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Family Type Differences in Children's Satisfaction with People They Live with and Perceptions about Their (Step)parents' Parenting Practices

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Abstract: Family complexity is increasing in Europe, experienced by a significant proportion of children. More evidence is needed in Europe how children's family type influences their well-being, especially their family-related subjective well-being, and to what extent parenting practices are playing a role in these relationships. The aim of the paper is to study perceptions of children who live with two biological parents, with a biological and a stepparent, or with a single parent about the parenting practices of their (step)parents and their satisfaction with the people they live with. The analysis is based on the third wave of the "Children's Worlds" harmonized dataset of 12-year-old children in Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Norway, Poland, and Romania. The findings reveal a 'cascade of children's appraisals' by the family types—overall, living with two biological parents is the least and in a stepparent family the most complex family environment for children, reflected in their highest and lowest evaluations of parenting practices and family-related subjective well-being, respectively. The analyses showed that simple and complex family type differences in children's family-related subjective well-being are entirely explained by parenting practices in Norway, Estonia, and Poland, but not or almost not at all in Finland, Hungary, and Romania. To conclude, in a caring, safe, and participation-enhancing family atmosphere, children can be inclusively flexible and adapt to new parent-figures.

Keywords: children; Europe; family complexity; family type; family-related subjective well-being

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1. Introduction

Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasizes the importance of environment in which children grow up. Family is the primary life environment for children and basic source of their well-being (Newland 2015), including subjective well-being (Ash and Huebner 2001; Dew and Huebner 1994; Gilman and Huebner 2003; Henry 1994; Joronen and Astedt-Kurki 2005; Lee and Yoo 2015; Nahkur and Kutsar 2019). Already in the 1960s, Baumrind (1966, 1971) noted the importance of parenting to child well-being. Bowlby (1982) stressed the importance of close relationships at least with one person, as disconnection causes distress and anxiety in a child, thus decreasing a child's well-being. Several systematic reviews (Davids et al. 2017; Merlin et al. 2013; Rose et al. 2018; Ruiz-Hernandez et al. 2019) have confirmed relationships between different parenting practices and child well-being. When parents are struggling, child well-being suffers (Newland 2014).

Being a parent and living in a family nowadays is more challenging compared to some decades ago. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) has been a promotor of looking at children as subjects here and now, and setting higher requirements for parenting. According to the Convention, parents/legal guardians have the primary responsibility to ensure proper environment necessary for development of the child (Art 6) safeguarding the 'provision', 'protection', and 'participation' (commonly referred to as the "3Ps") rights of a child. Thus, children have the right to caring and protecting parents who are also good listeners to the child. According to Du Bois-Reymond (1998),

"the modern family in most European countries has turned from an authority-oriented family to a negotiating one" (p. 59). Moreover, substantial family change—in the structure or form of families, in family organization, and in family relationships and values (Daly 2005)—and increased frequency of family transitions and complexity are challenging to all family members. There are many children whose parents separate or divorce, and children follow parents' decisions when moving from one family structure to the other. Many of them must cope with several family transitions before they reach the legal age of adulthood. Family transitions cause stress in children (see, e.g., Robson 2010). There is a body of studies that analyse impacts of divorce or separation of parents on child well-being (see, e.g., meta-analysis by Amato 2001). The UN CRC states that a child has a right not to be separated from their parents (Art 9, 10, 11). This means that children have the right to communicate with both the resident and nonresident parent, and separated parents. Whatever the family transitions are, Madge and Willmott (2007) point out that children can overcome family separations and other stressful situations if they feel cared for and loved. In other words, parents should resolve mutual problems for 'the best interest of the child' (UN CRC Art 3). Unfortunately, family transition is often accompanied by increased stress level in parents (Cooper et al. 2009), also leading often to less optimal parenting (Anthony et al. 2005; Karrass et al. 2003), or even to punitive and nonresponsive parenting (Cooper et al. 2009). Family transition as a life-changing event changes parenting practices because of family reconstructions: when parents separate and form couples with new partners, a new set of relationships is created.

Previous studies (Carlson and Meyer 2014; Cherlin 1992; Kalil et al. 2014; Sedlak et al. 2010; Stewart 2006) suggest that parenting practices (e.g., the extent of children being cared for, protected and listened to) may differ in different family types. For example, joint parental supervision and control is easier to perform compared to a single parent's resources and opportunities (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). However, as the stepparent's role is ambiguous, children may not receive the level of emotional support that they need from either their stepfather or their nonresident biological father (Carlson and Meyer 2014; Cherlin 1992; Stewart 2006). There is evidence that stepparents devote less total time to childrearing tasks (Kalil et al. 2014), and stepfathers are more likely to neglect or abuse the children with whom they live (Sedlak et al. 2010). To conclude, living in different family types uncover different levels of complexity for a child and thus uncover diverse outcomes for children's family-related well-being. Recently, Dinisman et al. (2017) showed that in general, children living with both parents evaluate parenting practices—including feeling safe and listened to at home—and family-related subjective well-being higher than children living in a single-parent family and in separated families. In this paper, we are interested in what roles parenting practices play in children's family-related subjective well-being in the cases of children that live in different family types. *The aim of the paper is to study appraisals of children who live with both biological parents; with one parent in the home being a stepparent; or with a single parent, about their parents' parenting practices (being cared for, listened to, and feeling safe) and liking the people with whom they share the household.* The latter serves as an outcome indicator of subjective well-being of children in the closest/primary family environment (hereafter we use the term 'family-related subjective well-being').

1.1. Family Complexity and Child Well-Being

Families have changed substantially in Europe over the past fifty years (Oláh 2015). Especially, family instability—an important factor in children's subjective well-being (Dinisman et al. 2012)—has increased in every European country. With higher rates of cohabitation, nonmarital childbearing, multipartner fertility, divorce, and repartnering, family complexity is increasing, and these changes are experienced by a significant proportion of children in Europe (Thomson 2014). Although Manning et al. (2014) consider the intersection of parent complexity (children who do not live with both biological parents) and sibling complexity (some of the siblings do not share the same parents[1]) critical to the conceptualization of family type, we conceptualize both as parent complexity, as in

most of the previous studies. By taking the perspective of the household, in this paper we distinguish three family types—biological parents, a single parent, and a stepparent family. Proceeding from Thomson (2014), we suggest that living with both biological parents is the least complex life environment for children, while living with a stepparent or a single parent give rise to more complex environments. Most single parents—usually mothers and their children—may be viewed as simple families, but complexity may arise if the separated parents have a continuing relationship of coparenting (Thomson 2014). Living in a single-parent family is often a transitional period before living in more complex families through parental repartnering; e.g., in most European countries, about half of the children that experienced parental separation would enter a stepfamily within six years of the parents' separation (Thomson 2014). According to Thomson (2014, p. 246), repartnering increases dramatically the complexity of family relationships and household arrangements.

Studies in the United States (Carlson and Corcoran 2001; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994), but also in United Kingdom (Ermisch and Francesconi 2001), and Sweden (Björklund et al. 2007) have shown that children living with both biological parents, compared to those who do not, tend to have better developmental outcomes. Moreover, according to Amato (2005), United States children living with two continuously married parents are less likely to experience a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and social problems during childhood. The special issue, "Marriage and Child Well-Being" in the journal *The Future of Children* published in 2005 concluded that in the United States, living in a single-parent family can have negative effects on child well-being. Previous research has consistently shown that children in stepfamilies have well-being outcomes similar to children living in single-parent families (see for discussion, e.g., Amato 2001). Thus, there is some evidence that living in complex families may decrease children's well-being. According to Brown (2004), researchers have not been able to adequately explain why these family structure differences in child well-being exist. Several of them (Astone and McLanahan 1991; Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones 2002; Hogan and Kitagawa 1985; Matsueda and Heimer 1987; Morgan et al. 1979; Peterson and Zill 1986; Thomson et al. 1994) have proposed that it may be due to differing parenting practices. Analyses of large-scale surveys have shown that effects of family structure on children are attenuated but not entirely accounted for by parenting (Astone and McLanahan 1991; Hogan and Kitagawa 1985; Matsueda and Heimer 1987; Morgan et al. 1979; Peterson and Zill 1986). Dunifon and Kowaleski-Jones (2002) showed that the parenting measures were not strong predictors of delinquency or math test scores and did not reduce the significance of the associations between family structure and child outcomes. Thomson et al. (1994) found lower levels of paternal and maternal support toward children in stepparent and cohabiting parent families than among families containing two biological parents, but did not find that these differences in parenting mediated between family structure and child outcomes.

However, due to the dominance of anglophone and primarily United States research on the impact of family type on child well-being, the generalizability of the results is questioned (Bukodi and Dronkers 2003, p. 3). The need to study the link between family type and child well-being elsewhere is supported by the results of Chapple (2013) meta-analysis. Chapple (2013) found that in non-United States OECD countries, the sizes of causal effect on a child's well-being of being brought up in a single-parent family are at best small, and the average effect is somewhat smaller than for the United States (except in the case of Nordic countries). Moreover, in the previous studies, most typically the child well-being measures available are measures of well-being deficits, e.g., depression or delinquency (Chapple 2013), and child well-being and its relationships with family type and parenting practices have been mostly examined using adult perspectives (e.g., parent, teacher, professional, see Neoh and Mellor 2010; Newland et al. 2014). Thus, in Europe, more evidence is needed on how children's family types influence their well-being, especially their family-related subjective well-being, and to what extent parenting practices are playing a role in this relationship.

1.2. Children's Perspectives on Family Complexity and Well-Being

Madge and Willmott (2007) have shown how children are capable of observing and commenting on their lives, on the feelings they have towards their biological and step-parents and the impact of parents on children's well-being. Considering the children's perspective is important to aid the realization that children do not always think what adults assume they think. Neither do all decisions that adults make 'in the best interest of the child' guarantee their high subjective well-being. Children in both shared-parenting and sole-residence arrangements often have different views of themselves than their parents do—even when parents believe children are doing well, and when parents feel satisfied, children may not be doing well and may not feel the same levels of satisfaction, e.g., Neoh and Mellor (2010) found that children in shared-parenting arrangements are less satisfied with their living arrangement than are their parents.

In this paper, we are interested in whether living with two biological parents is the least and living with one biological and one stepparent is the most complex family environment for children, from their own perspective. The family being simple or complex for a child is associated with a subjective family definition that goes beyond the household borders and involves people with whom they feel emotionally close, or they exclude someone (e.g., a mother's new partner or a stepparent) with whom they share the same household but feel not that close to (Brown and Manning 2009; Stewart 2005; Kutsar and Raid 2019). It is more common that adults who have started a stepfamily consider their family to be the people they are currently living with (Castrén and Widmer 2015). Stepfamily, according to Marsolini (2000), is a three-part network: it includes the current family, the former family of the parent, and the former family of the new partner. Therefore, a stepfamily does not function independently but in relation to the former families or households of the family members forming the core of its complexity. Therefore, feeling close to and/or persistently missing the nonresident parent troubles the child, causing difficulty in accepting the changing life situation, which can endanger especially subjective well-being of children in stepfamilies but also those living with a single parent. Castrén and Widmer (2015) suggest that adults are more exclusive than children: after separation they focus on formation of the new family unit, excluding the members who left the household, while children prefer continuation of the biological family.

However, being inclusive, children may accept also not-biologically-related or semi-related people who belong to more than one household, to their subjective family. Taking children's flexibility as a launching point, we can partly agree with Sawhill (2014) in that there is no definitive evidence on whether complexity causes problems in children's lives. We assume that complexity may occur also in a 'simple' family with two biological parents if the child perceives not been cared by parents; lack of safety due to involvement in conflicts between parents or worrying about family money matters; or, last but not least, lack of being listened to. Although research shows that family transitions cause adaptational problems in children (e.g., Dunn and Deater-Deckard 2001), some transitions may thus still uncover positive outcomes. We suppose that children's subjective well-being in single or stepparent families can vary on a broad scale and in some cases be more positive than when living with two biological parents, especially if the child can enjoy the positive parenting practices of their biological and nonbiological parents.

In recent years, children's subjective well-being has received an increasing amount of attention, and one of the ways to investigate it has been to ask children directly about their perceptions of happiness, their satisfaction with life, their own psychological well-being, positive and negative affect (Rees et al. 2012), and perception of living a good life (Kutsar et al. 2019). There are some studies (Bjarnason et al. 2012; Dinisman et al. 2012; Dinisman et al. 2017; Lee and Yoo 2015) based also on European countries' data, showing that life satisfaction is lower among children in all other family types compared to those living with both biological parents. However, Kutsar and Nahkur (2021) did not find statistically significant differences in overall life satisfaction between children living in simple and complex family types in Estonia, Poland, and Romania. Instead

of using children's appraisals of their overall life satisfaction, in this paper we are more specific and use their 'satisfaction with the people they live with' as an indicator of their family-related subjective well-being. In accordance with Rees (2017), we suggest that it is a better measure to answer a question about how the family complexity reflects in children's perceptions about their family life and subjective well-being. Using ISCWeB second wave (2013/2014) data from eight European countries, Rees (2017) explored children's family-related subjective well-being differences by family type. He found that children living in two-parent families almost always had the highest mean satisfaction with family life compared to children living in other family types in all countries, and there was only partial evidence that these variations in satisfaction with family life can be explained by different levels of material deprivation and amounts of family time. However, to our knowledge there are no previous studies exploring the link between family type and child family-related subjective well-being and the role of parenting practices in this relationship. As an only exception, we are aware of the study by Dinisman et al. (2017) examining children's family-related subjective well-being and appraisals of their parents' parenting practices by their family type. Dinisman et al. (2017) showed—using ISCWeB second wave (2013/2014) data—that, in general, children living with both parents are more satisfied with the people they live with and feel safer and more listened to at home than children living in a single-parent family and in separated families. However, they did not examine the role of parenting practices in explaining the family type differences further.

Partially, we replicate the study by Dinisman et al. (2017) using more recent data. Our purpose is to broaden the knowledge base about children's family-related subjective well-being in the context of family change. Keeping in mind the evidence described in previous sections, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a). *Children's appraisals of parenting practices differ by family type.*

Hypothesis 1b (H1b). *Children living with biological parents evaluate their parents' parenting practices more positively than children living in a single or stepparent family.*

Hypothesis 1c (H1c). *Children living in stepparent families evaluate their parents' parenting practices more negatively than children living with biological parents or a single parent.*

Hypothesis 2a (H2a). *Children's family-related subjective well-being differ by family type.*

Hypothesis 2b (H2b). *Children living with biological parents are more satisfied with people they live with than children living in a single or stepparent family.*

Hypothesis 2c (H2c). *Children living in stepparent families are less satisfied with the people they live with than children living with biological parents or a single parent.*

Assuming there are differences in family-related subjective well-being by children's family type, we go further and control whether children's appraisals of parenting practices play a role in it. Previously, it has been shown that the effects of family structure on children are attenuated but not entirely accounted for by parenting (Astone and McLanahan 1991; Hogan and Kitagawa 1985; Matsueda and Heimer 1987; Morgan et al. 1979; Peterson and Zill 1986). As there is no evidence—at least in the European context—whether parenting practices can help to explain the family type differences in family-related subjective well-being, we propose:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Children's lower family-related subjective well-being in a single or stepparent family compared to that of children living with biological parents are partially but not entirely explained by their lower appraisals of parenting practices.*

Next, we will introduce the data and methods that we will apply for testing the hypotheses.

2. Materials and Methods

Due to a relatively scarcity of available data, research on children's subjective well-being has lagged behind that on adults' subjective well-being (Rees 2017). However, substantial progress has been made over the last decade, e.g., launching the International Study of Children's Well-Being, "Children's Worlds" (ISCWeB).

2.1. Sample

The paper draws data from the third wave of the International Study of Children's Well-Being, "Children's Worlds" (ISCWeB)—a harmonized dataset of 12-year-old children. ISCWeB is a large-scale survey among a representative sample of at least 1000 children in each age group (8, 10, and 12) globally. Currently, we focus on 12-year- old children because they have experienced changes in living arrangements with higher probability than younger children. The coordination team of the study gave guidance of the sampling strategy and formed a panel of sampling experts that reviewed and approved all sampling strategies of the country teams. The country teams applied a stratified sampling approach (type of settlement; the random selection of schools, excluding schools of children with special educational needs). Self-administered questioning was carried out in classrooms with the presence of a trained interviewer. In Finland, data were collected with internet-based questionnaires (Webropol). The study received approval of the ethical committees in each of the participating countries.

The ISCWeB third wave captured children's responses from 35 countries around the world. Our intention was to focus on European countries. It allowed us to address the lack of research on cross-national comparisons of the links between family structure and child well-being (Thomson and McLanahan 2012). The paper focuses on Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Norway, Poland, and Romania for four reasons: first, these countries participated in the most recent ISCWeB (third wave in 2017/2018); second, they had country-wide representative samples; third, the sample sizes in all family types were sufficient for the present statistical analysis; fourth, all the necessary data for the analyses existed. Thus, several European countries not fulfilling the criteria—e.g., Spain and Belgium, which did not have country-wide representative samples—were not included.

Children defined their household structures by listing all people that they live with in their main (primary) home. Children had an opportunity to define a second home, if they had it, and its structure, because a child may live at times with one parent and the other, moving between these two. Because of a small number of children commuting between two family nuclei (the biological mother's and father's, who had separated or divorced and formed new family units), the paper will not develop this aspect. Table 1 describes the sample that the paper uses. In total, we use data from 6000 children with family type information. According to children's self-reports, the highest share of children living with their biological parents (the simple family type as defined by Thomson 2014) and the lowest share of children living with biological and stepparent or with a single parent (complex family types as defined by Thomson 2014) are in Romania and Poland. Children live with biological and stepparent most commonly in Finland and Estonia, and with a single parent in Hungary and Finland. Table 1 also shows the distribution of children's evaluations about how much they worry about family money matters. We included this variable for analytical purposes however, it also serves as an indirect measure of the socio-economic status (SES) of the child's family.

Table 1. Number and proportion of children in six selected countries by gender, family type, and subjective perception about family money matters.

		Gender		Family Type			Subjective Perception about Family Money Matters	
		Boys	Girls	Biological Parents	Biological and Stepparent	Single Parent	Often, Always Worry	Never, Sometimes Worry
Estonia	N	526	512	758	142	139	229	733
	%	50.7	49.3	73.0	13.7	13.4	23.8	76.2
Finland	N	493	564	732	150	175	103	851
	%	46.6	53.4	69.3	14.2	16.6	10.8	89.2
Hungary	N	433	500	658	121	158	79	804
	%	46.4	53.6	70.2	12.9	16.9	8.9	91.1
Norway	N	354	457	618	98	95	67	701
	%	43.6	56.4	76.2	12.1	11.7	8.7	91.3
Poland	N	549	562	959	81	72	183	834
	%	49.4	50.6	86.2	7.3	6.5	18.0	82.0
Romania	N	490	488	919	74	51	179	812
	%	50.1	49.9	88.0	7.1	4.9	18.1	81.9
Total	N	2845	3083	4644	666	690	840	4735
	%	48.0	52.0	77.4	11.1	11.5	15.1	84.9

2.2. Measures

Children's family-related subjective well-being is measured with the question 'How satisfied are you with people you live with?' (ranging from 0 = not at all satisfied to 10 = totally satisfied). Children's appraisals of parenting practices follow the main principles of the UN CRC (known as the 3Ps)—'provision' is measured with the statement, 'There are people in my family who care about me'; 'protection' with the statement, 'I feel safe at home'; 'participation' with the statement, 'My parents/caretakers listen to me and take what I say into account'. The response categories were: 0 = I do not agree, 1 = I agree a little bit, 2 = I agree somewhat, 3 = I agree a lot, 4 = I totally agree. Supported by factor analysis, we combined these three variables—using arithmetic mean—into one summary indicator (Cronbach alpha = 0.731 on country-pooled data) reflecting children's perceptions about parenting practices in their (primary) home.

In this paper, we follow the mean assessments of children and show the proportions of children who gave maximum appraisals to their satisfaction with people they live with (10 points on the 0–10 points scale) and parenting practices perceptions (4 points on the 0–4 points scale). In the case of children's satisfaction with people they live with, we also highlight the share of children with very low appraisals (0–4 points on the 0–10 points scale). Even when the percentages of children with very low subjective well-being are not high, they deserve attention, both in academic research and policies (Casas 2019). These children may face lasting negative life circumstances and may fall into mental health problems needing intervention.

2.3. Analysis

This paper applies descriptive statistics and logistic regression as methods of analysis. In all analysis steps outlined below, we conducted country-pooled and country-specific analyses. First, we examined whether children living in different family types assess their parents' parenting practices differently. Second, we examined by family type whether differences exist in children's satisfaction with the people they live with. In both steps, differences between the three family types are assessed using the Kruskal–Wallis test, which

is based on analyzing the mean rank. When a significant difference is found, post-hoc tests are conducted using Mann–Whitney's U test to assess the differences between each pair of family type. We use nonparametric tests because our variables do not meet normal distribution criteria and the size of the family type groups differ markedly. Third, binary logistic regression analyses are used to explore the relationships between children's family type, satisfaction with people they live with, and appraisal of parenting practices when controls are also taken into account. We used child gender (1 = boys and 2 = girls) and subjective perception about family money matters ('How often do you worry about how much money your family has?', ranging 0 = never to 3 = always) as controls. In the latter, we followed the Eurostat (Mayer et al. 2018) poverty rate, which is higher in single-parent families compared to two-parent families. In the regression models, children's satisfaction with people they live with as the dependent variable had two categories (1—totally satisfied, 0—the rest as the reference group). Model 1 included family type—as dummy independent variable where children living with biological parents are a reference group—together with controls. Model 2 also included a 'parenting practices' variable. These models test the extent to which differences in children's satisfaction with people they live with according to family type (also shown in Model 1) might be explained when children's appraisals about their parents' parenting practices are taken into account. Similar analyses strategy was used also by Rees (2017). Children's appraisals of their parents' parenting practices are considered to partially explain differences in their satisfaction levels with people they live with in simple and complex family types when in the regression analysis the level of significance (p) is 0.01 to 0.05 between single-parent or stepparent children and children living with both parents, and entirely when $p > 0.05$. We used Nagelkerke's pseudo R-square to measure the overall goodness of fit of the models (Field 2005).

3. Results

3.1. Mean Differences

First, we explored whether children's satisfaction with people they live with and their appraisals of parents' parenting practices differ by family type.

In all family types, children from Hungary tend to evaluate their parents' parenting practices the highest (Table 2). About 54–63% of Hungarian children evaluate their parents' parenting practices at the maximum positive level. Children's appraisals of their parents parenting practices differ by family type—occurring both in country-pooled and country-specific analyses—confirming Hypothesis 1a. Only in Hungary are there no family type differences in children's appraisals of parenting practices. Based on mean scores on country-pooled data, children living with both biological parents positively differ in their appraisals of parenting practices from children living with a biological parent and a stepparent or a single parent, confirming Hypothesis 1b. This applies to all countries (except Hungary).

Based on mean scores on country-pooled data, children living with a biological parent and a stepparent evaluate parenting practices significantly less positively than children living with both biological parents or a single parent, confirming Hypothesis 1c. Based on country-specific analyses, this applies particularly to Finland. In Finland only 37% of children living with a biological parent and a stepparent evaluate parenting practices at the maximum positive level, while 63% of children living with biological parents and 55% of children living with a single parent evaluate it so. In Estonia, Norway, Poland, and Romania, children living with a biological parent and a stepparent evaluate parenting practices significantly less positively than children living with both biological parents, but do not differ from children living with a single parent.

Table 2. Arithmetic mean, standard deviation (SD), share of children evaluating their parents' parenting practices at the maximum positive level (4 on 0–4 scale), and arithmetic mean, standard deviation (SD), share of children totally (10 on 0–10 scale) or not at all (0–4 on 0–10 scale) satisfied with the people they live with by countries and in total: Kruskal–Wallis (H) and Mann–Whitney U post-hoc tests.

		Children's Appraisals of Parenting Practices			Satisfaction with the People They Live with			
		Mean	SD	Max Positive, %	Mean	SD	Totally Satisfied, %	Not at All Satisfied, %
Estonia	Biological parents	3.64	0.60	53.7	9.09	1.48	59.0	1.4
	Single parent	3.44 [b]	0.72	34.7	8.69 [b]	1.73	50.0	1.5
	Biological and stepparent	3.26 [b]	0.95	33.3	8.31 [b,s]	1.82	35.3	2.2
	H	38.83 ***			34.49 ***			
Finland	Biological parents	3.70	0.58	62.7	9.29	1.14	58.7	0.8
	Single parent	3.57 [b]	0.69	55.2	8.86 [b]	1.54	43.1	3.4
	Biological and stepparent	3.36 [b,s]	0.83	37.1	8.53 [b,s]	1.51	28.7	1.3
	H	38.71 ***			63.10 ***			
Hungary	Biological parents	3.75	0.44	63.2	9.47	1.13	72.9	0.9
	Single parent	3.71	0.49	60.4	9.32	1.37	69.8	1.9
	Biological and stepparent	3.69	0.48	53.8	9.15 [b,s]	1.19	55.0	0.8
	H	2.87			17.75 ***			
Norway	Biological parents	3.67	0.77	67.8	9.40	1.13	68.3	0.6
	Single parent	3.57 [b]	0.74	52.7	9.08 [b]	1.33	54.7	1.1
	Biological and stepparent	3.64 [b]	0.62	49.5	8.97 [b]	1.52	54.1	2.0
	H	12.94 **			14.41 ***			
Poland	Biological parents	3.60	0.60	45.4	9.07	1.56	58.4	2.1
	Single parent	3.44 [b]	0.66	37.3	8.66	1.99	52.1	4.2
	Biological and stepparent	3.23 [b]	0.95	32.9	7.67 [b]	3.09	43.2	18.5
	H	16.20 ***			18.88 ***			
Romania	Biological parents	3.61	0.56	52.2	9.53	1.27	79.9	1.1
	Single parent	3.40 [b]	0.66	33.3	9.20 [b,k]	1.25	56.9	2.0
	Biological and stepparent	3.45 [b]	0.60	34.8	9.55	0.92	74.3	0
	H	14.81 ***			16.53 ***			
Total	Biological parents	3.66	0.60	56.5	9.30	1.33	66.2	1.2
	Single parent	3.55 [b]	0.66	48.7	8.97 [b]	1.56	54.3	2.2
	Biological and stepparent	3.44 [b,s]	0.79	40.5	8.67 [b,s]	1.83	45.4	3.5
	H	75.48 ***			154.53 **			

[b]—significantly lower than living with two biological parents. [s]—significantly lower than living with a single parent. [k]—significantly lower than living with a biological parent and stepparent. ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

In all family types, children from Romania and Hungary tend to be most satisfied with the people they live with (Table 2). About 57–80% of Romanian and 55–73% of Hungarian children are totally satisfied with the people they live with. Children's satisfaction with the people they live with differs by family type—occurring both in country-pooled and country-specific analyses—confirming Hypothesis 2a. Hypothesis 2b is also confirmed—based on mean scores on country-pooled data, children living with both biological parents positively differ in their satisfaction with the people they live with from children living with a biological parent and stepparent or a single parent. Based on country-specific analyses, this applies to Finland, Norway and Estonia. In Hungary and Poland, children living with both biological parents positively differ only from children living with a biological parent and stepparent, and in Romania, from children living with a single parent.

Based on mean scores on country-pooled data, children living with a biological parent and a stepparent are significantly less satisfied with the people they live with than children living with both biological parents or a single parent (Table 2), confirming Hypothesis 2c. Based on country-specific analyses, this applies to Finland, Estonia, and Hungary. For example, in Finland 29% of children living with a biological parent and a stepparent are totally satisfied with the people they live with, while this figure is 59% and 43% for children living with both biological parents and for children living with a single parent, respectively. In Norway and Poland, children living with a biological parent and a stepparent are less satisfied than children living with both biological parents, but do not differ from children living with a single parent. In Poland, 19% of children living with a biological parent and a stepparent are not at all satisfied with the people they live with, while this figure is 2%

and 4% for children living with both biological parents and a single parent, respectively. In Romania, children living with a biological parent and a stepparent are significantly more satisfied with the people they live with than children living with a single parent.

3.2. Regression Analyses

Regression analyses based on country-pooled data showed that children's appraisals of their parents' parenting practices are related to their satisfaction with people they live with. Children who evaluate their parents' parenting practices at the maximum level, compared to those who do not, have 4.9 times higher odds of being totally satisfied with people they live with (Model 2 in Table 3). Among controls, children who never or sometimes worry about family money matters have 1.3 times higher odds of being totally satisfied with people they live with compared to those who worry often or always. However, child gender did not matter in their satisfaction with people they live with.

Table 3. Binary logistic regression models explaining those children "totally satisfied" with people they live with (ref: the rest).

		Model 1			Model 2		
		b	**OR**	**S.E**	**b**	**OR**	**S.E**
Family type	Single parent (vs. biol. parents)	−0.465 ***	0.628	0.087	−0.414 ***	0.661	0.097
	Biol. and stepparent (vs. biol. parents)	−0.807 ***	0.446	0.089	−0.665 ***	0.514	0.098
Controls	Girls (ref: boys)	−0.043	0.957	0.057	−0.074	0.928	0.063
	Never or sometimes worry about family money (ref: always, often)	0.530 ***	1.699	0.078	0.284 **	1.329	0.087
Appraisal of parenting practices	Maximum appraisal of parenting practices (ref: the rest)				1.593 ***	4.916	0.063
Intercept		0.241 **	1.273	0.081	−0.303 **	0.739	0.093
Chi-square		158.12 ***			827.65 ***		
Nagelkerke R^2		0.039			0.201		

** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Country-pooled regression analyses also confirmed that children's satisfaction with people they live with differ by family type (Hypothesis 2a), that children living with both biological parents positively differ in their satisfaction with the people they live with from children living in other family types (Hypothesis 2b), and that children living in a stepparent family are least satisfied with the people they live with (Hypothesis 2c), even if a child's gender and subjective perception about family money matters (the indirect SES measure of the child's family) are taken into account as controls (Model 1 in Table 3). Children living with a biological and stepparent had 2.2 (=1/0.446 in Model 1) times and children living with a single parent had 1.6 times lower odds than children living with biological parents of being totally satisfied with people they live with. After adding children's appraisals of their parents' parenting practices in the regression model (Model 2 in Table 3), the effects were slightly reduced in size, but differences between simple and complex family types remained highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Thus, based on country-pooled regression analyses, Hypothesis 3 is not confirmed.

Additionally, we ran country-specific analogous regression analyses (tables available upon request), which also are not confirming Hypothesis 3 in any of the countries. In Norway, Poland, and Estonia, a single and/or stepparent family children's lower appraisals of their parents' parenting practices explained entirely ($p > 0.05$) but in Finland, Hungary, and Romania did not explain at all ($p < 0.01$) their lower satisfaction with people they live with compared to children living with both biological parents.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of the paper was to study the perceptions of children who live with two biological parents, with a biological parent and a stepparent, or with a single parent about the parenting practices of their (step)parents and their satisfaction with the people they live with. Based on previous literature and our considerations we created three hypotheses and four subhypotheses to explore the reflections of family complexity in children's perceptions.

The study applied the responses of 12-year-old children of the third wave of the Children's Worlds survey in six countries: Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Norway, Poland, and Romania. In the following, we discuss the reflections of family complexity in children's family-related subjective well-being. We conclude by indicating the limitations of the study and the need for further research.

From the perspective of family change, we presume that most children are born to and live with two biological parents. In different circumstances that we will not review hereby, a remarkable change in a child's life occurs when one of the parents separates and the child will stay living with the other. Most often, this is a mother, now living as a single parent and raising the child. The child may receive negotiated and/or institutionally established visiting orders in relation to the other parent. The established visiting order guarantees that the child can save social and psychological connectedness with the nonresident parent; however, the child will be involved in two parallel family arrangements. The new situation fulfils both the parent's right and responsibility to continue taking care of the child on the one hand, and the child's right to be connected with both parents after their separation, on the other. The next meaningful change in the child's life emerges with the appearance of new parent figures when the single or separated parents find new partners. According to Thomson (2014), in most European countries about half of the children who have experienced parental separation would enter a stepfamily within six years of the parents' separation. The child's family should continue functioning as a network of several nuclei, which fulfils the requirement to safeguard the child's well-being with smart and shared parenting activities of biological and new parent figures. In the present paper we do not look at siblings with whom the responding child shares the household—either being biological, half-biological, or nonbiological. Instead, we proceed from the adults in the child's (primary) household and the child's perceptions about their parenting practices addressed to the child. We lack background statistics about how many children in Europe have 'two homes', e.g., children who commute between mother's and father's family units. In the ISCWeB data set we did not have enough cases for statistical analyses of children's perceptions about their two homes. This is why we focused on the first (primary) home as reported by the responding children. However, by discussing the findings we cannot avoid discussing the possible influences of the nonresident parents, neither their home arrangements. Regarding family change, different family types are of different complexity (Thomson 2014), thus we also asked whether living in one or the other family type would make a difference in perceived complexity for children. In our sample, children living in complex family types are more represented in Estonia, Finland, Hungary, and Norway, while less so in Poland and Romania.

4.1. Different Family Types Are of Different Complexity in Children's Lives

We hypothesized that children's appraisals of parenting practices (H1a) and family-related subjective well-being (H2a) differ by family type and are lower in complex family types. In accordance with previous studies focusing on family type differences in children's' appraisals of their parents' parenting practices (Dinisman et al. 2017), subjective well-being (Bjarnason et al. 2012; Dinisman et al. 2012; Dinisman et al. 2017; Lee and Yoo 2015), including family-related subjective well-being (Dinisman et al. 2017; Rees 2017) the hypotheses are confirmed by country-pooled analyses showing different average levels of children's appraisals of parenting practices and liking the people they live with. In the context of family change, we agree with Thomson (2014) that a traditional nuclear family of two parents and their child(ren) can be qualified as a simple type. We presume that biological bonds between children and parents help to keep children's subjective family definitions clear and not debated. As shown above, a family with children and their parents is also the most common family type in the sample countries in Europe. However, many children in Europe go through family transitions that bring a mixture of biological, half-biological, and nonbiological bonds with the family members. Family transitions cause reconstructions of the family unit, changes in relationship patterns, parenting practices,

etc., causing distress to all parties involved. Distress is a reflection of the complexity of relationships—with more struggles and misunderstandings—that according to Newland (2014) and many other authors, lowers the child's well-being. The family transition erodes previous the child's clear-cut family definition, puts parenting practices to the test, and endangers the child's well-being as the family unit grows in complexity. Hereby we agree with Thomson's (2014) launching point and claim that single-parent families and stepfamilies are perceived as complex also by children. Based on mean scores on country-pooled data in the present study, a 'cascade of children's appraisals' by the family types became evident. It appeared that overall, living with two biological parents seems to be the least complex family environment for children, reflected in the highest evaluations of parenting practices and family-related subjective well-being. This finding confirms that a simple family type in theory is also the simplest in children's perspectives as it positively differs from the appraisals of children who live either with a single parent or with a biological parent and a stepparent. However, Hungary seems to be a major exception here—no family type differences occurred in children's appraisals of parenting practices and only Hungarian children living in a biological parent and stepparent family negatively differed in their family-related subjective well-being compared to children living in other family types. Living with a single parent takes a middle position in the children's 'cascade of appraisals', meaning that on average, living with a single parent is perceived as less positive compared to living with both biological parents and more positive compared to living with a stepparent. From this evidence we conclude that the child's family definition can stay relatively unchanged after the parents' separation, in which case the child can continue contact with both parents, and also separated parents are able to develop friendly co-parenting practices that are negotiated with the child and follow the principle of the 'best interest of the child'. However, it seems that with family transitions the situation has become more complicated for children and pose a challenge to them to cope with, which is reflected in children's lower assessment levels. The children's 'cascade of appraisals' reaches the lowest level when children share their primary home with a stepparent. The whole 'cascade' works out well with some exceptions. Norwegian and Romanian children from stepfamilies were slightly more positive about parenting practices compared to children from single parents. However, the differences were not statistically significant. Yet Romanian children living with a stepparent were significantly more positive towards the people they live with than children living with a single parent. This finding should be further checked.

4.2. Safeguarding Children's Family-Related Subjective Well-Being Is a High Challenge for Single and Re-Partnered Parents

We controlled the children's 'cascade of appraisals' with country-specific analyses. We hypothesized that children living in a stepparent family (the most complex family type) evaluate their parents' parenting practices the lowest (H1c) and are least satisfied with the people with whom they share the primary home (H2c). Our findings partly confirmed these hypotheses. In Finland, children living in a stepparent family evaluated their parents' parenting practices and satisfaction with the people they are living with the lowest compared to children living in other family types, while in Hungary they negatively differed only in their satisfaction with the people with whom they share the home. In Estonia, Norway, Poland, and Romania, children living in stepparent families did not differ in their appraisals of parenting practices from children living with a single parent. In Norway and Poland, children living with a stepparent also did not differ in their family-related subjective well-being from children living with a single parent. These findings refer to the hardships that parents may face when reforming the family unit after its structural change and adapting the parenting practices to the new situation and children's needs. In both cases, either being a single parent or raising the child with a new partner, this is a challenge. However, there is further evidence that is hard to explain. Namely, in Romania, children living with a biological parent and a stepparent are significantly more satisfied

with the people they live with than children living with a single parent, and do not differ from children living with biological parents. Interestingly, Rees (2017) did not find any family type differences in Romanian children's family-related subjective well-being.

Our finding that in all countries, children living in a single or stepparent family (except Hungarian and Polish single-parent children, and Romanian stepparent children) give on average more negative evaluations than children living with only biological parents indicates that the change in family relationships and everyday life due to the family breakdown affects children's family-related subjective well-being. For example, children of separated biological parents cannot see and spend time with their parents as a cohesive family unit, as they used to before the parents' separation (Kalmijn 2013) and they keep their inclusive family map as an ideal (Kutsar and Raid 2019), dreaming about its restoration, because disconnection from the close person creates stress and anxiety in a child (e.g., Bowlby 1982; Robson 2010, and others). In cases of separations characterized by conflicts, children often have inner conflicts with loyalty to their biological parents (Jensen et al. 2017) and they can even blame themselves for the family breakdown. The latter happens especially in situations where the separating parents build a wall of silence between them and the child and are not informing and explaining the situation to the child, neither negotiating the further communication nor the living arrangements (e.g., Hawthorne et al. 2003). Children have the right to be informed, and their opinions should be listened to and taken into consideration even in the situations that seem to concern only adults. Butler et al. (2003) have found that if children's right to participation is realized prior to the separation or divorce of parents, and children perceive that they are consulted, they can adapt to the new situation more easily. Our findings also showed that children with separated parents give lower appraisals about parenting practices in their primary home. Therefore, parenting practices reflect parent–child relationships that shape the child's feeling of safety and protectedness—or, conversely, frightened, lonely, or even forgotten/neglected. In sum, parenting behaviour as perceived by a child plays a critical role in understanding children's family-related subjective well-being in relation to adult-initiated family change.

Parental separation puts shared parenting skills to test. Shared parenting is on the rise in many European countries (Smyth 2017; Steinbach 2019) as a social practice and a policy issue. It is the main challenge for parents to safeguard their children's family-related well-being on the one hand and the policy aim of promoting active and shared parenting from the other. Internationally the issue of shared parenting (co-parenting) is broadly discussed in Europe, and beyond (e.g., USA and Australia). The international debate has matured during the recent years. All EU countries recognize that children have the right to a personal relationship and direct contact with both parents, even if the parents live in different countries. The European e-Justice Portal (Your Europe 2021) states that the specific regulations of shared parenting may differ from country to country, which makes the picture diverse. This we will not review herewith. However, findings so far suggest that the promotion of shared parenting as the best post-separation family structure is contestable, and the benefits and risks are heavily debated by practitioners and academics (Steinbach 2019). Child well-being is most challenged in the case of children living in stepfamilies. Jensen et al. (2017) have studied parent–child relationships in stepfamilies as a triad of relationships of the child with the residential biological and nonbiological parent and the nonresident biological parent. The finding demonstrated the central importance of the relationship between the child and the stepparent by relieving the child's stress in the main home using 'malleable mediators' (Fraser and Galinsky 2010) in the child's life; however, there was no linkage to the relationships with the other parents. Consequently, the parenting practices of residential and nonresidential parents and parent figures form a complex phenomenon in a child's life, shaping the child's family-related well-being in very different ways not only across countries but also across families. The latter may explain our confusion when trying to give explanations to children's appraisals from country to country and even by exploring children's assessments in the frames of the same country (e.g., why Romanian children living in stepparent families are significantly more satisfied

with the people they live with than children living with a single parent but do not differ from children living with biological parents).

4.3. Why Clear-Cut Conclusions Cannot Be Made? Multiple Faces of Children's Appraisals and High Family Contextual Diversity

We hypothesized that simple and complex family type differences in children's family-related subjective well-being are partially but not entirely explained by parenting practices (H3). The findings from our country-pooled and -specific regression analyses did not confirm this hypothesis. For example, in Norway, Poland, and Estonia, single-parent and/or stepparent family children's lower appraisals of their parents' parenting practices explained entirely—but in Finland, Hungary, and Romania did not explain at all—their lower family-related subjective well-being compared to children living with both biological parents. This goes against the findings of several authors (e.g., Astone and McLanahan 1991; Hogan and Kitagawa 1985; Matsueda and Heimer 1987; Morgan et al. 1979; Peterson and Zill 1986), who have shown that the effects of family structure on children are attenuated but not entirely accounted for by parenting. However, our findings are to some extent in line with Rees (2017), who found that in some European countries the time spent with family entirely helped to explain the family type differences in family-related subjective well-being, while in other countries it did not. We agree with the authors in that family transitions can cause adaptational problems in children (e.g., Dunn and Deater-Deckard 2001); still, some transitions may thus uncover positive outcomes: there cannot be a clear-cut picture of the simple and complex family types in children's perspectives that could coincide with adults' (formal) categorizations.

Researchers have shown that instability in family structure is associated with lower-quality parenting (Beck et al. 2010). Proceeding from this, we agree with Dinisman et al. (2012) that stability appears to be an important factor in the subjective well-being of children, and children living with a single parent have less-stable lives, while children living with both biological parents can enjoy more stability. Still, this is not the case for all children who live with both biological parents because not all parents are able to practice good parenting skills and provide good and stable lives for their children. Children living with stepparents provide less-stable lives, as revealed in children's appraisals about the parenting practices in the present study; however, not all children living with stepparents are unhappy.

Despite changes in the family arrangement, in many countries there is still a cultural and social preference of families with two biological parents; thus, children who live with a single or a stepparent may feel differently. In our sample 77% of the respondents live with two biological parents—this being the mainstream family type. Nevertheless, living with a single parent may be a transitional period, and the family unit can restore its mainstream structure of two adults raising children in the same household. However, for a child this is an important change, as the other parent is a 'newcomer', a parent figure, but not the one whom the child knows from birth. Studies have shown that after the parents' separation, children are inclusive by keeping family members whom they know well together in their mental map; while adults are more often exclusive and busy with re-construction of their family units, drawing new clear borders (Castrén and Widmer 2015). However, we are of the opinion that children can be inclusively flexible and adapt to new parent-figures in their home if there is a positive, caring, and safe atmosphere where they feel part of the family. With reference to Newland (2015), when there are struggles in the family, but parents are skilfully positive and provide supportive interactions with their child, then child well-being does not suffer. The latter implies that positive parenting practices can increase child's well-being in any family type. In our study, although children's family-related well-being (measured by 'satisfaction with people they live with') was the lowest in children who share the same household with a stepparent, still over a third of these children in Estonia and Poland and over a half in Norway and Hungary were totally satisfied with the people they live with. In Romania almost three fourths of children gave the maximum estimate. However, in Finland, the very positive children did not reach even a third.

Regarding parenting practices, children were more critical when assessing people with whom they share the (primary) home: those giving maximum estimates to all three aspects of the parenting practices stayed at around a third across countries (excluding Norway and Hungary where it stayed slightly higher, around a half). It seems that Norwegian and Hungarian parents have been more successful in developing parenting practices that support children's well-being than parents in Estonia and Finland, where complex families are rather widespread, and in Poland and Romania where complex family types are least widespread. Still, these proportions refer to the sample children's self-reports and are not representative of the household structures. From a sociological point of view, we are in line with Rees (2017)—it is possible that the transition from one family type to the other, rather than the structure itself, explains the lower family-related subjective well-being.

However, a certain number of children in each sample country in our study were satisfied with their (step)parents no matter which family type they live in. We connected the latter finding with the flexibility of children in adapting to new life situations, and the parenting skills of stepparents as key-persons by finding ways to be trusted and becoming an important person for the child. To paraphrase Bowlby (1982), a child needs at least one close relationship but it is better if there are more.

In our study, we considered that the subjective family definition of a child can go beyond the household borders and be different from other people's perceptions in the same household (Castrén and Widmer 2015). We followed children's cognitive appraisals about people they live with that may not coincide with the people the child feels are/are not his or her family. Besides family transitional moments, subjective family definitions can also play a role in family complexity in children's lives: living with one's own parents is the most stable living environment, with clear family borders and no transitions; each further transition will collect complexity and thus will decrease the child's well-being. From socio-ecological approach by Bronfenbrenner and the followers (e.g., Bronfenbrenner 1979) a child is influenced and influences different layers of social action. This leads us to conclude that our explorations of the findings clearly demonstrated the sharp limitations of the interpretations if we had kept the child's (primary) household focus only.

To conclude this paper, one could ask, what is our contribution to research, policy and practice? Understanding children's perspectives is a new field in academic research. To our knowledge, previous studies exploring the links between family type, parenting practices, and child well-being have been predominantly based on United States samples and not focused specifically on children's family-related subjective well-being. We are aware of one study, (Dinisman et al. 2017), based also on European countries data—examining children's family-related subjective well-being and appraisals of their parents' parenting practices by their family type. Partially, we replicate the study by Dinisman et al. (2017) using more recent data. However, we go further and control whether children's appraisals of parenting practices play a role in family type differences in their family-related subjective well-being. Our analysis indicated the need for raising awareness in children's rights and improving parenting skills, especially in times of family transitions. Children need to be informed, their opinions to be listened to; they need to be cared for and protected even during hard times overwhelmed with stress. Children need to stay connected with their nonresident parents and to feel secure and close with their stepparents. Parents—irrespective of whether they live together with their child or not, or have established visiting orders or not—should acknowledge and respect the child's subjective family borders and accept the child's needs. We became aware from our analysis that children are able to be flexible and adapt to changing family arrangements, e.g., to like the people they live with whether they are biological parents or not.

4.4. Limitations

We see several limitations in this study. First, there is a limitation of the ISCWeB project in general because it does not include children's responses from special educational establishments (e.g., 3% in Estonia and 6% in Poland). Second, the outreach to children

planned by the sampling frame was restricted by school and parental refusals; also because children could refuse participation at any moment of the study. Third, the children not attending school on the day of the interviewing are not represented. However, the country teams made efforts to receive 1000 responses from each age group and keep the representativeness of the sample. Concerning our methodological approach in this paper, we admit that this is one example of how family-related children's subjective well-being in different family types can be studied. We asked about children liking the people they live with and related it to the children's family-related subjective well-being. Liking people in the household is a general assessment that may capture not only (step)parents but also siblings; the latter is out of our focus. Still, as parenting practices play a central role in children's home atmospheres, we suppose that they also have major influence by giving appraisals about liking people in the family. Our approach is limited with the analytical approach to data. For example, we had to exclude the second homes of the children because of too-small subgroups. Moreover, we followed a traditional household-centred definition of the family type as the site of a child's main/primary living place and gave attention to the relationships and interactions with child's subjective family members outside the home only in the discussion of the findings. Our approach is also limited with the range of the variables in the dataset (e.g., we had no data on parental marital status or length of time in the current family type). However, we still had some potential, as said above, to broaden our approach and discuss the families beyond the household borders. For giving more consistent explanations, we admit that the childrens' families exceed the household borders at least in the case of living in complex family types and how much children feel cared for, safe, and able to participate increases their perception that they really 'matter' in their family. There are other several factors that are not measured in this paper but that seem important for explaining the received findings. For example, more direct socio-economic assessment of the child's household would matter, especially in cases of explaining the lower family-related subjective well-being of children who live with single parents. Last but not least, as we use cross-sectional data, determination of the causal relationships is not possible. We have a snapshot of children's appraisals that combines their perceptions of former experiences and the life situation in the moment of the study.

4.5. Further Research

In our study, the responding child represented his or her family type as the family living in the self-reported (primary) home. In this paper, we did not analyse children's assessments about their 'second' home where there was one. What "home" means to a child after their parents' separation, how they create its meaning in the case of following visiting orders (e.g., Natalier and Fehlberg 2015), and how much they feel a part of decision-making processes during the family transitions, need further studies. Moreover, not all children living in the same (primary) home can perceive the parenting practices in the same way and carry similar outcomes of family transitions. Every child has personal relationships with each of the child's subjectively defined or excluded household members and this is why asking children about their experiences is most valid, not only for academic purposes but also for educating parents, raising awareness in children's rights, and last but not least, for improvement of children's lives with policy measures.

We recommend further research to go beyond the household borders, asking children about the family as a network and learning about the interactions with the child's family-related subjective well-being. Most importantly, the family network analyses should follow subjective family definitions of children and significant adults around them. Qualitative studies could provide more explanations also to the evidence presented in this paper.

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Note

[1] Prior evidence have shown that children raised with half or stepsiblings often experience worse outcomes, such as school achievement (e.g., Gennetian 2005; Ginther and Pollak 2004; Tillman 2008), depressive symptoms and delinquency (Halpern-Meekin and Tach 2008) than those raised with only full siblings.

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