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### **How are the Children? Children's subjective Well-being in Different Family Types**

There is broad literature on the outcomes of children living in stepfamilies (e.g. Dunn 2004; Ganong & Coleman 1984). Research on (step)children primarily focuses on academic achievement, psychological adjustment, internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems, and well-being. Although research concerning child outcomes in stepfamilies is ambiguous, some scholars observed differences for stepfamilies regarding emotional and behavioral outcomes compared to children living in nuclear families (e.g. Apel & Kaukinen 2008; McMunn et al. 2001; O'Connor et al. 2001) other studies found no or minor differences (e.g. Steward 2008; Coleman, Ganong, and Fine 2000). However, there is great variety of defining stepfamilies in these studies. Some define stepfamilies in more detail, others sort out stepchildren who are adopted and very little point out the importance of distinguishing between stepfamilies and blended families, where a common child expands a stepfamily. This special group within stepfamilies is of major interest because common children living in a blended stepfamily are often labeled as a "bonding factor" (Juby et al. 2001) for the stepfamily. Moreover we are not only interested in these common children living in blended families but also in the stepchildren living in this family formation. Thus, most studies about children in stepfamilies relay on parental reports. Therefore our aim is to examine children's well-being in different family types, namely children living with two biological parents, children living in lone-parent families, stepchildren, and children of two biological parents where one parent (or both) have children from a prior union; this is the so called blended family. In blended families we are therefore able to compare two kinds of children: stepchildren and common children. Moreover children's well-being is examined from a children's point of view.

We expect that common children living in blended families have similar outcomes with regard to children's well-being as children living in nuclear families because these children live together with both biological parents and have not experienced the dissolution of their parents.

For testing our hypothesis we are using the Survey „Growing up in Germany“ 2009 (AID:A; Rauschenbach & Bien 2012), which is a representative telephone survey with a sample of 25,339 respondents, aged from zero to 55 years. The main aim of the AID:A-Survey is to get more information about children's, teenager's and adult's life circumstances, their stresses and strains, their family structure as well as their socio-economic situation. Moreover it is possible to represent children living in different family types (stepfamily, blended family, lone-parent and nuclear family) as well as indicators for children's well-being. At the age of nine, target children themselves were asked about relevant topics on their own life (e. g. school, behavioral adjustment, family climate). For this reason the AID:A-Survey offers a great option to examine the children's point of view.

For our analysis we use a subsample of nine to twelve year old target boys and girls (N=2.173), who answer the children's questionnaire. These children are part of a variety of family constellations. Most of them live in nuclear families, together with both of their biological parents (81.0 %), 11.8 % live with a single mother, almost all of the 3.0 % live in a stepfather stepfamily, 2.7 % live as a common child in a blended family and 1.3 % live as a stepchild in a blended family. As an indicator for children's well-being we use the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997). This 25-item behavioral screening questionnaire covers five subscales: emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, peer problems, prosocial behavior and conduct problems. Another possibility of creating subscales with this measurement is to build indicators for externalizing and internalizing problems as well as prosocial behavior (Goodman et al. 2010). The AID:A-Survey is such a data set, for this reason we want to implement these three subscales, externalizing and internalizing problems as well as prosocial behavior to examine child adjustment in five different family types, namely children in nuclear families, children in lone-parent-families, stepchildren, stepchildren in blended families and common children in blended families.

To answer our research questions we use Multivariate Covariance Analysis (MANCOVA) to compare different family types with regard to child adjustment. The analysis show significant group differences in the subdimensions externalizing and internalizing problems. Even controlling for age and the number of children living in the household, results remain robust. Child adjustment for children in blended families is lower as expected: common children report the most internalizing problems and stepchildren in blended families rank lowest in externalizing problems compared to all other children, especially to children in nuclear families. These first results suggest that the children often labeled as a “bonding” factor for blended families seem to reflect only the parental point of view. For the children it seems more to be a burden. This findings

show the importance to draw attention not only on the parental point of view but to take into account studies where the children's point of view is in the focus. More research has to be done to disentangle this contradicting results. Moreover the results highlight the importance taking into account different family types within stepfamilies, because blended families are often neglected in research. Nevertheless further systemic dimensions will be investigated, especially the role of the relationship between the child and the resident mother.

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