Better safe than sorry?
Quantitative and qualitative aspects of child-father relationships after parental separation in cases involving intimate partner violence

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Intimate partner violence (IPV) and child abuse have profound effects on children’s lives. In addition to creating a frightening situation for the child in the short term, they may negatively affect children’s well-being for years to come. Many families that live with IPV eventually split up, and after separation most children reside with their mother. However, most of them also stay in contact with their father (who in the cases examined here is also a perpetrator of violence in the family). It is sometimes simply assumed that such contact is in the child’s best interest, despite there being no evidence that the violent parent has changed his behaviour.

The focus of this thesis is on showing how complex this contact becomes when we add norms and ideals of the family to the equation. Different aspects of post-separation child–father contact in cases involving IPV are examined, such as: how children perceive their violent father’s care, how different factors impact on the amount and type of contact, and how different children’s well-being is affected by contact with a (previously) violent father. The thesis discusses the knotty problem of whether, and if so under what circumstances, child–father contact after IPV truly is in the best interest of the child.