

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: THE TIES THAT BIND

A Sociological and Demographic Research Programme 2000-2006

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1 The social and scientific relevance of the research programme

1.1. Preamble

Family relationships are an important part of the glue that holds society together and they have traditionally been regarded as one of the key determinants of social cohesion. But important social developments — such as the increasingly ‘fragile’ nature of relationships, dwindling family size, social and spatial mobility, and individualisation — have had a major impact on the position of the family within society. Family issues are the subject of frequent and ongoing debate, particularly in the political arena. Social scientists have come up with little in the way of explanations as to how family relationships are changing and to what extent, and little is understood about the causes and potential implications of changing family patterns.

The aims of the research programme set out in this proposal are twofold: to promote the systematic, scientific study of changing family relationships and to provide answers to key social issues.

A major theme of the proposed programme will be the issue of whether family bonds have eroded and if so, to what extent, what factors have brought this about and what the potential implications of this might be. There is no simple answer to any of these questions. It may well be that there has been no erosion of the bonds between family members but that there has merely been a shift in terms of the way family members express and experience their mutual solidarity. Any decline in the strength of family bonds that has occurred may have been caused by the multitude of socio-structural and cultural factors that can have an impact on the strength of family bonds and how family relationships are manifested. As for the implications, the erosion of family bonds may have an adverse effect on those involved in the relationship and on society as a whole, but it may also have beneficial effects.

This chapter will examine the social and scientific relevance of the proposed research programme.

1.2. Social relevance

Since time immemorial, the family has been an important unifying force in society: it is an important component of *social cohesion* (Van den Brink, 1997; De Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 1995; Kooy, 1975; Ultee, Arts & Flap, 1992). It also plays an important part in terms of the distribution of goods and resources. Goods and resources are transferred to and distributed amongst the nuclear and extended family (Van Berkel, 1997; Bernasco, 1994; Ganzeboom, Treiman & Ultee, 1991; De Graaf & Ultee, 1991; De Regt, 1993). The way this is done can also have an impact on *social inequality*.

The importance of the family has come under renewed scrutiny in recent years, a move prompted in part by the acknowledgement that the embedment in mutually satisfying family relationships can help promote social cohesion and prevent social exclusion (Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs, 1996). The family is, after all, the most important institution in which future generations are raised, in which norms and values are transferred, where the foundations of the future generations’ position within society are laid and where informal support and care are exchanged. The nuclear family is also the context in which people share a home that is not simply the private domain of the cohabiting family members, but also the base from which they participate in society.

Family relationships are also bound up with social inequality. Resources are initially divided up amongst households but they are also subsequently divided up amongst individuals within households and nuclear families. The impact that family relationships can have on inequality is evident in various areas, such as the connection between living arrangements and poverty — divorced women on welfare (Kuijsten, 1992; Poortman & Kalmijn, 1999), single elderly women (De Jong Gierveld, 1997) — issues concerning dual-income households and educational homogamy — unequal cumulation within households — and the issue of nuclear family members being breadwinners versus being economically dependent. Resources are passed down from one generation to the next, in the form of gifts or inheritances for example, or in the form of financial support, such as parents helping children to buy a home of their own. There are also non-material transfers, such as the transfer of educational

and professional opportunities, cultural and social capital, and norms and values (Brinkgreve & Van Stolk, 1997). The scale of intergenerational transfers is partly dependent on the nature of the family relationships. Parents who are divorced or whose children are living with a stepfamily may, for example, transfer less economic, cultural and social capital to their children than parents who are (still) living together (Bosman & Louwes, 1988; Dronkers, 1997).

The importance of nuclear and extended family relationships is often underlined in the public debate on social cohesion and inequality (Jonker, 1990) but the family is not what it used to be. People's private lives have changed dramatically over the past few decades (Te Kloeze, De Hoog, Van Bergen & Duivenvoorden, 1996; Langeveld, 1985; Niehof, 1994) in terms of the way relationships are *formed and dissolved* and how they are *structured*. These changes have been brought about by two major cultural developments — individualisation (Weeda, 1985) and secularisation (Van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe & Van de Kaa, 1986; Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 1988) — and a number of structural developments, such as the creation and subsequent modernisation of the welfare state, the expansion of education, and changes in the labour market (Knijn, 1994; Kuijsten & Schulze, 1997; Zwaan, 1993). The changes which the family has undergone over the past few decades have had a major impact on social cohesion and inequality within Dutch society.

Partner relationships have undergone a clear change over the past few decades. Increased female labour force participation has meant that more and more women cohabiting with a partner have jobs. This has put pressure on the traditional gender-specific division of labour (Van der Lippe, 1993). It also means that cohabiting couples are less free to choose where they live. Some partners even live elsewhere during the week in order to be nearer their place of work. There is also evidence to suggest that interaction between partners is becoming more a matter of negotiation than it used to be (Van der Avort, 1987; De Swaan, 1983). Things that were formerly taken for granted are now a matter of personal choice, such as the decision to postpone parenthood or forego having children altogether (Beets, Bouwens & Schippers, 1997; Bosveld, 1996; Corijn, Liefbroer & De Jong Gierveld, 1996; Kalmijn, 1996; Mulder & Manting, 1994; Vermunt, 1991). Another example is the decline in the importance of the social origin of prospective partners (Uunk, 1996; Kalmijn, 1998). But the nature of partner relationships is not the only thing that has changed. People have also become much more 'hesitant' about entering *into* relationships. This is borne out by the growing popularity of extramarital cohabitation and the fact that people are waiting until they are older before cohabiting with a partner (Liefbroer, 1991; Latten, 1993; Manting, 1994; Kalmijn, 1994). The risk of partner relationships ending in failure has also increased and it has become more common for people to have a succession of partner relationships (Klijzing, 1992; Kuijsten & Klijzing, 1990; Manting, 1994; Janssen et al., 1998). In short, partner relationships are formed later and dissolved sooner by divorce, although dissolution due to a partner dying generally occurs later because of the sharp rise in life expectancy. Many of the changes outlined above can be interpreted as examples of the shifting significance attached to partner relationships (Straver, 1993). There has been a growing tendency to place ever more emphasis on the emotional side of relationships with the result that greater demands are now being placed on this aspect of relationships. If a relationship does not fulfil expectations in this area, its foundations crumble (Van der Avort, 1987; Van den Brink, 1997; Wouters, 1990).

Parent-child relationships within the household are now characterised by a greater degree of equality and respect for each other's autonomy than they were in the past (Rispen, Hermanns & Meeus, 1996). The interaction between parents and children is more intimate, there is a greater recognition of the psychological needs of children and a greater willingness on the part of parents to satisfy them (Kronjee, 1991; De Regt, 1995). But there has also been a decline in terms of the time that parents and (young) children spend together — partly as a result of the fact that many married women continue to work — which sometimes leads to a conflict between what parents want and what they are able to do (Hooghiemstra & Niphuis-Nell, 1993; Van der Lippe, 1997). The father's role within the household is also changing (Boer et al., 1998; Van Dongen, Frinking & Jacobs, 1995; Jacobs, 1998; Kalmijn 1999). Parent-child relationships have become less hierarchical and authoritarian; a shift has occurred from households based on 'authority' to ones based on 'negotiation' (Du Bois-Reymond, 1997; De Swaan, 1979). Parent-child relationships are becoming increasingly characterised by freedom of choice and are therefore acquiring their own unique content (Dykstra, 1992). The past few years have

seen a slight increase in the length of time that children stay living at home with their parents after decades during which there was a tendency for children to leave home at ever younger ages, (Iedema, Becker & Sanders, 1997; De Jong Gierveld, Liefbroer & Beekink, 1991; Mulder, 1993; Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1995). Although the lowering of the age of consent has meant that children now become legally independent of their parents at a younger age, the trends of recent decades seem to have resulted in them postponing the achievement of their financial and residential independence. Uncertainties about the future mean that more and more of today's young people are keeping their options open (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998).

Relationships with family members who live outside the household (parents, children, brothers/sisters, grandparents, grandchildren) are also changing. It is becoming increasingly common for parents not to live with their dependent children (Niphuis-Nell, 1997). Complicated domestic arrangements are already cropping up here and there as a result of the growing incidence of divorce. Providing practical support to frail elderly parents is becoming increasingly difficult due to increased geographical distances between parents and children and the labour force participation of sons and daughters (Dooghe, 1992; Van Tilburg & Dykstra, 1995). The issue of providing support is also under pressure due to the fact that children no longer automatically regard this as their responsibility. Nor do parents themselves always want their children to shoulder the burden of providing instrumental support because doing so is at odds with the freedom of choice and emphasis on emotional reciprocity which is coming increasingly to characterise the parent-child relationship (Dykstra, 1990; Knipscheer, 1990). This increased freedom of choice also means that family relationships now have to compete for time and attention with other relationships, such as those with friends, neighbours, colleagues and acquaintances. The 'breadth' of family networks (i.e. the number of brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces, uncles and aunts) has diminished as a result of dwindling family size, but because of increased life expectancy, family networks now consist of more generations and there is evidence of 'verticalisation' in families (Dykstra & Knipscheer, 1995; Post et al., 1997).

So how does the general public view these developments (Van den Akker, Cuyvers & De Hoog, 1992; Van den Brink, 1997; Grotenhuis & Van der Zwaard, 1997; De Hoog, 1996)? One school of thought is strongly in favour of individualisation. After all, not only did it pave the way for women's liberation but it also provided people in general with a greater degree of autonomy and as such should generally be regarded as a positive development. This optimistic attitude was particularly prevalent in public debate in the Seventies and Eighties. This was an era which was characterised by a generally critical attitude towards the past and individualisation was regarded as a way of breaking free from oppressive traditional bonds and institutions.

A second school of thought places particular emphasis on the drawbacks of the process of individualisation. The fact that traditional sources of social cohesion such as the Church and the local community have become less important has created a vacuum which family relationships can help to fill. In an individualistic society characterised by a high degree of spatial and social mobility, family relationships are among the few relationships capable of being sustained across spatial and social divides. The nuclear family should therefore form the bedrock of social cohesion and its ability to fulfil this function was much debated. This point of view has become more prevalent in the public debate in recent years (Van den Brink, 1997) and is also being articulated in government papers. In its *Gezinsrapport* (Government Paper on the Family) (Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs, 1996), for example, the Dutch Cabinet concluded that it was important to "establish what needs to be done, in a changing society, to safeguard the irreplaceable social function the nuclear family performs (p. 23)".

Public attitudes towards the family have mirrored the shift in the debate in the public arena. The Seventies and Eighties saw a decline in the perceived importance of the family, but in recent years there has been a renewed appreciation of the importance of the family and the virtue of having an effective national family policy (Van den Akker, 1994; Liefbroer, 1998; Social & Cultural Planning Agency, 1996). The following illustration is a case in point: between 1965 and 1991, the number of people who agreed with the statement "if a marriage is on the rocks, it is better for couples to divorce, even if they have children" rose from 12 to 54 percent, but in 1995 the figure fell to 45 percent (Social & Cultural Planning Agency, 1996, p. 500).

But regardless of which side of the debate one is on, the fact remains that family relationships have undergone a dramatic transformation. The potential consequences of these changes are much less obvious. Whether or not these changes are actually indicative of a decline in solidarity within family relationships has yet to be ascertained, and even if family bonds *have* eroded, there is still no certainty about the impact this could have on the way people function within society. The implications for social cohesion and inequality are therefore equally unclear. Nor is very much known about the factors which cause changes to modern family life. In order to reliably assess the potential impact family relationships have on social cohesion, it is essential to gain insight into the underlying processes which shape these types of relationships. After all, understanding these processes is essential in framing policies to safeguard the solidarity that the family helps to provide. The research programme set out in this proposal will include a systematic and extensive study of modern family relationships in their broadest sense.

1.3. Scientific relevance

Research into nuclear and extended family relationships was unfashionable for many years. Making an issue of family relationships was seen as an implicit defence of the traditional nuclear family. During the Seventies and Eighties public opinion was focused on the increasing diversity of living arrangements and was preoccupied with emphasising the equal merit of alternative individual choices. This sort of climate was not very conducive to an analysis of the social determinants and implications of family relationship patterns and social scientists began to use less contentious but also more ambiguous terms such as ‘primary groups’ and ‘living arrangements’.

But the nuclear family is back in the limelight again in the scientific community and people are beginning to realise how limited our knowledge of this subject is. At the end of 1996, for example, the Social Science Council (SWR) published a report about sociological research into nuclear and extended family relationships in the Netherlands entitled *New Perspectives for Family Sociology*. The report explained the social importance of research into family relationships and put forward a wide range of areas that such research could focus on. The report highlighted the fact that universities had shown little interest in undertaking sociological studies into family relationships over the past few decades, and that those centres of expertise that had not actually been closed down had been down-scaled or become fragmented. (Social Science Council, 1996). As a result, interest in sociological research into the family has declined and politicians and society at large no longer know where to turn for information. This is a regrettable situation, given the social relevance of family sociology. In the view of the Social Science Council, a research programme should be initiated which could provide new impetus for sociological research into the nuclear and extended family and which could also help put this type of research back onto the Dutch scientific agenda.

The sort of initiative the SWR has in mind in this regard is research that would provide a new sociological perspective on changing relationships within the nuclear family. The SWR noted that a large-scale research project into the nuclear family had recently been undertaken which concentrated on the educational aspect of child rearing (Rispen, Hermanns & Meeus, 1996), but that a sociological study on the theme of ‘child rearing in the Netherlands’ would have placed emphasis on different issues:

“A sociological study might, for example, focus on socio-cultural differences in child rearing practices and the impact this has on the way the individual members of the nuclear family function within society. This sort of study could explore the idea that the process of modernisation has led to a much greater diversity in living arrangements than in the past, and that as a result parents and children are exposed to a much wider range of child rearing situations. Very little data on the potential implications of this increase in diversity have been collected and a study of this kind would therefore have to address such issues as: [a] how do different family structures — e.g. single-parent families, families where both partners work — affect child rearing behaviour and outcomes, [b] what relative influence do each of the partners have on the child rearing process, [c] how have social developments affected the way parents raise their children and [d] what impact do changes in the way the family

functions have for the social integration of parents and children? In other words, the distinctive feature of sociological research into the family is its in-depth examination of the potential impact of social developments on the way the family functions, and the potential social consequences of changes in people's living arrangements. (SWR, 1996, pp. 15-16)."

The SWR report identified three areas which should be the subject of future research: (1) Family formation and dissolution: trends, causes and implications; (2) Horizontal and vertical bonds in primary relationships: shifting patterns of dependency and their potential implications; and (3) Developments in terms of the interaction between the family and society. These areas offer more than sufficient starting-points for scientifically and socially relevant research.

Another important scientific body which has called for research into the family is the *Advisory Committee on Scientific and Technological Development* (1996a, b) set up by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Its 1996 report underlined the importance of research into social cohesion and inequality and specifically highlighted the importance of family relationships:

"What is needed are data that give the social context within which individuals have bonds or where there is potential for them to develop bonds. Much of the survey-research carried out to date is one-sided because it views individuals in isolation and shies away (on the grounds of practicality) from an integrated appraisal of social contexts and networks. Even information about the (nuclear family) household, which takes account of all members of the family and which would enable their interrelationships to be studied, is in extremely short supply — despite the fact that this is the one social context about which information could be collected with relative ease. The compilation of multi-actor data on social groups, i.e. by collecting data about multiple actors in a single context, is an area where there is still a considerable paucity of information (OCV, 1996b, pp.29-30)."

Scientists outside academia have also been critical of the current situation with regard to research into the family and are calling for more research to be done. The Social & Cultural Planning Agency, for example, has published a *Gezinsrapport* (Report on the Family) commissioned by the Dutch Cabinet which stated that:

"The wording of these conclusions is deliberately circumspect in view of the exploratory nature of this study. The results of the child rearing study should be viewed for the time being with a degree of scepticism and perhaps even distrust. (...)There is a need for family research which is approached creatively and on not too small a scale. There is still too little data available on this subject in the Netherlands. (Social & Cultural Planning Agency, 1997, p. 254)."

To date the response to the problems outlined above has been minimal. The most important initiative undertaken so far has been a report on the social position of the nuclear family and other living arrangements which the Dutch government has commissioned the Netherlands Family Council (NGR) to publish on a periodic basis. In order to improve the quality and range of data available for this report, the age range and range of questions of the Fertility Survey (Statistics Netherlands) have been extended, interviews with partners are being conducted, and small-scale in-depth studies are being prepared. Although such initiatives are a step in the right direction, they cannot fill the existing gap in our knowledge about the family.

The aim of the research programme set out in this proposal is to provide a new impetus for sociological research into the family in the Netherlands and in so doing to help fill the gap in sociological research into the family which has been highlighted by various bodies. The scope and subject matter of the proposed research programme are in keeping with the issues which the Social Science Council (1996) identified in its report on family sociology as key starting-points for scientifically and socially relevant research.

2 The key components of the research programme

Chapter 1 has argued that while the social importance of developments in the field of the family has increased in recent years, interest among scholars has not kept pace. The research programme proposed here will provide a significant new impetus to research in the field of the sociology of the family. Although the programme will be oriented primarily towards the development of the sociology of the family, this does not mean that other disciplinary perspectives will be excluded. On the contrary, the broad scope of the questions to be researched, including individual (experiential, attitudinal, behavioural) as well as social (cultural and structural) factors, clearly allows an interdisciplinary approach. The main problem and the principal research questions are, in fact, based on theoretical and empirical insights deriving from sociology, demography, social psychology, pedagogy, and cultural anthropology. The present chapter outlines the key components of such a programme. It begins by considering two of its central components, namely the emphasis on the nature and degree of solidarity within family relationships and the focus on relationships within the family in a broad sense, instead of just relationships within the nuclear family. The programme's three key research questions are then formulated and briefly discussed. Changes in the nature and degree of solidarity are occurring against the background of radical social transformations of both a cultural and a socio-structural nature. Section 2.4 considers the most significant of these changes in general terms, and their influence on family relationships. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the type of data needed for the programme, and of how these needs can be met.

2.1 Solidarity within family relationships as a basic concept

Chapter 1 has noted a general sense of a decline in the strength of family bonds. This observation raises a series of questions, such as 'Is it true that family bonds are eroding?', 'What is the basis of the supposed strength of family bonds?', 'What factors influence the strength of family bonds?', and 'What are the implications of a decline in the strength of such bonds?'. The research programme intends to provide answers to these questions. The key concept employed in formulating these answers will be that of *solidarity*. The programme will focus on identifying solidarity within family relationships and the causes and implications of that solidarity.

The programme will define solidarity as 'feelings of mutual affinity within family relationships and how these are expressed in behavioural terms'. It is a multidimensional concept, a number of aspects of which can be distinguished:

1. The concept focuses on the fact that the unifying force of relationships lies in the willingness of relatives to subordinate their *individual* interests — in part if not entirely — to *collective* interests or the interests of others in the relationship (Miztal, 1996; Van Oorschot & Komter, 1998). Van Oorschot and Komter (1998) distinguish four significant motives for expressing solidarity, namely (i) a sense of mutual affection and identification, (ii) moral convictions based on cultural transmission (norms and values), (iii) considerations of long-term self-interest, and (iv) accepted authority. Family relationships will usually be based on a combination of these. It will also be interesting to study differences in the combination of motives between types of family relationship and to consider whether the motives for expressing solidarity have shifted over time, from those emphasising shared identity — motives (i) and (ii) — to those emphasising shared interest — motives (iii) and (iv) (Van Oorschot & Komter, 1998). Perhaps the importance of a sense of moral duty has declined and the emphasis within family relationships has become more one of mutually reconciling the interests and needs of those in the relationship (Miztal, 1996). Another central question is whether differences in the motives family members have for demonstrating solidarity lead to major differences in the characteristics of family relationships.
2. Solidarity spans various domains. The present programme will distinguish between three main types of solidarity, *instrumental* or economic solidarity, *social* solidarity and *emotional* solidarity. Instrumental solidarity concerns how those involved in a relationship express their economic and instrumental bonds. In the case of partner relationships it might include the division of responsibilities, the formalisation of the relationship, and the partners' respective feelings

regarding the balance of power within their relationship. In the case of parent-child relationships it might include arrangements relating to their respective responsibilities, financial matters (pocket money, savings, supplementing the family income), and opinions regarding the participation and role of the children in decisions affecting the family. In the case of relationships with kin outside the household it will include the extent to which practical assistance and care is provided, and ideas concerning the scope the relationship offers for such provision. Social solidarity is the way people express their social bonds: the activities they share, the friends and acquaintances they have in common, and their attitudes towards privacy for partners or parents and children. Finally, emotional solidarity revolves around emotional reciprocity. Not just the affection or dislike that family members might feel for one another, but also the degree to which people actually express these emotions and how far people can depend on one another for help in difficult situations. This research will study solidarity in each of these three domains.

3. There is a *quantitative* element and a *qualitative* element to solidarity. The degree of solidarity within a relationship can vary. Partners who support one another unconditionally have stronger bonds than partners who go their own way. On the other hand, and this is at least as significant for the research programme, the nature of the solidarity might also differ. How those involved in a relationship express their solidarity does not necessarily say anything about the degree of solidarity. Some couples might express their instrumental solidarity by assuming responsibility for specific household tasks or by one of them becoming the breadwinner, while other couples might opt for an egalitarian division of responsibilities. How mutual solidarity is expressed in these two cases differs greatly, but the degree of economic solidarity might be the same in both. The programme will examine both aspects (quantity and quality) of solidarity.
4. The concept has both a *behavioural* and an *experiential* component. Solidarity is expressed in the actions of those involved. The form of the relationship says something about the nature and degree of solidarity. Solidarity also has an experiential component, however, which revolves around the degree to which people feel a sense of solidarity towards others in the relationship, the perceived importance of the relationship, and people's attitudes and expectations regarding the relationship. The programme will examine both components in detail. It might be interesting, for example, to consider the degree of tension between the two components. Parents and their adult children might, for example, harbour strong feelings of solidarity while actually expressing much less solidarity.
5. Solidarity can be used to identify *asymmetry* within family relationships. It can help determine the degree of stability and reciprocity in terms of the contributions and expectations of those involved. Some relatives show more solidarity than others. Within some family relationships solidarity can even be entirely one-sided if one of the partners does all the taking and the other does all the giving. Tensions and rifts can emerge between family members, regarding, for example, the provision of help to parents in need, as well as disagreements about the division of responsibilities between partners or resentment on the part of parents who expect much from their children but do not feel they get enough in return.
6. Solidarity can be identified at three levels. First and foremost it has an *individual* dimension. Some people are more inclined to show solidarity than others (Mills & Clark, 1994; Van Lange, Agnew, Harinck & Steemers, 1997; Van Lange, Otten, De Bruin & Joireman, 1997). Secondly, solidarity at the *relationship level* is extremely significant (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Mills & Clark, 1994). Thirdly, solidarity can be understood to characterise *networks* of relationships (Mangen & McChesney, 1988). One might, for example, try and assess how solidarity is expressed within families and to what extent people feel a sense of duty towards 'the family', either in its nuclear or extended form. At the network level the concept allows one to consider the relationship between the nuclear family on the one hand and the broader network of family members on the other, and the degree, for instance, of family individualisation within kinship networks. The relational and network dimensions of solidarity will be particularly important for the proposed programme. The individual dimension will be examined principally as one of the possible determinants of solidarity at the relationship and network levels.

2.2 Focusing on kin relationships rather than just nuclear family relationships

The research programme will not focus solely on partner relationships or the nuclear family; its scope will be broader, examining changes within families, nuclear and extended. We have explicitly opted for the term ‘kin’ since what we are concerned with is relationships between relatives in the broadest sense: not just relationships between partners or between parents and their co-residential children, but also relationships between various types of non-household family members. Nuclear family relationships form a subset of the larger family or kin network. Focusing exclusively on nuclear family relationships would, we believe, undesirably limit the scope of the study — both in terms of space and time. If, as this programme will do, one adopts a dynamic approach, one cannot focus solely on nuclear family relationships. Parents and children form a spatial unit that can be termed a nuclear family for only part of their lives. The period after which family members have ceased to be a nuclear family is also important if one is interested in determining the strength of family bonds. While the character of parent-child relationships may change after they cease to live in the same household, these relationships continue to be important.

Family relationships in the broader sense differ from other personal relationships in several ways: family relationships are — by and large — not achieved, but, by definition, embedded in a family network; they also have a special form of time-spatial continuity.

The principal feature that distinguishes family or kin relationships from others is that — in the main — they are not self-chosen but are *derived through birth* (Knipscheer, 1980). They are ‘ascribed relationships’. Consanguinity creates a dependence stronger than in other relationships: ‘blood is thicker than water’. Naturally, the extent to which people invest in these extended family relationships varies just as it does in any other relationships. ‘Ascription’ and ‘achievement’ must therefore always be taken into account when assessing the nature of a specific family relationship. Obviously, partner relationships can only be ‘achieved’, but children and other relationship-specific investments nonetheless create bonds that cannot easily be broken (Kalmijn, Bernasco & Weesie, 1999).

Family relationships rarely exist in isolation; families are *social networks* (Dykstra, 1990). They consist of relationships between many parties with different types of bonds that vary in intensity. This is graphically illustrated by family trees. Children are born into relationships with other family members, whether they like it or not. The network character of family relationships is also expressed in the fact that relationships can be created or dissolved as a result of decisions taken by another member of the family or by an occurrence specific to that other member: whether or not parents ever become grandparents depends on whether their children also have children; a child divorcing can affect the parents, for example in terms of the contact they have with their grandchildren; parents divorcing can affect their relationship with their children.

Extended family relationships also differ from other relationships because of their *continuity* (Knipscheer, 1990). While work relationships and a large proportion of friendships are specific to a particular stage of life — school, university, a particular job — family relationships survive despite changes in the life course of the individual. Both of the aspects mentioned above play an important role in this. The fact that family relationships are ‘ascribed’ means there will always be a formal tie. Since families form social networks, family members (some more than others) share a past that is foreign to outsiders and that is a perpetual source of solidarity between these members. However, family relationships are also very dynamic. They change over time because the positions of individuals within intragenerational and intergenerational chains change: children become parents, parents become grandparents. As parents and children age, the character of the dependence between them changes and might even be reversed. The continuity of family relationships also has implications for the investment in relationships. Often, any investment will only begin to yield a return later on; this creates a dependence which is sometimes called the ‘shadow of the future’ (Weesie & Raub, 1995).

A final aspect of family relationships is the spatial dimension. Almost by definition, during certain stages of the life cycle relationships within a nuclear family are accompanied by *spatial proximity* in the form of cohabitation (Weeda, 1989). Married couples are even legally obliged to cohabit.

Contemporary Western society places great store on families having their own home, and in the Netherlands it has become rare for married couples to live with their parents. The family home is not just the private realm in which family members live together, it is also the base from which they participate in society (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieu, 1997), from which they engage in all their working, caring and leisure activities. Given the limited time available to them, members of the household have to coordinate their respective activities, bearing in mind the time it takes to move from one to the other (Droogleever Fortuijn, 1993; Dijst, 1995). The division of responsibilities between household members, but also the relationships between members of the household and family members outside the nuclear family, depends in part on the radius of activities of household members, which in turn is shaped by where they live and the availability of transport. The spatial proximity of relatives sharing the same house applies only to the closest kin, and even then only during part of their lives. When children leave home they set up a new household elsewhere; the same applies when couples separate or divorce. Despite the geographical distance between family members, family relationships are maintained — unlike many non-family relationships — although the intensity and nature of these family relationships is affected by distance (Dykstra, 1990).

2.3 Three key questions

This focus on solidarity and the emphasis placed on family relationships in a broad sense are reflected in the programme's key research questions. These questions are formulated and elaborated upon below. Each of them focuses on a different aspect of solidarity and family relationships, namely description, causes and implications.

The first question is descriptive in nature and asks: *What patterns can be distinguished in the nature and degree of solidarity within family relationships, and how does this solidarity change over time and during the course of people's lives?* The programme will attempt to identify the degree to which family relationships are characterised by solidarity and how that solidarity is expressed. As stressed in section 2.1, we shall consider both behavioural and experiential aspects of solidarity, and instrumental, social and emotional solidarity. In studying the degree of solidarity the programme will also examine the formation and dissolution of relationships, especially partner relationships. Section 2.2 has noted that family relationships — apart from the partner relationship — are derived from birth. Partner relationships have a more or less distinct beginning and involve a 'qualitative' leap from having no relationship and thus no solidarity to having a relationship and thus having solidarity. We regard this change in the degree of solidarity to be of major importance as well. Specific attention will also be paid to the role of potentially relevant third parties, other institutions for example, in how family members express solidarity within their relationships. Several examples of such institutions are given in section 2.4. An important aspect of this first question is the need to chart past and future developments in the nature and form of solidarity and to outline how solidarity develops during the course of people's lives.

The second question focuses on the causes of differences in patterns of solidarity, and asks: *To what extent are differences in the nature and degree of solidarity within family relationships influenced by socio-structural and cultural factors, and what mechanisms play a role in this?* The emphasis here will be on studying socio-structural and cultural diversity in the way relationships are formed and expressed, and the effect of changes in the lives of those party to relationships on how those relationships are expressed. It will also be important to expose the mechanisms that play a role in the organisation of solidarity and the changes in that solidarity. Why do those involved in a relationship choose to express it in the way they do? And how does one explain changes in how that relationship is expressed?

The third question focuses on the implications of patterns of solidarity and changes in these patterns, and asks: *What are the implications of differences in the nature and degree of solidarity within family relationships for how family members function within society and for the relationship between families and other social institutions?* An answer to this question will provide insight into the implications of any decline in solidarity. As noted above, public debates on this issue tend to assume automatically that a decline in solidarity is something to be deprecated. But should it be? A

relationship in which the partners allow one another a great deal of independence might be better for those involved than a relationship in which the partners do everything together; a good balance between independence and togetherness might be ideal. Once again, a distinction will be made between the experiential and behavioural dimensions of how family members function in society. We shall examine how differences in solidarity affect the norms and values subscribed to outside the context of the family and how they affect the social and emotional well-being of the individual. But we shall also examine the behavioural implications of these differences, the degree of social involvement, of network contacts, and the use of services and facilities for example. In so doing, the relationship between the family and other institutions will again be highlighted.

Chapter three considers these three key questions in greater detail and in relation to the three types of family relationship distinguished, namely partner relationships, nuclear family relationships, and kin relationships. In doing so, it will 'flesh out' the necessarily abstract account of the central elements of the programme by elaborating on these questions.

2.4 The role of socio-structural and cultural factors

A central focus of the programme is to examine the impact of major social changes on the strength of family bonds and thus on the nature and degree of solidarity within those relationships. The following is a brief summary of the socio-structural and cultural factors relevant to the programme, and of some of the questions that might be of interest.

- *Expansion in education.* The fact that young adults continue in education for longer means they postpone forming their own nuclear family and spend longer living either in the parental home or living alone (Blossfeld, 1995). Further, the increasing duration and rising cost of education require a long-term investment on the part of parents. These factors can have implications for solidarity between parents and children both while children live with their parents and after they leave home. However, the fact that the level of educational achievement has risen as a result of the expansion in education has even more dramatic implications for family relationships, in part because of its effect on the developments described below.
- *Rising labour force participation of women.* The rise in the labour force participation of women has a whole host of potential implications for various aspects of solidarity within family relationships. It has been shown for instance that the labour force participation of women influences both when relationships are formed and the onset of parenthood, with the effect on parenthood apparently being the most pronounced (Blossfeld, 1995). If a woman works, this also affects how solidarity within the relationship with her partner is expressed. In such cases, men are expected to provide a different form of instrumental solidarity (with less emphasis on earning money, and more emphasis on domestic and child-rearing responsibilities), but also more emotional solidarity. Working women make much greater use of childcare facilities than non-working women. The relationship with non-household family members can also be affected by the labour force participation of women. Labour force participation reduces opportunities for providing informal support to parents who need it, but it might also mean parents being called upon to look after children more often than used to be the case in the past.

- *Improvement in welfare, poverty and social exclusion.* Social inequality at the household level far exceeds that at the level of the individual. We know very little though about the relationship between social inequality and solidarity within family relationships (Van Solinge & Plomp, 1997). The programme will consider the implications of poverty and exclusion for solidarity within these relationships and ask questions such as ‘To what extent do unemployment and poverty lead to tensions within partner relationships?’, ‘Does the form in which solidarity within family relationships is expressed vary according to social class?’, and ‘To what extent does the family offer a safety net in the event of financial difficulties?’. The programme will also consider the implications of changes in family relationships for poverty and social exclusion. One might, for example, want to investigate the effects of divorce on solidarity between ex-partners (is alimony paid, what arrangements have been made concerning parental access in the case of children?) and on financial transfers from parents to their adult children (how substantial are these transfers, to what extent do they improve the life chances of their children?).
- *Changes in the economic structure. The flexibilisation of labour* (Buchmann, 1989; Hakim, 1998) in particular has a potentially major influence on decisions regarding family formation among young adults and on how partners express their relationship. Diminishing job security, a concomitant of the growing tendency towards short-term contracts, and the demand for higher labour productivity make it more difficult for young adults to invest in both a career and family life at the same time. One direct consequence is that parenthood is postponed until it inflicts the least possible damage on one’s career. Another key change in the structure of our economy has been the rise of the *knowledge-based society*. The need for ongoing training means careers can no longer be planned as effectively as before, and this increases uncertainty about the future. How do families respond to this? The speed at which many forms of knowledge become outdated mean parents are often less well-informed in certain respects than their children. What impact does this have on parent-child relationships? Who is transferring knowledge to whom, and does this affect how solidarity between parents and children is generally expressed?
- *Institutional arrangements.* Since the 1950s an extensive safety net of benefits has been created in the Netherlands, the effect of which has been to undermine the link between decisions on family formation and socio-economic circumstances (Lichter et al., 1997; Wouters, 1990). Relatively favourable levels of benefit have made it easier for young adults with poor job prospects to have families. Also, such benefits provide a buffer for those who dissolve their relationships. The reduction in benefit levels and the narrowing of benefit entitlement since the 1970s have had a disproportionately severe effect on young adults, and perhaps contributed to a decision to postpone starting a family. As part of this programme, research can be carried out into the intentional and unintentional effects of government policy on the expression and degree of solidarity within family relationships. An important aspect of government policy to which specific attention will be paid is emancipation and family policy. Dutch emancipation policy is a fairly recent phenomenon, and the facilities for those wishing to combine work and motherhood have lagged far behind those in other European countries (Kuijsten & Schulze, 1997). In the Netherlands the difficulty of combining motherhood and paid work has contributed to the popularity of a scenario in which parenthood is postponed and women leave the labour force, either for a short period or longer, when they become mothers. It was not until recently that a policy was implemented that makes it easier for women to combine having children with paid work. This policy has contributed to the increase in the proportion of women who continue to work after having a baby, but it has not yet had any demonstrable effect on the age at which women decide to have children (Beets, 1998).
- *The rise of a multicultural society.* Ethnic diversity in the Netherlands has increased. Ethnic groups that have settled in the Netherlands since the 1960s sometimes vary significantly from the indigenous population in how they express solidarity within family relationships. A number of examples can be cited, including the powerful influence of parents on the choice of partner among Turks and Moroccans (Esveldt & Kulu-Glasgow, 1994) and the higher proportion of single mothers among Surinamese and Antillean women. One interesting question is how people reconcile the discrepancy between the family values of their own culture and those typical of

Dutch culture. Young adults are particularly exposed to these two sets of influence. It is also interesting to look at how families deal with someone from a different ethnic background joining the family (Hondius, 1999). Since the vast majority of partner relationships are formed within one's own ethnic group, many families still consist solely (or almost solely) of members of just one ethnic group.

- *Declining normative control.* The influence of existing normative frameworks and models on the behaviour of individuals has been greatly eroded. This process is evident, for example, in the change from households characterised by parental dictates to households characterised by negotiation. Parental authority can no longer be taken for granted, and relationships between parents and children are becoming more egalitarian. The decline in normative control also influences decisions by young adults to set up a family and the form that family takes (Buchmann, 1989). These decisions are based on considerations specific to the individuals concerned, and though the views of others deemed important might still play a role they are usually no longer decisive. Because young adults have obtained the right to their own money and begun to leave the parental home earlier, the power of parents to make decisions affecting their children has declined. The church used to be another significant party promoting marriage and the family, but secularisation (Dobbelaere, 1981) has curbed its influence on the behaviour of young adults too. Finally, greater geographical mobility and the ability to safeguard one's privacy have made it more difficult for society to exercise normative control over the behaviour of young adults.
- *Individualisation.* Not only has the scope for exercising normative control declined, so has the desire to do so. This cultural factor, frequently termed 'individualisation', has been a major influence on changes within partner relationships and nuclear and extended families. Individualisation refers particularly to the greater freedom of individuals to decide themselves, regardless of others, how to lead their lives. In taking these decisions, individual interests (rather than collective interests) are now more important than in the past (Turkenburg, 1995). The impact of individualisation on the way people express solidarity within intimate relationships is complex. People will decide to take far-reaching steps, like marriage or having children, only if they can gauge all the implications fairly accurately and only once they have evaluated them. Often, people will then postpone such decisions — since they are difficult or impossible to reverse. A rational approach to parenthood will also lead to people wanting to evaluate all the pros and cons before deciding to start a family. One effect of the process of individualisation is a greater emphasis on the quality of personal relationships (Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998). Since the decision to enter into and remain in personal relationships has become a matter of personal choice, one also needs to constantly monitor whether the quality of the relationship is still satisfying. This is true especially in the case of partner relationships. This might lead to a situation in which the quality of relationships is higher than in the past, but that the relationships themselves do not last as long. However, individualisation has implications not only for the manifestation of, and value attached to partner relationships, but also for relationships within the nuclear family — children might have greater privacy and freedom of choice in the shared household; perhaps the degree of emotional investment in relationships with children is greater — and for kin relationships in general — parents might be less inclined than before to ask their children for informal help.

The research programme will focus on these social factors in a variety of ways. It will consider how the extent to which solidarity plays a role in family relationships and how that solidarity is organised, differ according to the socio-structural and cultural position of families. It will consider differences in ethnic background, socio-economic position, cultural values, etc. In addition, the influence of social factors can be studied by examining how the nature and degree of solidarity change as a consequence of changes in the lives of those in the relationship. Possible questions include: 'What happens to the organisation of solidarity within partner relationships if one of the partners becomes unemployed?' and 'What impact does a mixed marriage have on the relationships between the two families?' A third way social changes might be of influence is in how they affect the organisation of solidarity. Here, one could focus on the role of institutions other than the nuclear family in the organisation of solidarity; the role, for example, of legal arrangements in formalising partner relationships, the role of childcare and help with child rearing in shaping parent-child relationships, and the role of elder care

in creating and cementing instrumental solidarity between parents and children. Finally, the programme will also focus on the effect changes in solidarity within family relationships have on the use of facilities and services, and on the interaction between families and other institutions.

2.5 Data requirements for the research programme

There are two main requirements for the proposed research programme. Obviously, there would have to be sufficient manpower available to carry out the programme, but there would also have to be sufficient research material available. This last aspect is dealt with below.

To provide satisfactory answers to the questions formulated above and elaborated on in chapter 3, a considerable quantity of data is required. Ideally, the database needs to meet certain conditions, the most important of which are briefly set out below:

- *Large-scale:* The database would need to contain information on the degree to which and the way in which various types of family relationships are characterised by solidarity. To enable comparisons to be made within types of relationship (for example, between highly educated women and women with a low level of education, between families with different ethnic origins, between rich and poor), the database needs to be large enough to enable meaningful comparisons at the subgroup level. Substantial subsamples within the database would enable sufficient information to be collected on the various types of relationship to permit comparisons between these relationships.
- *Panel:* The database would need to enable dynamic changes in family relationships to be studied. Collecting data retrospectively is not an option here since retrospective data on the nature and degree of solidarity within relationships would produce distorted and unreliable information in many cases. To study the dynamics of family relationships and obtain greater insight into the causes and impact of changes in family relationships a prospective panel would have to be set up to track family members over time.
- *Multi-method:* The database would need to provide information on the mechanisms behind the expression of solidarity and changes in how that solidarity is expressed. Attention should also be paid to both the behavioural and experiential components of solidarity. To enable this to be done in any meaningful way, large-scale survey data will be needed and small-scale in-depth interviews will have to be conducted. Combining both methods will provide a unique opportunity to obtain a better insight into the nature and significance of family relationships.
- *Multi-actor:* The database would need to enable relationships between family members and the dynamics within those relationships to be analysed. Many aspects of solidarity can be studied satisfactorily only if information is collected from more than one person involved in the various relationships (for example, non-co-resident children, brothers and sisters, and grandparents).

At present there is no database in the Netherlands (or outside the Netherlands) which meets the above conditions. Some useful initiatives concerning specific aspects have been undertaken, but a new database will be needed to enable the research programme's key questions to be answered. A proposal to create such a database (large-scale, panel, multi-method, multi-actor) has been formulated in an investment proposal *Netherlands Kinship Panel Study: A Multi-Actor, Multi-Method Panel Survey on Solidarity in Family Relationships*, which will be submitted for funding by the NWO-programme *Investeren Groot* (Major Investment Scheme). In implementing this programme of data collection, we shall co-operate and/or co-ordinate our efforts with other data collection projects being undertaken in the field of family relationships (in particular the Fertility Survey being conducted by Statistics Netherlands).

3 Elaboration of the key research questions

This chapter sets out the key questions of the research programme for each of the three types of family relationships that have been distinguished.

3.1 Partner relationships

This part of the programme will revolve around relationships between partners. What sets these relationships apart from the other two types of relationships (those between parents and children within the nuclear family and those between members of the extended family) is that they are achieved rather than ascribed; they are not blood ties. At the same time, partner relationships are (always in the biological sense, and usually in the social sense) the building blocks of all other family relationships.

3.1.1 *Solidarity within partner relationships*

The recurring theme in the issue of solidarity among partners is that it has become more complex over the years, both in terms of how it comes about and how long it lasts. This may be attributed to two developments.

To begin with, decisions about the formation of relationships and the manifestation of these relationships are no longer strictly dictated by social norms, nor are they now reinforced by sharply defined gender roles. Traditional social norms and values used to be defined in such a way that they engendered a particular type of solidarity between partners: it was the norm to have children, get married, to do specific things together but other things separately. Traditional gender roles also generated strong bonds between partners. Traditionally, partners were dependent on one another as a result of a strict division of labour and because of the asymmetrical and generally accepted balance of power between partners. The erosion of traditional norms and weakening of traditional gender roles has given people more freedom of choice (Young & Willmott, 1973; Van Berkel, 1997; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Although this is generally seen as a positive development, making choices has become more difficult as a result, with respect to both the person with whom one wishes to enter into a relationship and with whom one wants to stay, and how the relationship is structured. Within this context, solidarity may no longer be taken for granted, but it does manifest itself, albeit in a different way. Nowadays it is more important than ever for partners to reflect upon and discuss important aspects of their relationship (Van der Avort, 1987; Giddens, 1992).

A second, related development is that the collective and individual interests and desires of partners are now experienced and evaluated differently than they used to be. This trend is largely the result of a shift towards a more individualistic society. People today are more aware of their individual desires and interests, and they want them to be taken into account in their relationships with their partners (Lesthaeghe, 1983). The emancipation of women has contributed to this development. The shift in emphasis from collective interests ('the interests of the family' or 'the interests of the marriage') to a combination of collective and individual interests has also played a part in changing the nature of solidarity (Popenoe, 1988; Bengston & Achenbaum, 1993; Walker, 1994). The quality of a marriage used to depend strongly on the degree of specialisation, economies of scale and the presence of children, even if this meant less opportunities for personal growth for one of the partners. Today, quality is also measured in terms of the scope the relationship provides for personal growth for both partners, and their ability to 'derive benefit' from and enjoy the relationship. The individual demands placed on relationships by the partners seem to have increased, and this had made solidarity more fragile.

In other words, there has been a shift towards greater freedom of choice within relationships, and within this freedom of choice individual interests have been pushed to the fore and have become as important as collective interests. Having said that, these developments have not taken place to the same extent throughout society; some have only just begun whilst others have remained confined to certain sectors of society, such as among the better educated. Both major developments do, however,

have implications for the nature and degree of solidarity between partners, and thus for the strength and sustainability of bonds between partners (Finch, 1989; Harris, 1983; Kalmijn, Bernasco & Weesie, 1999; Laslett, 1979). Against this background, the programme will address various subquestions.

3.1.2 Formation and dissolution of partner relationships

The first, specific research question will focus on the formation and dissolution of partner relationships. An important aim of the programme will be to closely monitor patterns of partner relationships and to identify new trends at an early stage (Buunk & Van Driel, 1989). The programme will begin by addressing standard questions about the timing and prevalence of the formation and dissolution of lasting partner relationships – the rising divorce (separation) rate, rising age at marriage, the increase in extramarital cohabitation, and remarriage (Manting, 1994). It will also address the prevalence of same-sex partner relationships and the extent to which so-called Living-Apart-Together (LAT) relationships, where couples do not actually cohabit, are seen as an alternative to consensual unions and marriage.

The programme will delve further into identifying patterns of partner relationships than research in this field has done to date, since it will also study phenomena such as serial monogamy, ‘confirmed’ singles, and new hybrid types of partner relationships, such as dual-location households, where partners only live at the same address at the weekend and where one of the partners lives close to his or her place of work during the week (Green, 1997). Although questions about the formation and dissolution and prevalence of different kinds of partner relationships do not provide insight into the issue of solidarity within partner relationships, they do help to identify a prerequisite of solidarity: as people marry less, and later in life, as divorce rates rise and as people opt for more casual or ‘part time’ cohabitation arrangements, the conditions for the creation of solidarity within partner relationships change fundamentally.

3.1.3 How solidarity is expressed: patterns and dynamics

A second question that will be addressed is how partner relationships are given form and content. The specific characteristics of the relationships of cohabiting couples is directly related to the nature and degree of solidarity between the partners. The key question here is: Which patterns can we discern with respect to the nature and degree of solidarity within partner relationships, and how does solidarity change during the course of people’s lives? To answer this question, we will examine three dimensions of solidarity: instrumental, social and emotional.

We shall first look at instrumental solidarity, which, in the case of partner relationships, consists primarily of material bonds. Partners are often economically dependent on, or tied to one another to varying degrees. This includes well-documented issues such as the sexual division of household tasks and paid employment (Becker, 1991 [1981]; Van Berkel, 1997; Van der Lippe, 1993), as well as issues that have received less attention in the past, such as the way in which partners arrange their financial affairs (Giesen & Kalmijn, 1999) and how relationships are formalised, for example through marriage contracts, the official registration of (non-marital) partner relationships, and cohabitation contracts (Giesen, 1999). A new perspective on this will be our focus on the housing situation of couples, which constitutes one of the most important material bonds between cohabiting partners. We will take a dynamic approach to examining people’s housing movements and their residential careers (Courgeau & Lelièvre, 1992; Henretta, 1987; Mulder & Wagner, 1998), we shall look into how couples go about taking decisions with respect to residential moves and migration (Bonney & Love, 1991; Cooke & Bailey, 1996; Mincer, 1978), and how individual and collective living and employment interests are reconciled in decisions of this sort (Clark & Dieleman, 1996; Droogleever Fortuijn, 1993).

A second type of solidarity could be called the social dimension and includes leisure activities and social networks. The social dimension of solidarity is about the interaction between partners as well as shared lifestyles and how partners are bound by common ties with third parties via their networks

(Kalmijn & Bernasco, 1999). One of the advantages of having a partner is the possibility of sharing leisure activities and of having mutual friends and acquaintances. This enables partners to derive more pleasure from their relationship and strengthens solidarity between them (Hill, 1988; Kalmijn & Bernasco, 1999; Uehara, 1990; White, 1983). The programme will clearly identify the degree to which partners share pursuits. When spending time together, couples also need to reconcile their individual interests and desires, and one of the issues will be how partners take decisions in these kinds of situations. The time they spend on a paid job and homemaking (including child rearing) is an important factor in this regard, if only because paid and unpaid work may compete with shared leisure activities (Kingston & Nock, 1987). Another factor that plays a role, apart from the actual amount of time partners spend on work, is the scheduling of this time, such as working overtime, shift work and working outside normal office hours (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 1999; Presser, 1994). What's more, doing many things as a team could conflict with the ideology of individualism: whilst people derive pleasure from shared activities, they also feel they should have a 'life of their own'. This study will therefore pay ample attention to the important questions as to how people experience the conflict between autonomy and dependence, and what the best possible mix between the two might be.

The third dimension of solidarity is emotional. This dimension includes both the feelings partners have for each other (love, affection), and the degree to which individual psychological problems manifest themselves within partner relationships. The more partners are receptive to each other's problems, and the more they understand and help each other in this respect, the stronger the solidarity between them. Since couples today are placing greater demands on personal relationships, it is sometimes felt that partners should be each other's best friend as well as each other's partner. In some cases, partner relationships can even become more or less 'therapeutic' (Bellah et al., 1985; Giddens, 1992). Whilst expectations of this kind can strengthen solidarity between partners, they can also strain relationships. Another issue that will be studied in this context is how partners deal with conflicts within their relationships. The style of conflict management (Buunk & Nijsskens, 1980) affects the stability of partner relationships and can even be of influence following divorce, not only on the well-being of the partners concerned, but also on the well-being of any children that may be involved.

When looking at the issue of solidarity, the programme will also examine possible interrelationships between its various dimensions. Does solidarity have a single underlying dimension, or do the various types of solidarity constitute alternatives? American research has shown that solidarity is multi-dimensional (Roberts et al., 1991). Historical developments would suggest that, in certain social categories, it is the nature rather than the degree of solidarity that has changed: for example, instrumental solidarity is being replaced by emotional solidarity. This would therefore suggest that there is no single underlying dimension to solidarity, but that there are various social categories in society which differ from one other in terms of the different dimensions of solidarity that exist within partner relationships.

Another important issue that should be addressed when studying patterns of solidarity, is how solidarity changes during the course of people's lives. Solidarity is an outstanding example of a phenomenon that tends to become stronger with time: as relationships last longer, partners get to know each other better, they accumulate shared memories and become dependent on one another in a variety of idiosyncratic ways. Having said that, this pattern of growing solidarity can not always be taken for granted (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 1999). The birth of a child may make it more difficult for partners to spend time together and may cause partners to grow apart rather than become closer. Other major events in people's lives, such as illness or the death of a loved one, may have unexpected repercussions for the bonds between partners.

3.1.4 Relationships with other institutions

Family relationships are bound up with other social institutions in a number of ways. In the case of partner relationships, other institutions tend to come into the picture primarily at the time of formation and dissolution. Government is the main player that gets involved in these relationships, for example by formulating regulations and legislation governing the formation of relationships. A case in point is the recent public debate about the opportunity offered non-marital partners to officially register their domestic partnership ('geregistreerd partnerschap'), or the debate about the individualisation of taxes

and social security benefits. Government is also a party to the dissolution of partner relationships (divorce). How should household effects be divided up after a divorce, how much alimony needs to be paid and for how long, how should local government respond to the demand for housing that arises after couples part, and which rules should the authorities adopt with respect to the benefits women receive following divorce (Knijn & Van Wel, 1999)? Government also affects the way in which partner relationships manifest themselves. This relates not just to the financial aspects of relationships, but also to aspects that are affected by government policy in other areas, such as employment, childcare and housing (see also section 3.2.4). The programme will study other social institutions in addition to government that intervene directly or otherwise in partner relationships, such as counselling and advice services couples can turn to when they have relationship problems.

3.1.5 *Causes and mechanisms*

This part of the programme will seek to identify the causes and mechanisms that underlie the patterns described above, in terms of both the formation and dissolution of partner relationships and patterns of, and trends in, solidarity. To this end, we shall trace a number of general socio-structural and cultural trends. But identifying social trends will only be the first step in the process. When studying causes, differences among social categories need to be distinguished and the mechanisms that come into play at the individual and household levels need to be addressed.

Structural factors that affect the formation, manifestation and dissolution of partner relationships are rooted primarily in the structure of the labour market. The programme will also focus on the implications of the fact that women are going out to work, which has become a well-documented issue over the past years. Questions that will be addressed will include the way in which employment affects the degree of social and emotional solidarity between partners, in addition to standard questions about the influence of level of education and female labour force participation on the timing of marriage and marital stability (Blossfeld & Huinink, 1991; Booth et al., 1984; Liefbroer & Corijn, 1999; Oppenheimer, 1994). An important consideration is that time pressures in dual-income households can have two opposite effects. Whilst the fact that partners have less time for each other can weaken solidarity, a similarity of roles between partners in dual-income households can promote mutual respect and communication. In addition to studying the influence of employment, attention will also be given to differences between social categories: between the better and lesser educated, between urban and rural areas, and between the rich and the poor.

In addressing cultural trends, the main focus will be on the influence of norms and values. A distinction can be made between various types of norms and values, such as those regarding the emancipation of women, religious values, and postmaterialist values (Ingelhart, 1977; Popenoe, 1988). Norms and values affect the way people view partner relationships, which in turn influences the formation, dissolution and manifestation of relationships. Although, on average, values have undergone marked changes, these trends have not been embraced to the same degree by all social categories. Since public opinion appears to be very divided on this issue, it is important that we identify what people's norms and values are and how they shape relationships.

When studying the increased diversity in norms and values it will also be important to look at 'new' social categories in society: to what extent do the norms and values of ethnic minorities differ from those of the indigenous population, which differences exist among ethnic groups, and does this result in other types of behaviour? In this respect, it would also be interesting to pay specific attention to cultural differences among different migrant communities (Lesthaeghe, 1996). Marked differences may exist in the formation and manifestation of partner relationships within ethnic groups, depending on whether they belong to the first, second or intermediate generation of migrants.

As norms and values have changed, so have living arrangements. This is borne out by the growing popularity of extramarital cohabitation (Manting, 1994; Prinz, 1995; Rindfuss & Vandenheuevel, 1990). International research has focused on the question whether, and to what extent, consensual unions are the result of – or whether they result in – a weakening inclination towards family formation, and whether this is linked to the rising divorce (separation) rate (Axinn & Barber, 1997; Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Hall, 1996; Thomson & Colella, 1992; Waite et al., 1986; Waite, 1995).

The research programme will seek to gain insight into the significance of cohabitation for those involved and will monitor future changes in this area (cf. Manting, 1996).

3.1.6 Social implications

A view often expressed is that solidarity between partners has a positive effect on the way people function within society. After all, partner relationships are among the most important bonds people have with one other. The programme will seek to empirically test whether this statement is true. Its main focus will be on the subjective aspects of the way people function. Does not having a partner lead to loneliness, and does a lack of solidarity within partner relationships heighten feelings of loneliness? Standard questions of this kind will be further qualified by closely examining how individuals experience various forms of solidarity, and by explicitly investigating whether there are drawbacks to solidarity (asymmetrical patterns of dependency that impede personal well-being, excessively strong emotional ties that have an adverse effect on how people feel, a conflict between autonomy and dependence, etc).

In addition to studying the subjective implications of partner relationships, the programme will address the influence of partnerships on the objective aspects of the way people function within society. In the case of the formation and dissolution of relationships, issues addressed will include the degree to which people are financially independent, or how dependent they are on others or on the government. Attention will also be given to the pursuit of residential careers (Murphy & Sullivan, 1985; Sullivan, 1986). The programme will also take a closer look at the way in which partners influence each other's success in the labour market (Bernasco, 1994), and the extent to which bonds between partners encourage or impede other types of bonds, such as friendships and club activities.

3.2 Nuclear family relationships

The second type of family relationship involves the ties between parents and children living in the same household and ties between brothers and sisters. A key difference between parent-child relationships and the other nuclear family relationships is that children are highly dependent on their parents. Young children in particular rely on the involvement, the opportunities and qualities of their parents when it comes to their well-being, opportunities for personal development and the structure of their day-to-day lives. The family used to be regarded as the prototype of Durkheim's 'mechanical solidarity': strong social ties based on shared norms and values, in which mutual support and assistance was a matter of course. The family has traditionally been the main guardian of solidarity: it was nurtured as one of the most important mainstays of a harmonious and close-knit society. But social developments have meant that family solidarity can no longer be taken for granted.

3.2.1 Solidarity within the nuclear family

Macro-structural developments such as advancing urbanisation and geographical mobility and changes in the labour market due to, among other things, improved levels of education and rising female labour force participation, have brought about an individualisation and democratisation process within the family. In addition to this, 'family individualisation' has been a feature of society for some time; that is to say, ties between the nuclear family and its direct social environment have become looser. Demographic developments have given rise to fundamental changes in family structures: families are becoming smaller, women are having children later in their lives, couples are increasingly living together without getting married, and more and more children are being born outside of marriage. Although the number of single-parent families has remained stable since the early Seventies (about 10 percent of all families), poverty has become more widespread among these families, and in the Netherlands single mothers are now required by law to find paid employment (Hooghiemstra & Knijn, 1997; Bussemaker, Van Drenth, Knijn & Plantenga, 1997; Poortman & Kalmijn, 1999). At the same time, more and more children are growing up in stepfamilies that are created when their divorced parents enter into new relationships. Family structures are becoming ever more complex as a result; children may now have several 'parents' as well as 'new' grandparents and other relatives, all of whom are seeking to define their relationships with each other and with the children (Smart & Neale, 1999).

Another important change in family structures in the Netherlands is related to the immigration of families from former Dutch colonies and the reunification of the families of Mediterranean migrants. A particularly striking phenomenon among families of Caribbean descent are single-parent families in which the mothers, if they have a paid job, tend to spend more hours outside the home than Dutch mothers (Distelbrink, 1998). Families originating from Mediterranean countries tend to be bigger than those of the non-migrant population (Hooghiemstra & Niphuis-Nell, 1995; Pels, 1998). These developments have extended the spectrum of family structures in the Netherlands.

Socio-structural trends of this sort have gone hand in hand with cultural trends, in particular changing norms and values regarding the ways in which nuclear family members should interact and expectations regarding their duties and responsibilities. Both these trends have led to the democratisation of family relationships, fuelled by individualisation (Du Bois-Reymond, 1997; Giddens, 1992; Doornenbal, 1996). For example, the 'negotiation model' has come to replace the hierarchical relationships which formerly characterised families (Van Berkel, 1997). Not only has the relationship between partners changed as a result of a redefinition of gender roles (see section 3.1), but the relationship between parents and their children has changed as well. Children today tend to be respected as individuals, and their individual interests are given greater prominence alongside the parents' interests. Whilst more egalitarian relationships between parents and children can lead to increased mutual respect for each other's needs and desires, for example regarding leisure activities, privacy, the use of space within the home, or the division of household duties amongst members of the family, they may also increase the potential for conflict. Individual family members are more likely to clash because parents today are less inclined to stay together 'for the sake of the children'. Since the continuity of partner relationships is often disrupted, solidarity between parents and their children can no longer be taken for granted.

Despite major cultural differences within families of non-Dutch descent, both parents and children face the challenge of embracing the norms and values of Dutch society. Whether this turns out to be a difficult or an easy process depends on a number of factors, such as the number of years they have spent in the Netherlands, the degree to which they cherish their own cultural identity, their desire to integrate into Dutch society and the reaction of the Dutch to their presence. We can state with a fair degree of certainty, however, that problems will arise along the way, and that this will inevitably affect family relationships and will frequently strain the relationships between parents and children (Van Distelbrink, 1998; Pels, 1998).

It is not inconceivable that the major social trends described above affect the nature and degree of solidarity within families.

3.2.2 *Formation and dissolution of family relationships*

The first research question will involve identifying and detailing a variety of family characteristics. The programme will first examine the moment at which couples decide they want to have children and changes herein over time. The decision to have children tends to be based on a combination of financial-economic motives and social-emotional motives and is related to couples' decisions about future gender roles and lifestyles (White, Booth & Edwards, 1986; Van Luijn, 1996; Jacobs, 1998). Dykstra (1991) concluded that the average number of children born to women with a strong professional orientation is lower than among less career-minded women. Special attention will also be paid to couples who remain childless, either voluntarily or involuntarily. The reasons underlying childlessness and possible ways in which this may be related to background characteristics such as education and employment status or factors such as career planning or a lack of facilities to combine a job and a family will also be addressed.

'Dissolution' of parent-child relationships takes place solely as a result of the death of a parent or a child; the relationship between parents and children *within the context of the nuclear family*, however, ends when a child leaves the parental home. The programme will study developments in home-leaving by young people against the backdrop of international trends (Cordon, 1997; Goldscheider,

1997; Goldscheider et al., 1993). The Netherlands is one of the few countries in which the recent trend to postpone leaving the parental home is not very apparent (Hooimeijer & Mulder, 1998).

The programme will also describe different types of family structures and changes herein over time. Particular attention will be focused on varying types of families in which children grow up, and the relationship with structural background variables such as social class, education, the parents' employment status and ethnic origin. In the case of migrant families, relevant areas of study will include how old the children were at the time of family reunification and which reasons prompted this move, how the composition of families change during the course of the children's lives, and how the people involved experience these changes.

An important question when studying broken families, is what happens to the parent-child relationship after parents part. Until now, research into the implications of divorce has focused on the situation of the divorcees themselves (Broese van Groenou, 1991; Raschke, 1987; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990) and on the implications for any children involved (Bosman, 1993; Dronkers, 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Simons & Associates, 1996; Spruijt, 1993). Research in the Netherlands so far has paid very little attention to how divorce affects the relationship between children and their divorced parents (Dykstra, 1998). Outside the Netherlands, research into this issue was embarked on earlier (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990; Seltzer, 1991). The programme will address issues such as parental access, actual contact between children, fathers and mothers, possible conflicts that may arise in these situations, and how conflicts can be resolved. Particular attention will be focused on the emergence of new arrangements such as co-parenthood.

3.2.3 How solidarity is expressed: patterns and dynamics

Living in a nuclear family context raises the issue of how the various patterns of dependence and bonds among family members are expressed and experienced. Here, too, the programme will seek to identify patterns in the nature and degree of solidarity among family members and how these patterns change during the course of people's lives. As in the case of partner relationships, we distinguish three dimensions of solidarity.

The first question that needs to be addressed, is how instrumental solidarity between parents and children is expressed. This includes issues such as the scale of material transfers from parents to children (De Regt, 1993), such as toys, (luxury) articles, and pocket money, and the context within which these transfers take place: negotiations between parents and children, and the influence of peers, advertising and the media on children's desire for material goods. The financial position of the parents might well influence the nature and degree of mutual solidarity. Do 'poor' children understand and accept their parents' restricted means, and do 'rich' children appreciate the financial latitude they are given? Other aspects of instrumental solidarity relate to the allocation of space in the home, the ability to satisfy individuals' needs for privacy, and the degree to which parents (are able to) invest in their children's education and professional opportunities.

Social solidarity is expressed in the quality and length of time spent together as well as in the extent to which parents and children support each other, and the quality of this support, and the division of responsibilities among family members. Since these patterns tend to change during the course of people's lives, the programme will look at the age at which children begin to spend less time with their parents, and at which age children are expected to contribute to housework. The programme will identify how parents and children in different types of families spend time together (actively and passively), how parents and children communicate about these matters, and the degree to which the needs of individual family members are taken into account. Another relevant question is whether the involvement of children in homemaking strengthens solidarity, or whether in fact it gives rise to constant conflicts. A related issue is the gender-based socialisation of boys and girls. Are boys and girls these days expected to contribute equally to household tasks, and is this the case in all types of families? One might expect to find that children in two-career households are expected to do more. We would also expect to find that the nature of gender socialisation in migrant families differs from that in Dutch families. The impact this has on mutual solidarity between parents and children, as well as among brothers and sisters, is an interesting aspect of social solidarity within nuclear families.

It might be assumed that family relationships are based on emotional solidarity between parents and children, but countless novels and other testimonies of the emotional neglect of children indicate that this is not the case at all. Dutch research into child rearing practices shows that rearing children in an empathetic and understanding way is becoming a more generally accepted norm, yet more hierarchical forms of child rearing continue to exist (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Rispen, Hermanns & Meeus, 1996; Doornenbal, 1997). Which feelings do parents and children have towards one another, to what extent do they show mutual respect, even when they do not fully meet each other's expectations? Is the idea that 'my parent is my best friend' widely accepted (Van Wel, 1994)? In which areas do parents feel that they have failed in their efforts to understand and provide guidance to their children socially and emotionally and how is this perceived by (older) children? Which problems do parents and children share and which do they keep to themselves, and are there differences between single-parent and two-parent parent families and between Dutch and migrant families in this respect?

3.2.4 Relationships with other institutions

Relationships between parents and children are also shaped by the influence of other social institutions. Prospective parents might, for example, come into contact with the medical profession when wanting to start a family in the event of infertility or expected problems during childbirth. When people decide whether or not they want children, legislation and regulations governing the possibility to combine paid employment with children (childcare, part-time work and leave arrangements) come into play (Van Luijn, 1996; Jacobs, 1998). Social institutions can also affect the relationships between parents and their children. In the Netherlands, childcare is increasingly being delegated to third parties, especially for young children (daycare centres, nannies, so-called 'guest parents'). It would therefore be interesting to examine how parents express their commitment to their children in these cases and which parent has prime responsibility in this respect. Schools sometimes complain that parents are too involved in their children's school, and conversely, many parents are not satisfied with the quality of education and the way it is organised. The question here is how parents express their involvement in the school their children attend and to which extent they feel they need to stay in touch with the teachers. The same sorts of questions can be raised in relation to other activities in which children participate; how involved do parents get in the children's music and sports clubs, what do they find important, how much time and money do they spend on these kinds of things, and which parent has which responsibility in these matters?

The programme will also address questions about institutions with which parents may become involved should problems arise. For example, they may need to seek financial assistance from the social security services in the event of poverty and/or single parenthood, or they may turn to social workers, welfare officers or family support agencies, or to public health workers in the event of health problems.

3.2.5 Causes and mechanisms

The main socio-structural factors that influence the formation, dissolution and structure of relationships within families are (the division of) labour, education and income. The reasons why people put off having children has been the focus of scientific research for many years (Bloom & Trussell, 1984; Rindfuss & St John, 1993; Blossfeld & Huinink, 1991). The development of theories on family formation is also still in full swing (White, Booth & Edwards, 1986; De Bruijn, 1999; Friedman et al., 1994; Van Luijn, 1996). An important new development is the growing attention for the role of both parents, rather than only that of the mother (Jacobs, 1998; Kalmijn, 1996; Corijn, Liebroer & De Jong Gierveld, 1996; Oppenheimer, Kalmijn & Lim, 1997).

Dutch research into home-leaving patterns has barely touched on the role of income and employment (Baanders, 1998; Hooimeijer & Mulder, 1998) or that of the parents' resources (De Jong Gierveld et al., 1991). Various American and British studies have already underlined the importance of these factors on young people's decisions to leave the parental home (Aquilino, 1991; Avery et al., 1992; Buck & Scott, 1993; Murphy & Wang, 1998; Whittington & Peters, 1996).

When addressing the form and content of parent-child relationships, attention will be focused on decisions regarding the division of responsibilities between parents. Although this is a well-documented issue, little is known about the implications of this division of labour for the nature of the relationship between individual parents and their children. Other socio-structural factors that could affect the parent-child relationship are the family income level, the parents' living arrangement and the social environment in which the children are raised. The social environment includes issues such as the urban-rural difference, living in a multicultural or in a culturally homogenous neighbourhood, and the difference between families that form part of a close-knit social network and those that lead a fairly isolated existence.

Cultural factors that may influence the relationship between parents and children include norms and values regarding democratic family relationships, egalitarian attitudes about child rearing, and materialistic values. This also includes insight into discrepancies between the values cherished by the family and the values with which children come into contact in their social environment outside the family. It is not inconceivable that the diversity of norms and values to which children are exposed will grow in the future, and that parents will deal with this in a variety of ways. How do they help their children to find their way in the world, and do they expect them to embrace their own norms and values? Do different population categories differ strongly in this respect and to what extent do parents of non-Dutch descent want their children to adjust to their new cultural environment (Distelbrink, 1998; Pels, 1998; Brinkgreve & Van Stolk, 1996)?

As a result of changing norms and values about family relationships, fathers are now also giving more instrumental and emotional attention to their children (Doornenbal, 1996). This is making relationships between fathers, mothers and children more complex, partially owing to the fact that fathers still tend to depend on the information the mothers give them about their children's behaviour. Following on from this theme, it would be interesting to study what children expect of their parents in these matters and how they evaluate their relationships with their parents. Research has shown that fathers are becoming more involved in child development and family life (Van der Lippe & Niphuis-Nell, 1994; Kalmijn, 1999), and this could mean that the absence of the father (the 'dead beat' father) is increasingly felt to be undesirable (Lamb, Pleck & Levine, 1985; Smart & Neale, 1999).

3.2.6 Social implications

Given the dependence of children on their parents, we can say that parents are generally expected to show considerable solidarity towards their children. The main question is therefore how the solidarity shown by parents manifests itself and why parents sometimes fail to succeed in doing what society expects of them. The programme will also study the implications of differences in the nature and degree of solidarity shown by parents. A 'lack' of solidarity could give rise to problems among their children and could lead to the erosion of family life. What the repercussions will be, will depend on a number of factors, including the question which obligations children feel they have towards their parents and which types of solidarity they expect and accept in the various phases of their lives. The programme will also seek to shed light on whether, and to what extent solidarity between parents and children has drawbacks. Children could, for example, find strong mutual solidarity with their parents too suffocating.

Solidarity within the family may also have an objective impact on the way the children function within as well as outside the family. To what extent are school performance, community participation, the development of social networks and the observance of norms and values related to (earlier) types of solidarity within the family?

3.3 Kin relationships

This part of the programme will address relationships between family members who do not live in the same household. This category includes relationships between parents and children who have left the parental home, between adult children and elderly parents, between grandchildren and their grandparents, between brothers and sisters, between cousins, nephews, nieces, aunts and uncles... in

short, the gamut of kin relationships. There has been less focus on these types of relationships within research on the family than on the two other types described. They could, nevertheless, act as a unifying force among individuals as well as in society at large.

3.3.1 *Solidarity within kin relationships*

The main issue underlying this part of the programme will be that solidarity within kin relationships is being eroded. This may be attributed to two developments. To begin with, demographic developments have fundamentally altered the size and composition of kinship networks (Post et al., 1997; Riley, 1983). These trends can be broken down into various components: [a] Delayed childbearing is resulting in a bigger 'distance' between successive generations. [b] The trend towards smaller families results in leading to a 'depletion' of family networks. [c] The rising divorce and remarriage rates are making kinship networks more complex and more diverse. [d] As a result of increased life expectancy more people today have elderly relatives, who often need help, for longer periods of time. [e] As a result of the trend towards smaller families and the extension of life expectancy, families are becoming 'top heavy': the number of elderly relatives is growing in relation to the number of younger relatives. The age structure of individual families reflects that of the population as a whole: both are ageing. With the advent of these new types of networks, people are faced with new dilemmas and dependencies for which society has not yet drawn up rules and routines (Hagestad, 1981; Riley & Riley, 1989, 1994). Kin relationships are often so complex that they are increasingly giving rise to conflicting loyalties. How should a child of divorced parents divide its attention between two bickering middle-aged parents, whose children should a remarried father take along to which family reunion, to what extent are the new and the former partners accepted by the family network?

The second development that has played a part in eroding kin relationships is individualisation (Hareven, 1994; Lasch, 1977). Certain macrostructural developments such as ongoing urbanisation and increased geographical mobility, changes in the labour market and the improved level of education are believed to have contributed to the shift towards a more individualistic society and are therefore felt to pose a potential threat to solidarity within kin relationships (Hammerström, 1993). Social norms have traditionally dictated that people need to show solidarity towards blood relations. These norms span a broad spectrum: they vary from the attention and support people are expected to give their elderly parents, to whether or not one should attend family reunions or a relative's birthday party. Solidarity used to be enforced by feelings of altruism towards one's relatives as well as by a certain sense of duty towards family members (Finch, 1989). The collective interest of the family has long prevailed over the desires and interests of individuals, and in certain ethnic groups this pattern still exists (Hareven, 1982; Vermeulen & Penninx, 1994). These norms have been eroded in recent decades and new norms have been established; this trend is generally subsumed under the term individualisation (Buchmann, 1989; Meyer, 1986, 1988). The central idea underlying this ideology is that people should stand on their own feet. An implication for kin relationships is, for example, that the elderly can no longer take the support they receive from relatives for granted, and that elderly relatives themselves now prefer to be less dependent on their families. Another concept underlying this ideology is that the formation of relationships, and the type of relationship people opt for, is, or should be, based on individual choice. People now tend to interact of their own free will and on the basis of mutual affection rather than out of a sense of obligation or duty. Research has shown, however, that a sense of obligation is still an important factor in family relationships, whereas achieved relationships, such as friends, tend to be based on mutual affection (Komter & Vollebergh, 1997). Having said that, a likely result of the process towards a more individualistic society will be that people will be less inclined to foster ties with family members if they derive little satisfaction from these relationships, and that friends and acquaintances will increasingly compete with relatives in people's social networks.

The two developments described above have made it more difficult for relatives to engender and continue to foster solidarity. Kin relationships have become more complex, and clearly defined norms and regulations have not yet been established for many of these new types of relationships. Despite this lack of clarity, however, more emphasis is now being placed on independence and individual choice in various realms of life, including people's kin relationships.

3.3.2 *The formation and dissolution of kin relationships*

An important aim of the research programme will be to closely monitor patterns of kin relationships, and to identify the latest trends soon after they set in. The examination of the formation and dissolution of kin relationships is less relevant than is that of their structure and complexity.

An interesting exercise would be, for example, to examine the number of people of a certain age belonging to one-, two-, three-, four- and five-generation families. Another issue relates to the fact that certain generations may be 'missing' either because couples have never had any children or because they have survived their children, thus breaking the continuity of lineage. Information about situations of this sort would provide insight into the number of people that may be 'caught' between obligations towards minor children and duties towards very old parents (Brody, 1981). It would also shed light on the number of people who have no intergenerational embeddedness whatsoever, such as childless couples whose parents have died (Connidis, 1989; Johnson & Troll, 1992).

Another issue would be to examine the geographical dispersion of family members. Information about the distance between family members does not only tell us more about the implications of migration, but also about the efforts which relatives need to make to stay in contact with one another (Hammel & Yarbrough, 1973; Smith, 1998).

Another possible issue that could be addressed, is the number of people of a certain age that have both stepfamilies and consanguineal relations. This information would provide insight into the number of people who have relatively extensive kinship networks (with various sets of brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents). It would also tell us more about the number of people who may face conflicting obligations and loyalties within the family (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Furstenberg, 1981; Johnson, 1988; Spitze et al., 1994).

The extent to which members of different family generations are in the same phase of life (such as a son who, like his father who remarried later in life, has a small child, or situations where both mother and daughter are widowed, or in which both father and son are retired) would be another interesting question. The importance of this question is that a 'regular' basis for intergenerational relationships is lacking. 'Regular' in this context means that the respective parties are embedded in different phases of life, and with the responsibilities and interests that go with them.

3.3.3 *How solidarity is expressed: patterns and dynamics*

The second question relates to the way in which kin relationships are given form and content. Which patterns can be discerned in the nature and degree of solidarity within kin relationships, and how does solidarity change during the course of people's lives? In order to answer this question, we shall address three types of solidarity: instrumental, social and emotional.

When addressing the issue of instrumental solidarity, the programme will focus on the way in which children support their parents in old age. This is a well-documented theme in the social sciences, but in view of its paramount importance, it will also be studied in the research programme (Mangen et al., 1988; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Roberts & Bengtson, 1991; Levitt et al., 1992). Various forms of support will be addressed: financial support, assistance with activities of daily life, help in the event of illness, etc. In so doing, the programme will provide insight into the implications of support for feelings of independence or dependence among both caregivers and those who receive care (Brody, 1985; Nolan et al., 1996). A less well-documented issue is instrumental support that is provided in the opposite direction: how, and to what extent, do parents help their non-co-resident children (Eggebeen, 1992; Klein Ikkink et al., in press). American research has shown that the exchange of care varies during the life course: a substantial amount of care is given to young adults; the amount of support received declines in middle age, but children do continue to provide care to their parents. Intergenerational reciprocity in support declines during the life course (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). The programme will pay special attention to the support offered by grandparents when members of the 'middle generation' face problems, for example following divorce (Johnson, 1988), or in combining family responsibilities and a job (Hochschild, 1997). Relatively little research has been conducted into

material transfers within families, and inheritance (De Regt, 1993; Soldo & Hill, 1993). Research into these issues has long been the exclusive domain of economics. A related question is the extent of intergenerational reciprocity in transfers of this sort. For example, are children who have received financial gifts from their parents more inclined to support their parents later in life (Henretta et al., 1977)? Possible exchange chains can be studied effectively with the aid of panel data and multi-actor data. Another important question is how people view these matters. Relatives may help one another out of altruism or a sense of duty, but exchange models may also have a rational basis (Antonji et al., 1992; Cox, 1987; Finch, 1989; Gouldner, 1960; Uehara, 1995; Komter & Vollebergh, 1997). In this light, it is interesting to study people's expectations towards each other. The answer to these questions provides insight into the degree to which rules regarding family roles are clearly defined (Rossi & Rossi, 1990).

The social dimension of solidarity is largely shaped by the amount of contacts relatives have. Apart from the frequency of contact, for example between brothers and sisters, between parents and their adult children and between grandparents and grandchildren, the social dimension of solidarity includes the nature of contact, such as shared leisure within kin relationships. So far, very little research has been done into the group of people who do not stay in touch with their relatives. The programme will take stock of the contacts people have and the reasons why people stay in contact with their relatives (Allan, 1979; Larson et al., 1986). Do they do this out of a sense of duty, for instrumental reasons (attending to business), because they enjoy it, or out of habit, for example to attend ritual events such as Christmas, birthdays or funerals?

The research programme will also address the issue of emotional solidarity. To what extent do people feel attachment to their relatives, how is this related to the biological distance to these relatives, and how does this change during the life course of the various relatives (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; Rossi & Rossi, 1990)? The programme will address both the positive aspects of kin relationships and negative experiences, including the way in which people deal with them (Rusbult, 1987). Are conflicts avoided or neglected? Or are people forgiving when it comes to their relatives and are they inclined to deal with differences of opinion in a constructive manner?

Here, too, it would be interesting to look into the way in which the various dimensions of solidarity are interconnected. To what extent do exchange chains span the various domains of solidarity? For example, is social solidarity shown by children towards their parents exchanged for instrumental solidarity from parent to child? Do parents who receive a great deal of instrumental support from their children try to redress or keep the balance in parent-child relationships by giving them strong emotional support (Van Tilburg, 1998)? Another interesting question would be whether the various dimensions of solidarity are complementary, or whether they compete with one another. For example, does instrumental solidarity stand in the way of emotional solidarity?

3.3.4 Relationships with other institutions

Kin relationships are bound up with various social institutions that have an impact on the manifestation of solidarity within these relationships, in particular with respect to instrumental exchanges (financial transfers, caregiving). A key issue is the nature of the relationship between government facilities and family support (Litwak, 1985; Soldo et al., 1989; Kohli, 1997). There is a lack of information about whether these formal and informal 'systems' reinforce each other, that is to say whether they support each other like 'communicating vessels'. Elderly parents, for example, may be able to provide financial support – either to uphold their status or out of feelings of altruism – to any of their children who are less well-off thanks to the guaranteed state incomes they receive. Alternatively, the two systems may substitute each other in the sense that the formal arrangements could make informal care redundant (Burgers, 1998; Komter et al., 1999). This issue is pivotal to the public debate about the provision of informal care: there appears to be some evidence that relatives tend to 'withdraw' from giving care to elderly family members given the availability of institutional care. Other areas in which social institutions come into play are laws of succession and tax regulations regarding material transfers (De Regt, 1993). It would be interesting to examine how legislation of this kind impacts solidarity within kin relationships.

3.3.5 *Causes and mechanisms*

The programme will seek to gain insight into the causes of differences in solidarity among various kinds of kin relationships. Once again, we shall try to identify the causes by tracing a number of general socio-structural and cultural trends in society.

The programme will first examine socio-structural factors such as differences in solidarity between various subcategories: differences between the better and the lesser educated, between people in urban and rural areas, and differences between rich and poor. When addressing kin relationships, specific attention will be given to demographic factors since they determine the structure of kinship networks, which in turn will influence the nature of the relationships within these networks. One issue that could be studied, for example, is the nature and degree of solidarity among members of small families compared with members of larger families (Uhlenberg & Cooney, 1995). An open question is whether people with small family networks are 'worse' off than people with large networks, or, conversely, whether people in small families have particularly strong ties with one another. The degree of solidarity among kin is determined by the complexity of family ties as well as by the size of the family network (Hagestad, 1981). For example, family networks that used to be separate are now becoming closely intertwined through divorce and remarriage, and this could give rise to conflicting loyalties within networks that stand in the way of solidarity (Riley, 1983).

This part of the programme will also study cultural factors, in particular the question as to how elements of the trend towards a more individualistic society affect kin relationships. Do people who cherish autonomy and individual freedom of choice have weaker bonds with family members, or is it mainly the nature of their relationships with kin that differs? One would, for example, expect these groups to place emphasis on emotional solidarity in kin relationships rather than on social or instrumental solidarity. The number of relatives with whom these people maintain contact is therefore likely to be smaller, yet the emotional bonds with the 'select' group of relatives with whom they associate are likely to be stronger.

Another cultural factor the programme will address extensively are the family norms and values of different ethnic groups in society (Vermeulen & Penninx, 1994). These groups are more likely to face new and unknown situations for which solutions need to be found than any other group in society. After all, within migrant families intergenerational relationships arise not only between people who live in different historical periods, but also between people who have their roots in different cultures: the culture of the country of origin, the culture at home and that outside the home in the host country. A new phenomenon in migrant families is the ageing trend (Tesser et al., 1998). Whilst the number of migrants aged 65 and older was negligible in the past decades, this group is now growing rapidly. When addressing the norms and values of ethnic minorities, attention should also be paid to the family norms and values of religious subgroups, both migrant and non-migrant.

3.3.6 *Social implications*

The programme will also seek to provide insight into the implications of kinship networks for the way in which people function within society. Once again, both subjective and objective aspects will be addressed. The key issue is whether strong kinship networks result in greater individual well-being, less loneliness, and more active participation in society. When looking at kinship networks, a number of specific questions come to the fore, such as the question whether families are a unifying force in the sense that they can bridge the gap between various cohorts. Families are, after all, one of the contexts where individuals who have their roots in different historical periods are able to meet and interact. The elderly give the younger generations a window on the past. The younger family members, in their turn, can keep the elderly informed about the lifestyles and mores of their time, and keep them abreast of new social, cultural and technological developments.

4 Financial and organisational framework of the research programme

In this final chapter, we put forward proposals for the organisational framework of the research programme and we set out details of the budget needed for its successful implementation.

4.1 Organisation of the research programme

The research programme aims to promote the scientific study of family sociology and demography in the Netherlands. In a report drawn up by the Social Science Council, entitled *New Perspectives for Family Sociology*, the Council underlines that a programme of this sort should focus on two separate goals. It should encourage the development of one or more centres of expertise that conduct top-quality sociological research into primary living arrangements, whilst at the same time integrating and coordinating research activities by scholars who work within and outside these centres. The programme aims to contribute in particular to the realisation of the second goal formulated by the Social Science Council (SWR), by providing a framework for research efforts by scholars specialised in this field. The first goal formulated by the SWR will be realised primarily by the investments which institutions are prepared to make within the framework of the programme that is to finance the data collection. To this end, Utrecht University and the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute have joined forces and have submitted a proposal as part of NWO's 'Investeren in Groot' Programme.

In our view, responsibility for the research programme should lie with a programme steering committee. The steering committee would be responsible for mapping out the areas of research to be covered in order to answer the key research questions of the programme and supervise its implementation. It would also ensure that the various research questions and types of family ties are adequately represented in the research programme as a whole. The members of the programme steering committee should have a clear affinity with the area of research and should represent a broad spectrum of relevant expertise and institutions.

Research carried out as part of the programme should meet high scientific quality standards. It should, at the same time, be relevant to society at large. Cooperation between scientists and representatives of major social organizations in the field of family issues is crucial in this respect. We propose that the contribution of civic society be guaranteed by including a number of (2 to 3) representatives of the social arena as advisory members (without voting rights) on the steering committee. A set-up of this sort would ensure that communication lines between the scientific community and civic society be kept as short as possible.

The programme steering committee would stimulate the transfer of knowledge and promote cooperation between the programme participants and other researchers in this field. It would do so by organising seminars on a regular basis (about 3 times a year). During these seminars, participants in the programme will discuss research plans and results. This approach would strengthen cohesion within the programme as a whole.

4.2 Budget required for the research programme

The research programme sets out a broad area of research that includes three types of questions relating to three types of family relationships. The description of the research questions in chapter 3 shows that there is scope for, and a need for a broad spectrum of research. This implies that an all-out effort will have to be made to provide satisfactory answers to the key research questions posed. An equitable division of attention and resources among the various research question and types of family relationships is vital. In our view, this will require the financing of about six fully-fledged research proposals for each type of family relationship. At the same time, resources should be made available for integrative research, focusing on solidarity within kinship networks as a whole and examining possible links between solidarity within various types of family relationships. Each research proposal will require funds totalling about NLG 0.3 million to finance their implementation by PhD students, or the appointment of post-docs for a period of three years. Another possibility would be to earmark

part of the funds available for the project for so-called replacement subsidies with which the teaching responsibilities of senior research associates could be bought out.

In addition to the resources needed to finance the research proposals, funds will have to be set aside for the organisation of the seminar series and conferences at which the research results will be exchanged and presented to a wider public. Two conferences will be planned for each theme. The programme will be closed by a conference at which the main results will be presented.

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