time Event History Models*

Table 2 (women) and Table 3 (men) present the results of the discrete-time event history models. Model 1 shows that young adults from stepfamilies had more than twice the odds (2.15 for women, 2.31 for men) of leaving home early than their counterparts from intact families. Those from single mother families were also more likely to leave early, amounting to a 1.48-fold (women) and 1.98-fold increase in the odds of leaving home before age 21. Model 2 add the variables for economic resources. Poor housing conditions were predictive of leaving early among women. The coefficients for the other economic resources variables, parental income and homeownership, also pointed in the expected direction. However, these

### *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

estimates did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. For men, living in an owner-occupied housing unit decreased the odds of leaving early, whereas low and high household income increased the odds of leaving early.

In Model 3, we look at the variables for social resources. The quality of the mother-child relation and parental school involvement were not predictive of leaving home early. However, among women higher levels of mother's life satisfaction were associated with lower odds of leaving home early. In Model 4, we assess the effect of community resources, indicated by whether or not young adults were still living in the area where they grew up. As expected, those who were still living at their place of childhood were less likely to leave home early. This effect was stronger and significant among men, whereas it remained insignificant among women.

[Table 2 about here]

[Table 3 about here]

In Model 5 and 6, we look at the pull-factors. In line with our theoretical considerations, young adults who had left the educational system were more likely to leave home early. The same applied to those who had a partner. These effects were found both among women and men. Model 7 shows the full model which includes all explanatory factors simultaneously. The effects in this model did not differ substantially compared to the previous models, indicating additive effects. In additional analyses, we examined interactions between the independent variables but did not find evidence for meaningful effects.

### *Mediation Analysis*

To evaluate our hypotheses, we tested for mediation effects of the explanatory factors on the relationship between family structure and leaving home using the KHB method, which provides an unbiased decomposition of direct and indirect effects of logistic regression

### *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

analyses. The indirect effects of family structure via our five (sets of) mediation factors (economic resources, social resources, community resources, main activity, and having a partner) are presented in Table 4.

For women, the KHB analyses showed that economic resources significantly mediated the effect of earlier home leaving from single mother families. Taken together, the indicators for economic resources explained 41.12 % of the effect of being from a single mother family. Mediation for the effect of being from a stepfamily on early leaving was weaker and insignificant. These findings are in line with Hypothesis 1a and 1b. Social resources were a further significant mediator for women from single mother families, accounting for 12.47 % of the effect of being from a single mother family on leaving home early. Again, social resources did not constitute a significant mediator for the effect of being from a stepfamily. This suggests that we mostly have to reject Hypothesis 2. In contrast to Hypothesis 3a and 3b, community resources did not significantly mediate the effect of either type of non-intact family structure on leaving home early. The indicators for young adults' main activity (employment or education) mediated the effect of being from a single mother family (explaining 9.84 % of the effect), but not the effect of being from a stepfamily. This gives support for Hypothesis 4, but only for women from single mother families. In line with Hypothesis 5a and 5b, having a partner, accounted for 8.11 % of the effect of being from a stepfamily for women. In total, our model for women explained 58.75 % of the effect being from a single mother family and 19.67 % of the effects of being from a stepfamily on early home leaving. Note that given some overlap between the mediators, their effects were not fully additive.

Looking at the mediation effects for men, the KHB analysis showed that consistent with the results for women, economic resources significantly mediated the effect of being from a single mother family on leaving home early. This supports Hypothesis 1a and 1b also for

## *Family Structure and Leaving Home*

men. Social resources were irrelevant as mediators of the effects of both types of non-intact family structure. Hence, we have to reject Hypothesis 2 for men. In contrast to our findings for women, community resources significantly mediated the effect of family structure on leaving home, both for men from stepfamilies (7.03 % explained) and for men from single mother families (7.23 % explained). These findings give support for Hypothesis 3a, but not for 3b, in which we expected that more of the effect of family structure on leaving home would be explained by community resources for young adults from stepfamilies. The main activity – employment or education – was a weak and insignificant mediator for men, suggesting that we have to reject Hypothesis 4 for men. Similar to women, having a partner significantly mediated the effect of family structure for men from stepfamilies ( $p < 0.1$ ), but accounted for only 2.46 % of the effect of being from a stepfamily on early home leaving. The small percentage explained suggest weak support for Hypothesis 5a and 5b for men. In total, our model for men explained 29.12 % of the effect being from a single mother family and 21.12 % of the effects of being from a stepfamily on early home leaving.

## DISCUSSION

This study asked why young adults from non-intact families are more likely to leave home early than young adults from intact families. To answer this question, we examined the role of push and pull factors that differ by family structure and are associated with early home leaving.

Economic resources emerged as the most important mediator of early home leaving in single mother families, explaining 41 % of the effect for women and 26 % of the effect for men. In stepfamilies, these mediation effects were weaker, given that a step-parent often protects against economic deprivation. These findings indicate that women and men from single mother families are more likely to leave the parental home early because they are

“pushed” out of a nest that is less feathered by economic resources. This suggests that improving the economic well-being of single mother families could reduce early home leaving, along with further deleterious effects that follow from premature move-outs (Aassve et al., 2007; Oksanen et al., 2016).

In contrast to previous studies (e.g. Afifi & Schrodt, 2003; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), we did not find significant differences between women and men from non-intact families and those from intact families in the quality of the mother-child relationship and school involvement of parents. Moreover, our analyses showed that these two factors did not influence early home leaving. In this regard, the German context of the present study appears to differ from the U.S. context on which most previous studies are based. Moreover, we focused on early leaving and measured relationship quality at age 17, whereas other studies focused on children at different ages. Overall, our indicators for social resources in the parental home did not emerge as important mediators of early home leaving, although the lower life satisfaction of single mothers partly explained earlier move-outs of their daughters.

Several previous studies have attributed early home leaving among young adults from stepfamilies to conflict (Amato & Kane, 2011; Cherlin et al., 1995). Our findings show that the quality of the mother-child relationship does not mediate this effect. These findings suggest that the quality of the stepfather-child relation rather than the mother-child relation explain early home leaving among young adults from stepfamilies. In the absence of a measure for the quality of the relationship to the stepfather, we were unable to substantiate this claim. Testing this idea is an important objective for future research on family structure and leaving home.

Our results on community resources showed evidence for mediation among men, but not among women. Men who no longer lived in the area where they grew up were more likely to

leave home early, and this factor accounted for approximately seven percent of the effect of non-intact family structure on early home leaving. A limitation of our study is that our measure of community resources was indirect. Future research should add measures that capture relevant resources more directly.

Lastly, the two pull factors, main activity (employment or education) and having a partner did not constitute important mediators of the relationship between non-intact family structure and early home leaving, although we found some evidence for earlier union formation explaining earlier move-outs from stepfamilies.

Our study is one of the first attempts at explaining the well-known phenomenon of earlier home leaving among young adults from non-intact families. Given the potentially deleterious effects of these “off-time” transitions, it is important to gain insight into the factors that account for this phenomenon. Our prospective data allowed us to investigate a wide range of explanatory factors measured before young adults had left their parental home. The main conclusion to emerge from the analysis is that young adults from non-intact families leave earlier because their nest is less feathered in terms of economic resources. However, a substantial part of the effect remained unexplained, in particular for women living in stepfamilies and men living in both single mother and stepfamilies. Future research is needed to examine additional factors that influence early home leaving – in particular the role of relations to step-fathers – to gain further insight into the complex linkages between family structure and leaving home.

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*Family Structure and Leaving Home*

Table 1 *Descriptive statistics at first observation*

	Women							Men		
	All		Intact		Stepfamily	Single mother	Intact	Stepfamily	Single mother	
M / %	SD	Min	Max	M / %	M / %	M / %	M / %	M / %	M / %	
Family structure										
Intact	.725									
Stepfamily	.089									
Single mother	.195									
Left home	.028	0	1	.027	.096	.039	.013	.030	.047	
Economic resources										
Household income (% of median income)			1	4						
< 60%	.071			.043	.069	.208	.032	.060	.183	
60 – 100 %	.289			.249	.349	.446	.229	.343	.454	
100 – 150 %	.358			.348	.329	.241	.422	.403	.265	
> 150%	.282			.359	.253	.104	.317	.194	.099	
Homeowner	.595	0	1	.701	.438	.226	.721	.425	.238	
Poor housing conditions	.323	0	1	.297	.329	.446	.278	.336	.451	
Quality of mother-child relationship	0.010	0.918	-5.331	1.992	0.079	-0.008	0.063	-0.054	-0.076	-0.021
Parent(s) not involved in school	.112	0	1	.108	.096	.164	.093	.149	.134	
Life satisfaction mother	6.918	1.741	0	10	7.070	6.859	6.477	7.036	6.751	6.484
Moved away from place of childhood	.083	0	1	.067	.185	.134	.055	.157	.125	
Main activity			0	2						
In education	.834			.855	.836	.792	.837	.739	.820	
Employed	.040			.034	.014	.057	.036	.075	.058	
Not employed, not in education	.126			.111	.151	.152	.127	.187	.122	
In a relationship	.385	0	1	.407	.541	.509	.309	.410	.384	
Number of children in household	0.858	1.010	0	8	0.920	0.918	0.771	0.877	0.664	0.701
Part of Germany			1	3						
East	.238			.211	.362	.271	.222	.356	.255	
West	.703			.716	.604	.671	.719	.603	.710	
Abroad	.059			.073	.033	.057	.058	.041	.035	
<i>N</i>	3,488				1,264	146	336	1,264	134	344

## Family Structure and Leaving Home

Table 2 Event history models on leaving home early, women ( $N = 4,677$  observations;  $N = 1,746$  individuals).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7	
	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE
Family structure (ref. intact)														
Stepfamily	2.15**	0.37	2.00**	0.36	2.11**	0.38	2.10**	0.37	2.10**	0.37	2.05**	0.36	1.86**	0.34
Single mother	1.48**	0.21	1.27	0.20	1.41*	0.20	1.46**	0.21	1.41*	0.20	1.46**	0.21	1.18	0.18
Age (ref. 17)														
18	1.54*	0.32	1.54*	0.32	1.54*	0.32	1.53*	0.32	1.52*	0.32	1.58*	0.33	1.55*	0.32
19	3.79**	0.72	3.84**	0.73	3.77**	0.72	3.78**	0.72	3.92**	0.75	3.91**	0.74	4.04**	0.77
20	6.59**	1.24	6.71**	1.27	6.59**	1.24	6.56**	1.23	6.42**	1.22	6.63**	1.25	6.55**	1.25
Household income (ref. 100-150)														
< 60%			1.44	0.32									1.30	0.29
60-100%			1.14	0.17									1.07	0.16
> 150%			1.18	0.17									1.25	0.19
Homeowner			0.85	0.11									0.84	0.11
Poor housing conditions			1.46**	0.18									1.34*	0.17
Quality mother-child relationship					0.92	0.06							0.93	0.06
Parents not involved in school					1.03	0.18							1.04	0.18
Life satisfaction mother					0.92**	0.03							0.93*	0.03
Moved away from place of childhood							1.26	0.22					1.17	0.22
Main activity (ref. education)														
Employed									1.90**	0.45			1.87**	0.44
Not employed, not in education									1.97**	0.34			1.84**	0.34
In a relationship											1.79**	0.20	1.76**	0.20
Number of children in household	1.12**	0.06	1.18**	0.06	1.20**	0.06	1.20**	0.06	1.20**	0.06	1.21**	0.06	1.20**	0.06
Part of Germany (ref. East)														
West	0.62**	0.08	0.65**	0.08	0.66**	0.08	0.62**	0.08	0.60**	0.08	0.62**	0.08	0.65**	0.09
Abroad	0.87	0.21	0.91	0.23	0.90	0.22	0.85	0.21	0.86	0.21	0.91	0.22	0.95	0.25
Constant	0.03**	0.01	0.03**	0.01	0.03**	0.01	0.03**	0.01	0.03**	0.01	0.02**	0.00	0.02**	0.00

Note: Data are from SOEP 2001 – 2014.

e<sup>B</sup> = exponentiated B.

† p < .10. \* p < .05. \*\* p < .01



## Family Structure and Leaving Home

Table 3 Event history models on leaving home early, men ( $N = 4,838$  observations;  $N = 1,742$  individuals).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7	
	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE	e <sup>B</sup>	SE
Family structure (ref. intact)														
Stepfamily	2.31**	0.52	2.16**	0.51	2.33**	0.53	2.15**	0.50	2.27**	0.52	2.26**	0.52	2.03**	0.49
Single mother	1.98**	0.35	1.69**	0.34	2.01**	0.36	2.15**	0.33	1.97*	0.35	2.03**	0.36	1.71**	0.34
Age (ref. 17)														
18	3.37**	1.10	3.34**	1.09	3.39**	1.10	3.40**	1.10	3.39**	1.11	3.66**	1.20	3.64**	1.20
19	5.02**	1.61	4.96**	1.58	5.04**	1.62	5.08**	1.62	5.14**	1.64	5.53**	1.78	5.68**	1.83
20	11.50**	3.55	11.52**	3.55	11.60**	3.61	11.66**	3.58	10.69**	3.30	12.14**	3.77	11.65**	3.61
Household income (ref. 100-150)														
< 60%			1.70†	0.51									1.64	0.51
60-100%			1.61*	0.32									1.56*	0.32
> 150%			2.26**	0.46									2.21**	0.45
Homeowner			0.71†	0.13									0.75	0.13
Poor housing conditions			1.17	0.19									1.18	0.19
Quality mother-child relationship					1.06	0.10							1.05	0.10
Parents not involved in school					0.94	0.24							0.99	0.26
Life satisfaction mother					1.01	0.04							1.03	0.05
Moved away from place of childhood							1.95**	0.45					1.87**	0.43
Main activity (ref. education)														
Employed									2.10**	0.49			1.97**	0.45
Not employed, not in education									1.48†	0.35			1.51†	0.37
In a relationship											2.16**	0.33	2.08**	0.32
Number of children in household	1.22**	0.09	1.22**	0.09	1.22**	0.09	1.21**	0.09	1.21**	0.08	1.22**	0.09	1.20**	0.09
Part of Germany (ref. East)														
West	0.70*	0.11	0.70*	0.12	0.70*	0.12	0.70*	0.12	0.70*	0.12	0.69*	0.11	0.67*	0.11
Abroad	0.65	0.27	0.62	0.26	0.66	0.27	0.59	0.25	0.63	0.26	0.73	0.30	0.64	0.27
Constant	0.03**	0.01	0.03**	0.01	0.03**	0.01	0.03**	0.01	0.03**	0.01	0.02**	0.00	0.02**	0.00

Note: Data are from SOEP 2001 – 2014.

e<sup>B</sup> = exponentiated B.

† p < .10. \* p < .05. \*\* p < .01

## Family Structure and Leaving Home

Table 4 Mediation analysis (KHB)

Mediation variables	Women					
	Stepfamily			Single mother family		
	Coef.	SE	% explained	Coef.	SE	% explained
Economic resources	0.06	0.03	7.37	0.16*	0.68	41.12
Social resources	0.02	0.14	2.00	0.05*	0.02	12.47
Community resources	0.02	0.02	3.25	0.02	0.01	4.48
Main activity	0.02	0.01	2.13	0.04*	0.02	9.84
In a relationship	0.06**	0.02	8.11	0.03	0.02	7.00
All mediators	0.15**	0.05	19.67	0.23**	0.07	58.75

  

Mediation variables	Men					
	Stepfamily			Single mother family		
	Coef.	SE	% explained	Coef.	SE	% explained
Economic resources	0.09	1.63	9.97	0.19*	2.04	26.63
Social resources	-0.01	-0.18	-0.96	-0.01	-0.34	-1.52
Community resources	0.06*	2.54	7.03	0.05*	2.42	7.23
Main activity	0.03	1.56	3.49	0.01	0.96	2.19
In a relationship	0.05†	1.92	2.46	0.02	0.77	5.47
All mediators	0.19**	0.06	21.12	0.22*	0.10	29.12

Note: Data are from SOEP 2001 – 2014.

Calculated by KHB method.

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$

FIGURE 1. SURVIVAL CURVE FOR LEAVING HOME BY FAMILY STRUCTURE

