UNIVERSITY OF WEST LONDON
The Career University

UWL REPOSITORY

repository.uwl.ac.uk

Parental Alienation – What do we know, and what do we (urgently) need to know? A narrative review.

Hine, Ben ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9732-4631 (2024) Parental Alienation – What do we know, and what do we (urgently) need to know? A narrative review. Partner Abuse, 15 (3). ISSN 1946-6560

/10.1891/PA-2023-0015

This is the Submitted Version of the final output.

UWL repository link: https://repository.uwl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10667/

Alternative formats: If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact: open.research@uwl.ac.uk

Copyright: Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy: If you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact us at open.research@uwl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Rights Retention Statement:

Parental Alienation – What do we know, and what do we (urgently) need to know? A narrative review.

B. Hine J M Hamel

Abstract

Research on behaviour seeking to disrupt, deny, or negatively impact the parent-child relationship, sometimes labelled as Parental Alienation (PA), has burgeoned in recent years. Despite this proliferation, the theoretical and practical conceptualisation of PA is still a highly controversial topic, un-helped by the potential outpacing of academic knowledge on PA in relation to its application in socio-legal and clinical contexts. Confusion and controversy persist despite several recent reviews seeking to provide clarity on different areas of PA-related discourse (e.g., its effect on alienated children). The current narrative review, therefore, sought to synthesise learnings from those reviews (most of which were published between 2020 and 2022), with subsequently published work, in the most comprehensive and contemporaneous overview of PA to date. As a narrative review, there were no specific inclusion criteria, other than a limitation to English manuscripts and literature from the last ten years. Snowballing was also utilized, whereby reference lists were used to identify further papers for inclusion. The resulting review outlines current understandings of a) the key areas of controversy relating to PA, including how it is defined, its use in family court proceedings, and recommendations on intervention, b) how PA is enacted, by whom, and in what contexts, and c) how PA impacts on parents, children, and other family members. Crucially, urgent recommendations for further research directions are then made, particularly in relation to legal applications and therapeutic intervention.

Keywords: Parental Alienation, Domestic Violence and Abuse, Family Court, Intervention

Introduction

The past decade has seen a substantial rise in research seeking to examine so-called 'Parental Alienation' (PA). It is widely acknowledged as a controversial area, due largely to a) the complexity of identifying and defining the behaviours involved, b) the potentially problematic origins of the term itself, and c) evidence concerning the potentially misguided, erroneous, and vexatious use of PA claims within particular settings (i.e., family courts). As a result, substantial efforts are now being made to more accurately define PA, examine the relationship between PA and other forms of violence, explore the impact of PA, and further explore and critique its use in legal and therapeutic contexts. Indeed, the evolution of the PA literature body within such a short space of time (Harman, Warshak, et al., 2022) has arguably added to potential confusion around the topic, with problematic origins potentially still 'tainting' more legitimate recent empirical research. This narrative review, therefore, seeks to bring together a contemporaneous profile of current PA research across a wide variety of areas and output types, to provide clear directions for future research and inquiry.

In undertaking this narrative literature review, the author was interested in reviewing a broad scope of literature and evidence sources, and therefore, they did not apply search criteria commonly used in systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and scoping reviews. This was also deemed especially appropriate for what is essentially still a 'blossoming' area of inquiry (Harman, Bernet, et al., 2019). Rather, the author conducted an extensive search of peer-reviewed qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method manuscripts, theoretical papers, dissertations, reviews, and commentaries, as well as grey literature across multiple databases (Cochrane, MEDLINE, CINAHL, Embase, PsychINFO, and Google Scholar). They also used a snowballing approach that involved reviewing reference lists of relevant articles to identify additional literature. Literature was limited to English only, and there was a particular focus on literature produced in the last ten years. Key search terms included, but were not limited to, "parental alienation," "parental alienation prevalence," "parental alienation custody," "parental alienation parents," and "parental alienation child(ren)" as well as variations of these terms which were used to ensure exhaustive search results. Terms detailing identically or similarly described behaviours were also used (including "strategic mother-child separation" and "post-separation coercive control"). The author adopted a critical perspective to then evaluate and synthesize the literature; this approach did not produce a quantitative account of articles as this was not the intent given the purpose of the review. It should also be noted that, wherever possible, the author has sought to not replicate the work of several recent reviews (Harman, Warshak, et al., 2022; Lee-Maturana et al., 2022; Marques et al., 2020; Mercer, 2022d; Miralles et al., 2023; Templer et al., 2017), but rather incorporate these distinct reviews into a more holistic discourse on this area of research.

1. Conceptualising and Contesting Parental Alienation (PA)

Before assessing any evidence on the experiences and impact of PA, the controversy around the term must be acknowledged and addressed. Indeed, one of the most common criticisms of this area is that there is no satisfactory definition or conceptualisation of the phenomenon to begin with, and that language in this area may actually be 'part of the problem' (Kleinman, 2021). As such, there is still fierce debate over both the fundamental existence of PA and its scientific standing. The central positions of this debate and a contemporary reading of it are provided below.

1.1 Defining PA

As alluded to, there are, and have been, several definitions of PA, all of which coalesce around central tenets but have slight variations of focus. For example, most definitions of PA focus on the *result* or *outcome* of coercive or 'alienating' behaviours which cause a misalignment between the child and the alienated parent (Hine & Hine, 2022). For example, Harman, Bernet, et al. (2019) describe it as "a psychological condition in which a child allies himself or herself strongly with an alienating (or preferred) parent and rejects a relationship with the alienated (or targeted) parent without legitimate justification" (p. 212). More recent definitions are even broader and less focused on pathology, defining PA as "a situation whereby one parent has a negative influence on a child's relationship with the other parent and makes a deliberate effort to intervene and prevent the relationship from developing/continuing or improving" (McCarten, 2022, p. 2) or "the process where a child's relationship with one parent (the targeted parent) is negatively influenced by the actions of the other parent (the alienating parent)" (Haines et al., 2020, p. 3). Some definitions have begun to explicitly acknowledge so-called 'parental alienating behaviours' (or PABs). Indeed, Rowlands (2019) makes the important distinction between PA as an *outcome* and PABs as the *process,* which is described as "activities that contribute to the child's rejection of the alienated parent" (p. 317) (see 1.3.2). Most commonly, however, definitions remain focused on the outcome of PA, as the process itself can vary greatly.

In a recent study, Bernet et al. (2022) attempted to provide the fullest definition of PA yet – as "one type of contact refusal, when a child— typically whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict separation or divorce—allies strongly with one parent and resists and rejects contact and/or a relationship (i.e., contact refusal) with the other parent without legitimate justification. PA refers to the actions and attitudes manifested by the child. PA is brought on by the alienating behaviors of the parent with whom the child is aligned" (p. 5). It was suggested by participants in this study that definitions which include contact refusal, without legitimate reason and as a result of alienating behaviours, are the most robust and clear. Therefore, at present, the Bernet et al. definition appears the clearest and most comprehensive in describing PA.

It is important at this point to also acknowledge so-called 'Parental Alienation Syndrome' (PAS), a controversial psychological dysfunctional dynamic that, according to the theories of US physician Richard Gardner, is activated in minor children involved in both parental separation and divorce (defined as 'conflictual') and in contexts of alleged intra-household and family violence (Gardner, 1992). Since this time, mixed evidence has emerged regarding the legitimacy of PAS, with serious questions arising regarding its validity and the categorisation of this relational dynamic as a psychiatric disorder (Haines et al., 2020; McCarten, 2022; Meier, 2009). Indeed, there also exist serious questions surrounding Gardner's views on 'atypical sexuality'[1] and paedophilia[2], including in relation to PAS (Berman & Weisinger, 2022; Dallam, 1998). Even very recent research is split on this issue, with some studies finding support for the specifically syndrome-rooted conceptualisation of PA(S) (Perrotta, 2021), and others robustly refuting such a conceptualisation (Lubit, 2019). However, despite a continuing presence of advocacy on both sides, researchers in this area at large, particularly recently, have moved away from PAS and towards PA (Haines et al., 2020; McCarten, 2022). This has been in recognition of PA as a pattern of behaviour, rather than a pathology, and in attempts to distance current empirically robust research from its supposedly 'problematic' origins. That is not to say that there is no space for clinical consideration in relation to the outcomes and impact of the PA process. For example, there are arguments to include 'Parental Alienation Relational Problem' in the 'Other Conditions That May Be a Focus of Clinical Attention' section of the DSM-5-TR (Bernet & Baker, 2022), due to the evidenced impact on alienated children and the necessity for intervention (see Section 2). Regardless, researchers now appear focused on defining, measuring, and identifying PA, rather than 'diagnosing' PAS.

1.2 The Scientific Status & Application of PA

Despite and perhaps as a function of the transition from PAS towards PA, questions around the very existence of PA and its scientific status have been repeatedly raised. For example, McCarten (2022) has identified 'ten great myths' relating to PA, all of which are subject to ongoing and fierce debate, including a) that a child will not unreasonably reject their mother, b) that alienation is temporary and/or a natural reaction to family separation, and c) that an alienated child functioning well in other areas of life does not require intervention. Many of these assertions are covered and debunked in Bernet's work around PA misinformation, and yet still persist (Bernet, 2020, 2023; Bernet & Xu, 2023). Evidence for the ongoing fervour of the debate is highlighted most clearly by the release of three books within the last two years (all from the same publisher), two defending the scientific nature of PA research and its

[1] Sexual preferences which fall outside of established cultural norms

[2] A sexual perversion in which an adult or adolescent experiences a primary sexual attraction to prepubescent children

relationship to the law (Haines et al., 2020; Lorandos & Bernet, 2020) and one robustly refuting it (Mercer & Drew, 2022). Some of the most prolific work 'against' PA is provided by Milchman, who has routinely questioned the scientific status of research in this area (Milchman, 2019; Milchman et al., 2020a, 2020b), arguing that there is a) a fundamental lack of empirically rigorous research on the topic, b) an overapplication of the term PA when there is any contact refusal, c) frequent erroneous application of the concept, for example in the legal system, and d) significant controversy surrounding 'treatments' (all of which are supposedly exacerbated by the lack of a clear definition). Indeed, there is no greater area of contention than the application of PA within family court processes, especially when claims of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) are also present (Mercer & Drew, 2022). There is particular difficulty around then recommending appropriate and safe intervention in cases where claims of PA are upheld (Pollack & Reiter, 2021), fuelled by a supposed lack of reliable evidence on the efficacy of existing interventions (Berman & Weisinger, 2022). A more detailed attempt at summarising these specific areas of debate is provided below.

1.2.1. PA & Family Court

The use of PA in family breakdown litigation has a long and complex history (Lorandos & Bernet, 2020; Mercer & Drew, 2022), which has included complicated debate on admissibility (Lorandos, 2020; Mercer, 2022c), its use in cases also involving domestic violence (Meier, 2022), how such applications may have a gendered element (Drew, 2022), and how previous conceptualisations (i.e., PAS) are being replaced by PA (Barnett, 2020; Doughty & Drew, 2022; Doughty & Rathus, 2022), all of which are inter-related.

At present, in the United States, several researchers have argued that the greatest issue is that claims of PA (when made by fathers) are largely false, and are only brought to counter 'genuine' claims of abusive behaviours from mothers (Jaffe-Geffner, 2021; Meier, 2020; Meier et al., 2022a, 2022b) and that children are too frequently transferred to abusive parents (again, mainly fathers) or subject to joint custody and unsupervised visitation as a result of alienation claims (Silberg & Dallam, 2019). This is a position reflected by Meier and Dickson (2017) who argue that the court system is structured to 'invisiblise' male violence from custody disputes, Gutowski and Goodman (2020) who demonstrated that survivor-mothers seeking custody had revictimizing experiences during court processes, and Milchman (2022) who describes how alienation claims and the tenets of this concept fundamentally undermine claims of abuse (particularly sexual victimisation). Meier et al. (2022a, b) conclude that whilst PA does exist, and is admissible, this is only the case when it is presented based on fact and evidence, not when packaged into a 'quasi-scientific' concept (although it is not clear how this is delineated). Others have been equally explicit in warning against the danger of false positive identifications of alienation in custody disputes, and the necessity for evaluators to understand the complexities surrounding alienation (Warshak, 2020b). The positioning of PA as a harmful

legal tool utilised by abusive fathers to dismiss and minimise mothers claims of abuse was also reflected in a report in 2023 to the United Nations by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women (Alsalem, 2023). Additional work from the US has further focused on issues relating to 'expert' PA witnesses being unreliable and/or unregulated (Myers & Mercer, 2022; Rao, 2021), with little work existing to provide any clarity on this issue.

In contrast, other large-scale case reviews draw opposite conclusions and speak positively about the evolving role of PA within the court system (suggesting that Warshak's warning above is already being heeded). Specifically, Lorandos (2020) identifies that, whilst it is true PA has become increasingly introduced into custody cases over time, this is the result of welcomed recognition of the issue, and of expert input from experienced jurists, litigators, and mental health professionals. Importantly, in that review, no cases were identified where children were transferred to an abusive parent. Indeed, Harman and Lorandos (2021) have robustly criticized past work on both conceptual and methodological grounds (specifically Meier, 2020), for example, by highlighting that coding procedures are not clearly outlined, or that gendered assumptions appeared to be made within the language used to describe cases and 'typical' case paradigms. They also found that whilst parents accused of alienation were likely to lose parenting time and custody, this could happen to both mothers and fathers, and there were no losses or decreases in custody found when the accusing parent was also found to be abusive (Harman & Lorandos, 2021). Additionally, Sharples et al. (2023) recently observed that parents who had a claim of PA upheld against them were also more likely to have a claim of DVA upheld, suggesting that PA is part of a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour by the same individual, rather than a rebuttal. Moreover, the report on this issue presented by the Special Rapporteur has been comprehensively criticised for its approach, conclusions, inaccuracies, and contradictions (Aichenbaum, Bernet, Brzosowski, et al., 2023).

Work from Canada also reflects this dichotomy, which is unsurprising considering previous observations that 'alienation ideology' has presented in legal systems 'across the globe' (Zaccour, 2020). Qualitative evidence suggests, for example, that women in domestic violence refuges are fearful of raising and pursuing allegations of abuse against their male partners in specialist services and court settings, as PA will be counter-claimed in an attempt to delegitimise their position as abuse victims (Lapierre & Côté, 2016). This is both supported and refuted by the limited case review work available, which has simultaneously suggested that claims of domestic violence (largely on the part of mothers) are both likely (Sheehy & Boyd, 2020) and not likely (Paquin-Boudreau et al., 2022) to be dismissed when alienation was claimed. Ironically, the conclusions of both pieces state that greater awareness of alienation, broader violence, and their relationship was needed among court professionals.

Work from the UK is much more limited, partly due to the inaccessible nature of the country's family court system. However, some small scale qualitative research is available,

which again suggests that women fear raising domestic violence claims in anticipation of an alienation counterclaim (Birchall & Choudhry, 2022). Moreover, in her review of a limited number of published judgements, Barnett (2020) further argues that, due to lobbying of various 'fathers' rights' groups, claims of PA within the court system have become too powerful, and that courts are too easily persuaded by such claims when made. Conversely, qualitative research also exists on men's extremely poor and prejudiced experiences of the family court system (Bates & Hine, 2023; Hine & Bates, 2022; Hine & Hine, 2022; Hine & Roy, 2023), in which they suggest that courts fundamentally devalue their role as fathers, rarely award any level of custody, and ignore their claims of alienation and domestic violence from mothers (Bates & Hine, 2023).

None of the attempts to explore or clarify this issue have been helped by researchers presenting this matter as fundamentally gendered, with mothers being portrayed as making 'genuine' DVA claims on one side and fathers being presented as making 'false' PA claims on the other. Indeed, there is no doubt whatsoever that *some* fathers (and mothers) will bring erroneous PA claims to court to enact further abuse on their partners and that DVA claims by *some* mothers (and fathers) are also erroneous. However, at present, there is an extreme lack of understanding of a) how and when claims of either PA or DVA are brought forward, b) how the legitimacy and outcomes of such claims are determined, and c) whether these determinations are accurate and in line with the current empirical understanding of PA.

1.2.2 Treatment & Interventions for PA

If a claim of PA (in whatever form it is argued or presented) *is* upheld as a result of family court proceedings, the question then arises as to appropriate intervention (Warshak, 2020a), both legally and psychologically. Issues relating to legal options were explored above, with challenges around residency transfers highlighted. The evidence regarding psychological intervention is also split and is covered in several recent reviews. For example, Templer et al.'s (2017) systematic review found evidence from ten studies that changes in custodial or residential arrangements in favour of the targeted parent are effective in ameliorating PA. They also noted that specialized family therapy addressing the alienation is helpful in restoring family relationships and family functioning and that a coordinated approach from therapists and legal practitioners is important in resolving PA. This positioning that evidence for effective intervention exists despite the complexities involved is echoed by other syntheses of available research (Haines et al., 2020). Moreover, Harman et al. (2021) argue that with more evidence on the nature of family systems and relationships where alienation is present comes clearer avenues for effective intervention.

Other reviews are much more damning, principally Mercer's 2022 review examining six specific interventions: *Family Bridges, Family Reflections Reunification Program, High Road to Reunification, Overcoming Barriers Family Camp, Transitioning Families Therapeutic*

Reunification Model, and *Turning Points for Families* (Mercer, 2022d). This review concluded that many program tenets are questionable, and that outcome studies are too weakly designed and implemented to provide evidence of the programmes' effectiveness. These conclusions are supported by Trane et al. (2022) and Barnett et al. (2022) in their syntheses and work with those referred to these programmes and by other critiques of specific programmes (*Turning Points for Families* and *Overcoming Barriers Family Camp*, Andreopoulos & Wexler, 2022; and *Building Family Bridges*, Avalle et al., 2022).

As above in section 1.3.1, it appears that the central challenge in this area is the lack of robust, reliable, evaluative data. Indeed, Haines et al. (2020) rightly conclude that whilst preliminary evidence exists in support of several interventions, more robust evaluation is needed. In this sense, the two opposing schools likely have more in common than is often stated, as Mercer essentially draws a similar conclusion. A key difference, however, springs from a variation in the belief of PA as a valid and scientific concept, and whether children do indeed reject parents with whom they previously had healthy attachments for any reasons other than abuse or neglect (Champion, 2022; Mercer, 2022a, 2022b). Indeed, returning a child to an abusive parent is obviously likely to have negative consequences (Chester, 2022), as is reported by children who have lived with an abusive parent (Lapierre et al., 2022). However, if PA *is* accepted as a damaging form of abuse in its own right, then the outcomes of leaving a child with an alienating parent could well be viewed as just as damaging (Haines et al., 2020). It is therefore necessary to examine the most recent evidence available which suggests that PA is indeed a scientifically supported phenomenon worthy of our attention.

1.3 Tackling the Controversy: Critical Recent Developments

As with any research area dealing with the complexities of interpersonal violence, it is unlikely that many of the areas of contention outlined above will be easily or quickly addressed or resolved. However, it appears that all parties agree that robust empirical evidence is key to doing just that, as is open dialogue between those with opposing views. Indeed, in response to the controversy surrounding PA, several lines of inquiry have already proliferated, and are outlined below.

1.3.1 A Clearer and More Robust Definition

One of the central arguments against PA, as outlined in section 1.1, is the lack of a clear definition. Indeed, the generation of a clear and comprehensive definition for such a complex issue was always going to be, and has been, challenging. However, Bernet et al.'s definition (2022), which positions PA as a type of contact refusal that occurs without a legitimate reason and is the result of alienating behaviours is the most developed and useful at present. However, it is arguably one thing to attempt to define a concept, and another entirely for that definition to be recognised and accepted by important groups (i.e., custody evaluators). In their study, Bernet et al. (2022) sought to establish the level of agreement for

various definitions, including that of PA, finding almost 80% agreement with the definition provided. This suggests that, as of very recently, useful and well-recognised definitions of PA do exist and should be used consistently in future work.

1.3.2 Parental Alienating Behaviours (PABs)

One of the responses to confusion over what constitutes PA was to instead focus in more detail on the *behaviours* and the *process* of PA alongside the *outcome.* Initially, this decision only exacerbated the issue, as thousands of alienating behaviours have been identified and catalogued (Harman, Biringen, et al., 2016; Harman et al., 2018; Harman & Matthewson, 2020; Verrocchio et al., 2018), which (justly) further fuelled discourse that PA is thus ill-defined and that 'just about anything can be labelled as PA'. However, in refinement of the list of 11 categories provided by Baker and Darnall (2006), Bernet et al. (2022) now provide 17 specific behaviours, adapted from Freeman (2020), they are: Bad-mouthing the rejected parent, limiting the child's contact with the rejected parent, interfering with the child's communications with the rejected parent, limiting mention of the rejected parent, withholding approval when the child shows an interest in the rejected parent, telling the child that the rejected parent does not love them, allowing the child to choose between their parents, creating the impression that the rejected parent is dangerous, forcing the child to reject the alienated parent, confiding in the child about adult topics, asking the child to spy on the rejected parent, asking the child to keep secrets from the rejected parent, referring to the rejected parent by their first name, referring to a stepparent as "Mom" or "Dad", withholding medical, social, or academic information from the rejected parent, changing the child's name to remove association with the rejected parent, and undermining the authority of the rejected parent. Crucially, it is now also made clear in this revised list that *several* of these behaviours must co-occur to constitute PA (see 1.3.3 below).

Bernet et al.'s recent study with custody evaluators (2022) provides robust consensus on what alienating behaviours are, as well as agreement on some of the specific examples above. In this study, PABs were defined as "the activities of the alienating parent, which contribute to the child's unjustified contact refusal of the other parent such as: denigrating the other parent; limiting the child's contact with the other parent; allowing the child to choose between their parents; creating the impression the other parent is dangerous and unloving; etc." (p. 5), which achieved over 90% agreement between evaluators.

A further recent clarification as to the nature of PABs has been made in distinguishing between different 'levels' of alienation, in response to criticisms that previous definitions of PA were too definitive and represented only an 'extreme' outcome. Arguably, this is also partly in response to the increased focus on process rather than outcome, and that PABs are enacted over time and often progress from milder to more severe forms (as is common in other forms of abuse). Specifically, McCarten (2022) has distinguished between mild (e.g., denigration,

criticism), moderate (e.g., guilt at seeing targeted parent), and severe PABs (e.g., abduction, false allegations), with these levels supported by Bernet et al.'s study at an 85% agreement rate (2022).

There is also now clear consideration of the fact that alienating behaviours are not considered to be one-time events; but instead, are enacted over time (Verrocchio et al., 2018) and can occur both pre- and post-separation, and often within a wider suite of abusive behaviours (Bates & Hine, 2023; Lysova et al., 2023). It is worth noting here that many of the behaviours listed above could readily be categorised as verbal or emotional abuse, psychological abuse, and coercive control. This has prompted comprehensive and robust arguments for positioning PA as a form of family violence and DVA (Haines et al., 2020; Harman et al., 2018; McCarten, 2022), though it should be noted that this positioning is contested (Mercer, 2021). Some authors have gone further, identifying PA as a form of child abuse (Isailă & Hostiuc, 2022; Kruk, 2018; von Boch-Galhau, 2021). Indeed, there is evidence available which directly aligns both the processes and the outcomes of PA to various forms of 'traditional' DVA (e.g., emotional abuse; Harman et al., 2018). Moreover, recent research has shown how a) alienated parents describe PA as family violence (Bates & Hine, 2023; Lee-Maturana et al., 2022), b) PA occurs alongside and as part of other forms of DVA (i.e., coercive control; Bates & Hine, 2023), and c) research traditionally examining experiences of DVA either 'discovers' alienating behaviours (Bates, 2019, 2020; Lysova et al., 2023) or is researching the phenomenon under a different label (Monk & Bowen, 2021). Moreover, recent research by Harman et al. (2021) and Grubb et al. (2023) has demonstrated how power dynamics within relationships where PA is occurring mirror the imbalance of power seen in intimate terrorism (see Johnson, 2008) especially when the alienating parent had primary or sole custody (Harman et al., 2021). It would, therefore, preliminarily appear that positioning PA as a form of DVA is appropriate.

1.3.3 Measuring PA

With greater clarification as to what PA is and how it is enacted, several measures now exist to assess these behaviours, contrary to discourse suggesting otherwise (Freeman, 2020). Many of these measures are mentioned in Harman, Warshak, et al.'s review (2022), including the Rowlands Parental Alienation Scale (RPAS; Rowlands, 2019, 2020), the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ; Rohner & Ali, 2020), and the Parental Alienation Questionnaire (PAQ; Sîrbu et al., 2021). Other international scales, such as the ZICAP II Scale in Chile have also received preliminary validation (Zicavo Martínez et al., 2021). Indeed, it can be argued that we are now in a position similar to that of the so-called 'mainstream' DVA sector, in that several viable measures, each robust in their reliability and with valid critiques, exist for use (Bowen, 2011). Four factors have been identified that are common across all measures: a previously positive relationship between the alienated parent

and child, a lack of abuse or neglect, the presence of PABs, and manifestations of PA in the child (Harman, Warshak, et al., 2022). An additional factor (that the child manifests contact resistance or refusal) is included in Bernet's recent 'five-factor model' (Bernet & Greenhill, 2022), which has demonstrated significant reliability as a tool for the assessment of PA (Morrison & Ring, 2023). Taken together, these studies suggest that, very recently, reliable measures have been produced to accurately assess for the presence of PA and, crucially, to delineate this from other types of contact refusal.

1.3.4 Delineating PA from Other Contact Refusal

A critical facet of the definition and measurement tools provided by Bernet et al. (2022) is that contact refusal occurs for an 'illegitimate' reason. This has prompted PA researchers to be clearer on delineating so-called 'illegitimate' reasons why a child will refuse contact and to outline so-called 'legitimate' or 'genuine' reasons why a child may reject or have a strained relationship with a parent, for the purpose of clarifying which circumstances do and do not, therefore, constitute PA.

The two terms that have emerged from this discourse are 'estrangement/justifiable estrangement' and 'hybrid cases' (McCarten, 2022). Justifiable estrangement describes a situation whereby a child rejects a parent for an 'appropriate' reason, including betrayal and major issues with lack of trust or emotional closeness (Linden & Sillence, 2021). Children in this situation generally describe not missing their estranged parents. One of the most common reasons for justified estrangement is the presence of abuse (for example domestic or sexual violence) on the part of the estranged parent, which is widely recognised as damaging to the child. Moreover, when claims of alienation are made in the context of abuse, this constitutes one of the more complicated situations that can arise, especially when abusive parents sometimes claim alienation falsely to mitigate their own abuse (see section 1.3.1). Such situations constitute so-called 'hybrid' cases, where it is asserted that there are both legitimate and illegitimate reasons for rejection (McCarten, 2022). These cases represent some of the most complex situations for evaluators to process and are made even more complicated by observations that abused children do still attach to an abusive parent, and that the behavioural manifestations of victimisation in children are thus often hard to detect (Sullivan & Lasley, 2010).

In Bernet et al.'s study (2022), there were high levels of consensus found for these terms also. Estrangement was described as "a child's justified contact refusal of a parent, such as due to a history of abuse, neglect, or severely deficient parenting" (p. 6) which received over 85% agreement, and hybrid cases described as "a family situation in which a child is strongly aligned with one parent against the other and the underlying explanation involves features of both alienation and estrangement" (p. 7) which received over 81% agreement. Crucially, Bernet et al. (2022) did note that many respondents highlighted that what counts as

'legitimate' is ambiguous and thus a clear determination of alienation versus estrangement is often hard to achieve. Indeed, there are now several methods for delineating different types of contact refusal cases, outlined in more detail in 1.3.4, suggesting that distinctions are clearer than previously argued.

1.3.5 Reaching Critical Mass on Scientific Status

More broadly, and despite the ongoing and largely theoretical work of authors such as Mercer and Milchmann, several reviews have now provided robust and definitive empirical evidence firmly *for* the overall scientific status of PA, not least Harman et al.'s review in 2022 which stated, "It is no longer tenable to dismiss the field as lacking in scientific status" (p. 16). Moreover, there have now been comprehensive and scathing reviews of work seeking to challenge PA, for example the 2023 review by several academics of Myers & Mercer's book (Aichenbaum, Bernet, Cedervall, et al., 2023). There are therefore now several reviews, including those aforementioned in the introduction to this review such as Miralles and Marques which have demonstrated that it is fundamentally *no longer tenable* to label PA itself or it's associated research body as 'pseudoscientific'.

1.4 Summary

As such, it is clear that PA remains (and some would say unjustly) a highly controversial area, and that arguments against the scientific validity of PA were perhaps previously legitimate. However, the recent and ever-growing research presented above suggests that great leaps have been made in providing an empirically sound basis for describing the phenomenon of PA, including how to measure it, and its relationship to other forms of contact refusal and frameworks of violence (Baker, 2020). And so, whilst theorisation (as with any discipline) is ongoing, and whilst many areas are worthy of significant further attention (as discussed in section 3), claims that PA is ill-defined and unsupported by empirical work, however, appear *resoundingly defunct*.

2. PA - Experiences and Impact

With, and in contribution to the seeming resolution of the scientific status of PA, and whilst some issues remain (i.e., its application in legal and clinical settings), there have also been significant leaps in understanding the experiences and impact of PA and PABs on various groups, including alienated parents, alienated children, and the wider family. Moreover, attempts to understand and profile perpetrators have also provided some preliminary findings, detailed below.

2.1 Alienating Parents

One of the key challenges in conducting research with alienat*ing* parents is that they are reluctant to report they have done so, often motivated by desires to hide negative behaviour, but also through potentially distorted perceptions (i.e., that they are not acting in an abusive manner at all; Haines et al., 2020; McCarten, 2022). This challenge of conducting

research with alienating parents has led to some difficulty in defining characteristics of alienating parents, such as prevalence of a particular gender or specific personality traits. Some information on alienating parents' characteristics is available, however. Research to date suggests that there are no differences in the likelihood of being an alienating parent based on gender (e.g., Harman, Leder-Elder, et al., 2016; Harman et al., 2019), though there are differences in perceptions of these behaviours by gender (i.e., it is judged to be worse when enacted by fathers than mothers, Harman et al., 2016). There are also several personality characteristics associated with alienating parents (e.g., lacking in self-control, lacking in boundaries, Harman et al., 2022), as well as findings that alienating parents may have Cluster B (i.e., personality disorders, e.g., narcissistic, or borderline personality disorder) or mood disorders (e.g., bipolar; Harman et al., 2022). Further, research shows that alienated parents might be motivated by revenge and an inability to let go (Haines et al., 2020; McCarten, 2022).

In 2021 and 2022, Roma and colleagues provided further robust psychological assessment of alienating parents using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2; Butcher et al., 2001). In one study, they assessed mothers involved in custody disputes and found to have perpetrated alienating behaviours in comparison to mothers involved in disputes and not found to have perpetrated PA, concluding that alienating mothers presented higher moral virtue and extroversion, and were more vulnerable to interpersonal stress and unsuccessful self-representation (though it should be noted that this could be a trauma-related response to previous abuse; Roma et al., 2021). In a second study, they compared mothers and fathers by assessing 41 couples engaged in PA versus 39 control couples, finding that mothers who were classified as alienating presented a faking-good defensive profile, denied hostile and negative impulses, blamed others for their problems, and displayed excessive sensitivity. Conversely, fathers who were classified as targets of alienating behaviours displayed chronic depressive states, social isolation, and interpersonal conflict (Roma et al., 2022). Across both papers, the authors argued for a) more research on alienating parents (with the analysis of custody cases presented as a viable avenue to do so) and b) a rapid personality assessment of parents involved in child custody cases to help identify PA more quickly, and for the benefit of the child.

2.2 Alienated Parents

In their 2022 systematic review, Harman, Warshak, et al. provided a clear overview of the experiences and impact of PA by alienated parents. Indeed, parents listed significant and wide-ranging negative impacts, including anxiety, depression, stress, physical symptoms, and feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, and being socially isolated (Harman, Warshak, et al., 2022). Moreover, several studies have specifically examined the relationship between alienation and these outcomes in parents (e.g., Verrocchio et al., 2019). Lee-Maturana et al.

summarised ten key findings from their previous work (which was included in the Harman, Warshak et al. review), namely that: more research is required on parents' experiences; there are several definitions of PA known to parents (see section 1.1 above); parents strongly identified PA as family violence; child abduction is a PAB; targeted parents are active in attempts to see their children; there are a variety of alienators; they experienced disenfranchised grief and ambiguous loss; they experienced sadness, distress, frustration, anger, guilt, and shame; there was a risk of serious psychological difficulties, including suicidal ideation; and that they used a variety of mechanisms to cope with PA (Lee-Maturana et al., 2022). This summation provides a clear and comprehensive review of the profundity of the impact of alienating behaviours on targeted parents, arguably positioning PA as an urgent health and mental health issue.

In studies inclusive of both mothers and fathers, such as the work by Lee-Maturana et al. above, few gendered differences in experiences and/or impact have been identified (Harman, Warshak, et al., 2022). This includes work conducted on parents' experiences of PA during the COVID pandemic in the UK (Burhai et al., 2022) and South Africa (Viljoen, 2021). However, some scholars have recently chosen to focus on the experiences of fathers, due to their potentially elevated vulnerability to alienating behaviours as the parents most likely to live outside of the home following separation (i.e., the non-resident parent, NRP). Indeed, recent work by Bates and Hine has highlighted the gendered vulnerabilities of men to PA due to a) the high likelihood of being the NRP, b) prejudicial stereotypes relating to fatherhood, and c) invisibilisation associated with additional IPV victimisation (Bates & Hine, 2023; Hine & Bates, 2022; Lysova et al., 2023). Further work holistically examining fathers' experiences of family breakdown reflects these findings, highlighting that men feel that, following breakdown, they are both incidentally and purposefully erased from their children's lives, sometimes with the aid of various institutions (e.g., family courts; Hine & Roy, 2023). Importantly, the work on men's experiences of PA above has highlighted a greatly elevated risk of suicidal ideation and suicide completion, a finding supported by other theoretical work on this specific relationship (Sher, 2015a, 2017), and on men's elevated risk of suicide following family breakdown more broadly (i.e., nine times more likely than women; Evans et al., 2016; Scourfield & Evans, 2014; Sher, 2015b).

Interestingly, there is also increasing examination of mothers' experiences, though these were not captured in Harman, Warshak, et al.'s review (2022), largely due to linguistic division. Specifically, many studies examining mothers' experiences do not explicitly use the term 'parental alienation', even when describing behaviours which constitute PABs, instead using other terms, such as 'coercive control' or 'strategic mother-child separation'. In the case of the former term, several studies have explored women's experiences of coercively controlling behaviour where a former male partner will target, undermine, and sabotage the

mother-child relationship by employing a pattern of coercive tactics and occasionally also by manipulating other professionals, which sometimes resulted in mothers' loss of contact (Dijkstra, 2019, 2022; Katz, 2019). Moreover, other studies have highlighted the different fathering forms or facades witnessed by mothers and children (i.e., dangerous fathering, admirable fathering, omnipresent fathering), all of which are still exhibited by a fundamentally coercive and controlling ex-partner (Katz et al., 2020). Some studies have also emphasised how false allegations of child maltreatment were utilised against mothers to the great detriment of their mental health (Douglas & Fell, 2020).

In the case of the latter term, Monk and Bowen (2021) outlined eight themes detailing tactics of 'strategic separation': lying to and manipulating children; sabotaging children's contact with their mothers; weaponizing children; conditioning children through reward and punishment exploiting women's vulnerability, particularly as mothers; threatening mothers with taking their children from them; actively employing mother-blaming by exploiting mother-blaming institutions and practices; and denigrating mothers and elevating themselves in order to supplant mothers as children's primary caregivers and attachment figures. Interestingly, results from these studies mirror those for research conducted under the specific terminology of PA, with Monk and Bowen's examination of mothers almost directly mirroring Bates and Hine's examination of fathers (2023). It is argued here that this, therefore, supports a) continuing discussions regarding the accuracy and consistency of language for research in this area, b) the situation of PA and PABs within existing frameworks of violence including coercive control, and c) greater collaboration between researchers seeking to explore the gendered experiences of PA *as a form* of coercive control, to the benefit of all alienated parents and their children.

In addition to the exploration of gendered PA experiences, diversification of inquiry can also be found in an increasing number of international studies, notably Tavares et al.in Portugal and Torun et al.in Turkey. The Portuguese work focused mainly on the impact of PA, supporting the findings above which outline the profound negative influence on both health and mental health (Tavares et al., 2020, 2021). The Turkish work has focused on both the experiences of alienated parents and their impact, finding high levels of exposure to a variety of PABs, poor enforcement of court orders, a lack of knowledge amongst professionals, and feelings of hopelessness, desperation, loneliness, anxiety, and a lack of ability to enjoy life (Torun et al., 2022). Taken together, research examining targeted parents supports an ever-growing, consistent, and international picture of the nature of those experiences, and of the negative impact this type of abuse has on said parents.

2.3 Alienated Children

Several reviews now exist that detail the profound effect of PABs on the psychological wellbeing of children (Haines et al., 2020; Marques et al., 2020; Silva, 2021), with some such

reviews concluding that outcomes are similar to other forms of severe child abuse (Harman, Warshak, et al., 2022). The most recent review by Miralles et al. (2023) provides a comprehensive assessment, outlining how currently published research supports links between PAB exposure and: affective disorders, psychological general distress, self-esteem and self-sufficiency, alcohol abuse and drug use, attachment and relationship with parents, life satisfaction and quality, and perceptions of emotional consequences. This largely quantitative research body (i.e., the work of Verrocchio, Baker, and colleagues) has recently been supported by other quantitative work (showing increased risk of depression; Sun et al., 2021) and qualitative work with adults alienated as children. For example, research by Verhaar et al. (2022) with 20 such adults found that they suffered from mental health difficulties (including anxiety disorders and trauma reactions), emotional pain, and addiction and substance use (as well as positive coping mechanisms and a level of developed resilience). Second-hand accounts of the effects on children provided by alienated fathers (Hine & Bates, 2022) and coercively controlled mothers (Monk & Bowen, 2021) provide further support for the significant and wide-ranging psychological impact this form of abuse has on children.

An additional outcome, outlined in Hine and Bates (2022), is that children subjected to alienating behaviours find themselves losing their childhood as a result of the position alienating and alienated parents place them in. Indeed, findings that children are made to 'grow up too quickly' and make adult decisions or think in an adult way, or about adult issues, suggest that these children are 'parentified' and 'adultified' (Haxhe, 2016). Many children are subject to 'emotional parentification' specifically (Jurkovic et al., 2001), where the child is 'expected to meet a parents' particular emotional or psychological need' (p. 45). Men also mentioned that their relationship with their children was affected due to children having to manage the parental conflict (again an example of parentification), as well as the mothers' abusive behaviours and reactions to these. There are significant negative consequences currently known to be associated with parentification (Haines et al., 2020), including disruption of attachment (Engelhardt, 2012) and negative mental health consequences (Jankowski et al., 2013), which therefore further position PA as particularly damaging to young children due to these associated outcomes. These effects are also likely to be exaggerated through the loss of other childhood relationships (e.g., siblings, stepsiblings, extended family) that are associated with parental relationship breakdown.

This specific loss is situated within a range of losses relating to PA highlighted by Harman, Warshak, et al. (2022), due to the alteration which occurs to the child's beliefs, perceptions, and memories of the alienated parent. Specifically, they outline losses relating to the individual self, the loss of childhood experiences (and the opportunity to engage in them), of a 'good enough' parent, of extended family (see section 2.4 below), of community, and of activities and relationships essential for healthy development. The authors also note that many

of these losses are interconnected and that the loss of the parent also means the loss of fulfilment for critical needs (i.e., as outlined in Maslow's hierarchy of needs; 1943). The authors further argue that, subsequently, children have hugely straining cognitive and emotional experiences related to ongoing and ambiguous loss, and disenfranchised grief – both of which are reflective of parents' experiences (Harman, Matthewson, et al., 2022). Indeed, this is unsurprising considering the previous theoretical positioning of PA as a disruption of, and attack on, healthy attachment systems (Harman, Matthewson, et al., 2022; Kneier, 2021; Lowenstein, 2010). There is therefore significant preliminary evidence that children who experience alienating behaviours are severely affected.

2.4 The Wider Family

One of the largest-growing areas of research on PA has been research examining the experiences of other family members, principally grandparents. Indeed, the publication of almost all of the research on the experiences of alienated grandparents has occurred across 2022 and 2023. One of the earliest studies, which was specifically outlined as an exploratory study, was conducted by Golly in 2019. Results demonstrated a high association between being cut off from grandchildren and depression, complicated grief, and decreased overall health, especially when a positive relationship existed prior to the loss of contact. As a result, Golly concluded that contact with grandchildren should be part of assessments and interventions for the elderly in social work settings (Golly, 2019).

Further studies have now provided more detail and support for the findings reported by Golly. Specifically, Bounds and Matthewson (2022) have reported extensively on the experiences of alienated grandparents, finding that a) grandparents experience a wide variety of alienating behaviours (e.g., brainwashing, controlling contact, false allegations etc.) and that b) all of these experiences 'map' onto and reflect the experiences by both alienated parents and children (Haines et al., 2020). The authors noted that this provided important insight as to how grandparents are positioned within a triangulation of the children between themselves, the alienating parent, and the alienated parent. If an alienated parent did not have contact with the child, then neither did the grandparents of that parent, and if they defended the alienated parent, they also jeopardised their contact with their grandchildren (Bounds & Matthewson, 2022). Put simply, grandparents appear to become enveloped in an extension of the alienating behaviours, as part of an 'us versus them' mentality from the alienating parent (Bounds & Matthewson, 2022).

In results again reflective of those found with alienated parents, alienated grandparents report a profound effect of alienating behaviours, including impacts in relation to (already) strained health and daily functioning associated with ageing (Avieli & Levy, 2022). Specifically, alienated grandparents report many of the phenomena reported by parents, including grief, loss, and a general negative impact on health and wellbeing, as well as additional impacts due

to old age (such as collapsing due to stress on the body). Such effects were exacerbated by a 'race against time' in individuals that were older and therefore were more unsure as to whether they might get the chance to see their grandchildren again. Moreover, grandparents felt invisibilised and that their experiences were trivialised, especially in relation to parents' experiences. However, they were keen to stress that they also felt immense pain at being denied a relationship and that their loss was agonising, especially when they still had access to other grandchildren. Grandparents also experienced a destabilisation of their core moral beliefs, with an associated shock that individuals were capable of such cruel behaviour, especially when grandparents had done nothing to 'deserve it' (Avieli & Levy, 2022).

Evidently, in consideration of the outcomes of PA, grandparents (as extensions of the alienated parent) must be acknowledged, as they not only experience similar behaviours and outcomes but have unique vulnerabilities due to advanced age. As yet, a comprehensive assessment of the impact on other family members (e.g., siblings, aunties/uncles, cousins) has not occurred. One reason for this could be that relationships with the latter two groups tend to, but not always, be less close than a grandparent relationship. However, further research, particularly in relation to siblings, is warranted (see section 3).

2.5 Summary

The research above presents a stark overview of the impact that PABs can cause for both alienated parents and children, as well as the wider family (i.e., grandparents). Moreover, we are beginning to understand more about the types of parents who enact alienating behaviours, though the challenges in getting information about these individuals is acknowledged, and further research requirements are discussed below in section 3.3. What is preliminarily evident is that the experience of alienation is deeply psychologically, emotionally, and even physically damaging and that reducing this form of violence should be a priority for both health and violence reduction initiatives.

3. Critical Questions & Future Research Directions

It is clear that knowledge around PA has expanded rapidly, and research in this area is indeed 'blossoming' (Harman, Bernet, et al., 2019). Moreover, it would appear that a 'critical point' has been reached, where discussions regarding the existence and scientific status of PA are obsolete. However, several key questions and directions for future research are evident and are outlined below.

3.1 Training and Terminology

Based on the evidence put forward in this review and others, it can be argued that PA now has a sufficiently developed definition and framework for use by various bodies and professionals (including those within the family court system). However, as with all inquiries into new and developing areas, refinement and adaptation of this description in line with current knowledge should be a dynamic and ongoing endeavour, as should its accurate

measurement (as is the case with broader definitions of DVA). More importantly, greater efforts to translate this knowledge into professional practice should be made *at speed*, as academic conceptualisations of PA have now firmly outpaced practice guidance in many countries which leaves PA open to misuse within the legal system.

Current efforts to provide training are somewhat hampered by ongoing linguistic discussions. As noted in section 2.2 some research examining behaviour representative of PA has been conducted by academics who refuse to use the term itself. There are several explanations as to why this might be the case. First, that they object to the history of the term (i.e., PAS) and its potential misuse. Second, that they feel these behaviours are best explained through other frameworks (i.e., coercive control). Or third, that they do not object to the existence of behaviour that seeks to disrupt the parent-child relationship, but rather object to the idea that this can happen to fathers and that PA describes this (and so they instead describe PA as 'strategic mother-child separation' etc). In response to all of these points, the following response could be offered: if we have a term – PA – that is linguistically correct and well supported by a significant body of evidence, shouldn't we, instead of endlessly discussing language (seemingly at points through ideological and gendered lenses), focus on upskilling professionals to accurately and efficiently identify and intervene when PA occurs? Not least because we are yet to see an alternative term for PA that a) is not gendered (as with PA), or b) does anything that PA does not.

3.2 Prevalence

With the existence of several forms of measurement, establishing the prevalence of PA internationally is now critical. Doing so will not only provide valuable additional validation of said definitions and measures but will reveal the extent of the issue to prompt advocacy and further research. One of the challenges of conducting such research is that representative samples are inherently hard to source, and at present, such research, when achieved, is from specific, Western countries (e.g., United States, Canada).

For example, in relation to the former, several studies utilising clinical samples (e.g., Campbell & Lorandos, 2020) demonstrate high occurrence rates for PABs (12-43%), with nearly all custody evaluators stating they had witnessed PABs in their cases. However, it can be argued that these populations are likely to have higher rates of occurrence due to their clinical nature and that this may not be representative of the issue at large.

On the latter, and overcoming this limitation, three key studies have provided some insight into PABs in the general population, two in the United States (Harman, Leder-Elder, et al., 2016, 2019) and one in the United Kingdom (Hine et al., 2023), utilising parent self-reports of PA manifestations and demonstrating a significant level of occurrence (32%-39.1% and 39%-59% of separated or divorced parents in the US and UK respectively). However, this type of study is still only limited to the Western countries mentioned above. Therefore, whilst it

would seem there is no doubt that PABs are likely to be frequent in circumstances of family breakdown, especially in 'high conflict' and acrimonious separations, at present, further research confirming this utilising robust sampling from a variety of countries is needed to support these assumptions.

3.3 Experiences of Abuse & Family Dynamics

Provisional reading of the available evidence on the experiences of alienated parents and children is alarming. However, it is worth noting that the studies available are still often limited to small sample sizes, thus limiting generalisability. It is therefore critical that research on all groups (targeted parents, targeted children, adults alienated as children, parents facing PA claims) continues, and in a way that meets standards for robust empirical enquiry. Alienating parents are particularly hard to access and accurately assess, for obvious reasons. Instead, it may be more beneficial to conduct research from a family systems perspective, thus acknowledging a dynamic set of relationships that do not exist in isolation. This approach is supported by the observations that relationships are frequently bidirectionally abusive (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012), and that clear victim-perpetrator binaries are often inappropriate. Doing so would be particularly helpful in court settings, as violence within relationships can then be more holistically assessed, rather than operating within a gendered framework of wholly legitimate DVA claims by women versus wholly erroneous alienation claims by men (Bates & Hine, 2023). Moreover, recent discourse on how more comprehensive theories of attachment (e.g., the dynamic-maturational model – DMM; Crittenden, 2006) can assist with determining outcomes in family court proceedings (Crittenden et al., 2021; Speiker et al., 2021) would benefit from further attention, as PA may be better understood as an intergenerational transmission of attachment-based trauma.

3.4 Use of PA in Courts & Accurately Determining Perpetration of Violence

Arguably the most important avenue for future research is how PA claims can be successfully brought to and managed within family courts. It is clear that, at present, both mothers and fathers, and most importantly children, are experiencing tremendous distress during proceedings to determine contact, and that litigators and other professionals may not be equipped to deal with these extremely complicated cases. One of the biggest barriers in this area is gaining access to cases to review (e.g., in the UK). Moreover, the voices of various professionals in relation to the challenges they experience in managing such cases is currently largely missing within the literature.

Evidently, three things need to occur. First, there needs to be a rapid expansion of available evidence in this area, particularly in jurisdictions where this information has traditionally been hard to access. Only with accurate and comprehensive case file data will scholars be able to establish the nature and impact of DVA and PA claims in cases determining custody or parental responsibility. Second, professionals involved in family court processes

need to have access to the latest information and academic work on PA, including new case review work as described, so that they can act in the best interests of the child through accurate determination of alienation claims. Indeed, Marques et al. (2022) have demonstrated that judges know a tremendous amount about PA, but that not all of it is reflective of current research. Indeed, work highlighting mothers' rightful concerns about acting protectively for their children cites outdated PAS claims as the issue (Clemente & Padilla-Racero, 2021) when this definition should have been superseded in courts. This is certainly argued to be the case in particular countries and jurisdictions, where outdated conceptualisations of PA(S) may be causing substantial harm (e.g., Brazil; Castro & Williams, 2020). Third, several authors have rightfully argued that multidimensional, holistic assessments of whole family dynamics are needed when examining cases involving both DVA and alienation claims (Berman & Weisinger, 2022; Harman et al., 2021; Isailă & Hostiuc, 2022; Madelyn, 2022), so that the best interests of the child can be accurately determined, and they can be protected from abuse of all kinds.

3.5 Effective Intervention

As described above, it is currently simultaneously argued that several effective interventions exist for alienated children and their parents and that such interventions are lacking in comprehensive and reliable evaluation. Indeed, these arguments are not mutually exclusive, and it is evident that the rapid, thorough assessment of available interventions is required to ensure that children are *protected from* alienation as violence, but also not returned or exposed to violence *from which they are being protected*. Notably, denying the existence of PA means that neither is possible.

One of the most robust intervention evaluations to date has recently been provided by Harman, Saunders et al. (2022). They evaluated the *Turning Points for Families (TPFF)* therapeutic intervention program for severely alienated children and their alienated parent to determine whether it was safe, did not cause harm, and led to positive changes in the alienated parent–alienated child relationship. Court orders and video recordings of the four-day intervention were reviewed for indications of improvements over the course of the intervention in relational communication, social support, and communal coping, which refers to the family members jointly 'owning' a problem and proactively taking responsibility for it together. Improvements in the parent–child relationships were noted and TPFF helped to improve family members' communal coping scores. Participation did not lead to negative changes on any measure. This preliminary evidence indicates that TPFF, like other therapeutic structural interventions, is a safe and effective treatment option for severely alienated children.

Evaluations for programmes should therefore seek to rapidly reproduce and utilise the robust and established protocols for intervention appraisal used by Harman, Saunders et al. (2022).

4. Conclusion

Research on PA is evidently burgeoning, with around 40% of all research conducted on this topic occurring since 2016 (Harman, Warshak, et al., 2022). Not only this but since the recent publication of numerous seminal reviews (Harman, Warshak, et al., 2022; Lee-Maturana et al., 2022; Marques et al., 2020; Mercer, 2022d; Miralles et al., 2023; Templer et al., 2017), several studies critical in shaping our understanding and discourse in this area have also been published, as outlined in *this* review, with many more to come. Indeed, it would seem that we can now 'put to bed' any debate regarding the scientific status of PA, as the evidence simply does not warrant its continuation. Instead, research on establishing the extent of the problem within the global population, the impact of PA on other groups (i.e., grandparents), and the appropriate and safe application of PA within various systems and institutions (e.g., family court) should now be the principal focus for researchers in this area. By doing so, we can begin to ensure that anyone experiencing PA, most importantly children, are protected from these deeply damaging behaviours.

References

Aichenbaum, Y., Bernet, W., Brzosowski, B., Cedervall, B., Hellstern, B., Korosi, S., Ludmer, B., Marcus, P., & Mendoza-Amaro, A. (2023). *An analysis of the report of the special rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/652b4267cc223c56e83ab445/t/654056fdbe05f47265e9f667/1698715390344/Analysis-Report-Special-Rapporteur-2023-06-02.pdf

Aichenbaum, Y., Bernet, W., Cedervall, B., Harman, J. J., Mendoza-Amaro, A., & Sheery, A. (2023). *A comprehensive review of misinformation and other inaccuracies in challegning parental alienation: New directions for professional and parents*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/652b4267cc223c56e83ab445/t/65458eb7e8169324d7df6734/1699057338096/Analysis-of-Mercer-Drew-2023-04-04.pdf

Alsalem, R. (2023). *Custody, violence against women and violence against children*. https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G23/070/18/PDF/G2307018.pdf?OpenElement

Andreopoulos, E., & Wexler, A. (2022). The "solution" to parental alienation: A critique of the turning points and overcoming barriers reunification programs. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2022.2049462

Avalle, D. S., Smith, B. J., Wiederman, M. W., & Garnica, C. B. (2022). How efficacious is Building Family Bridges? What the legal and mental health fields should know about Building Family Bridges and "parental alienation". *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2022.2066595

Avieli, H., & Levy, I. (2022). "I feel erased:" A qualitative analysis of grandparent experiences of parental alienation. *Family Relations*. https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12704

Baker, A. J. L. (2020). Parental alienation and empirical research. In D. Lorandos & W. Bernet (Eds.), *Parental alienation: Science and law* (pp. 207-253). Charles C Thomas.

Baker, A. J. L., & Darnall, D. (2006). Behaviors and strategies employed in parental alienation: A survey of parental experiences. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 45*, 97-124. https://doi.org/10.1300/J087v45n01_06

Barnett, A. (2020). A genealogy of hostility: parental alienation in England and Wales. *Journal of Social Welfare & Family Law, 42*, 18-29. https://doi.org/10.1080/09649069.2019.1701921

Barnett, A., & Riley, A. (2022). Experiences of parental alienation interventions. In J. Mercer & M. Drew (Eds.), *Challenging parental alienation: New directions for practitioners and parents*. Routledge.

Bates, E. A. (2019). "I am still afraid of her": Men's experiences of post-separation abuse. *Partner Abuse, 10*, 336-358. https://doi.org/10.1891/1946-6560.10.3.336

Bates, E. A. (2020). "Walking on egg shells": A qualitative examination of men's experiences of intimate partner violence. *Psychology of Men and Masculinities, 21*, 13-24. https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000203

Bates, E. A., & Hine, B. A. (2023). "I was told when I could hold, talk with or kiss our daughter": Exploring fathers' experiences of parental alienation within the context of intimate partner violence *Partner Abuse*. https://doi.org/10.1891/PA-2022-0021

Berman, P. W., & Weisinger, E. (2022). Parental alienation vs coercive control: Controversial issues and current research. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2022.2125475

Bernet, W. (2020). Parental alienation and misinformation proliferation. *Family Court Review, 58*, 293-307. https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12473

Bernet, W. (2023). Recurrent misinformation regarding parental alienation theory. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 51*, 334-355. https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2021.1972494

Bernet, W., & Baker, A. J. L. (2022). *Proposal for Parental Alienation Relational Problem to be included in "Other Conditions That May Be a Focus of Clinical Attention" in DSM-5-TR*. https://www.pas-intervention.org/uploads/2/2/5/4/22545256/proposal-2022-06-30.pdf

Bernet, W., Baker, A. J. L., & Adkins, K. L. (2022). Definitions and terminology regarding child alignments, estrangement, and alienation: A survey of custody evaluators. *Journal of Forensic Sciences, 67*, 279-288. https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.14868

Bernet, W., & Greenhill, L. L. (2022). The five-factor model for the diagnosis of parental alienation. *Journal of the American academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 61*, 591-594. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2021.11.026

Bernet, W., & Xu, S. (2023). Scholarly rumors: Citation analysis of vast misinformation regarding parental alienation theory. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*. https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2605

Birchall, J., & Choudhry, S. (2022). 'I was punished for telling the truth': how allegations of parental alienation are used to silence, sideline and disempower survivors of domestic abuse in family

law proceedings. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*. https://doi.org/10.1332/239868021X16287966471815

Bounds, O., & Matthewson, M. (2022). Parental alienating behaviours experienced by alienated grandparents. *Journal of Family Issues*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X221126753

Bowen, E. (2011). An overview of partner violence risk assessment and the potential role of female victim risk appraisals. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 16*, 214-226. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2011.02.007

Burhai, L., Hine, B. A., Bates, E. A., & Chuang, S. (2022). Parents experiences of parental alienation during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom. *Manuscript in preparation*.

Butcher, J. N., Graham, J. R., Ben-Porath, Y. S., Tellegen, A., Dahlstrom, W. G., & Kaemmer, B. (2001). *MMPI-2 (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory 2): Manual for administration, scoring, and interpretation, revised edition*. University of Minnesota Press.

Campbell, T. W., & Lorandos, D. (2020). *Cross-examining experts in the beahvioral sciences*. Thomas Reuters.

Castro, M. S., & Williams, L. C. (2020). Parental Alienation and its controversies: Considerations from the viewpoint of Brazilian legislation. In S. Deb, G. Subhalakshmi, & K. Chakraborti (Eds.), *Upholding Justice* (pp. 105-118). Routledge.

Champion, K. M. (2022). Coercion in families and child resistance to contact with a parent after family separation. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development, 19*, 230-243. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2022.2105273

Chester, S. (2022). Reunification, alienation or re-traumatization? Let's stat listening to the child. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development, 19*, 359-382. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2021.1957059

Clemente, M., & Padilla-Racero, D. (2021). Obey the justice system or protect children? The moral dilemma posed by false parental alienation syndrome. *Children and Youth Services Review, 120*, 105728. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105728

Crittenden, P. M. (2006). A dynamic-maturational model of attachment. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 27*, 105-115. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1467-8438.2006.tb00704.x

Crittenden, P. M., Landini, A., Speiker, S. J., & Grey, B. (2021). Using parental attachment in family court proceedings: DMM theory about the adult attachment interview. *Child Abuse Review*. https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2730

Dallam, S. (1998). Richard Gardner: A review of his theories and opinions on atypical sexuality, pedophilia, and treatment issues. *Treating Abuse Today, 8*, 15-23.

Dijkstra, S. (2019). "I did not see my daughter for years:" The impact of coercive control on post-divorce relationships between mothers and children. In M. J. Magalhães, A. Guerreiro, & C. Pontedeira (Eds.), *II European Conference on Domestic Violence [e-book]*. Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto.

Dijkstra, S. (2022). 'I see a wall… then I cannot reach my son.' Coercive control tactics by one parent alienate the child from the other. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*.

Doughty, J., & Drew, M. (2022). History of parental alienation belief system. In J. Mercer & M. Drew (Eds.), *Challenging parental alienation: New directions for practitioners and parents* (pp. 21-39). Routledge.

Doughty, J., & Rathus, Z. (2022). The international expansion of the parental alienation belief system through the UK and Australian experiences. In J. Mercer & M. Drew (Eds.), *Challenging parental alienation: New directions for practitioners and parents* (pp. 40-62). Routledge.

Douglas, H., & Fell, E. (2020). Malicious reports of child maltreatment as coercive control: Mothers and domestic and family violence. *Journal of Family Violence, 35*, 827-837. https://doi.org/10.1007/sl0896-019-00128-1

Drew, M. (2022). Gender credibility and culture: the impact on women accused of alienation. In J. Mercer & M. Drew (Eds.), *Challenging parental alienation: New directions for practitioners and parents* (pp. 159-172). Routledge.

Evans, R., Scourfield, J., & Moore, G. (2016). Gender, relationship breakdown, and suicide risk: A review of research in Western countries. *Journal of Family Issues, 37*, 2239-2264. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X14562608

Freeman, B. (2020). The psychosocial assessment of contact refusal. In D. Lorandos & W. Bernet (Eds.), *Parental Alienation - Science and Law* (pp. 44-81). Charles C Thomas.

Gardner, R. A. (1992). *The parental alienation syndrome: A guide for mental health and legal professionals*. Creative Therapeutics.

Golly, C. A. (2019). *Grandparents cut off from grandchildren: An exploratory study* Barry University].

Gutowski, E., & Goodman, L. A. (2020). "Like I'm Invisible": IPV survivor-mothers' perceptions of seeking child custody through the family court system. *Journal of Family Violence, 35*, 441-457. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-019-00063-1

Haines, J., Matthewson, M., & Turnbull, M. (2020). *Understanding and managing parental alienation: A guide to assessment and intervention*. Routledge.

Harman, J. J., Bernet, W., & Harman, J. (2019). Parental Alienation: The blossoming of a field of study. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 28*, 212-217. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721419827271

Harman, J. J., Biringen, Z., Ratajck, E. M., Outland, P. L., & Kraus, A. (2016). Parents behaving badly: Gender biases in the perception of parental alienation. *Journal of Family Psychology, 30*, 866-874. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000232

Harman, J. J., Kruk, E., & Hines, D. A. (2018). Parental alienating behaviors: An unacknowledged form of family violence. *Psychological Bulletin, 144*, 1275-1299. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000175

Harman, J. J., Leder-Elder, S., & Biringen, Z. (2016). Prevalence of parental alienation drawn from a representative poll. *Children and Youth Services Review, 66*, 62-66. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.04.021

Harman, J. J., Leder-Elder, S., & Biringen, Z. (2019). Prevalence of adults who are the targets of parental alienating behaviors and their impact. *Children and Youth Services Review, 106*, 104471. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104471

Harman, J. J., Maniotes, C. R., & Grubb, C. (2021). Power dynamics in families affected by parental alienation. *Personal Relationships*. https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12392

Harman, J. J., & Matthewson, M. (2020). Parental alienation: How is it done. In D. Lorandos & W. Bernet (Eds.), *Parental alienation - science and law*. Charles C. Thomas.

Harman, J. J., Matthewson, M., & Baker, A. J. L. (2022). Losses experienced by children alienated from a parent. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 43*, 7-12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.05.002

Harman, J. J., Saunders, L., & Afifi, T. (2022). Evaluation of the Turning Points for Families (TPFF) program for severely alienated children. *Journal of Family Therapy, 44*, 279-298. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6427.12366

Harman, J. J., Warshak, R., Lorandos, D., & Florian, M. J. (2022). Developmental psychology and the scientific status of parental alienation. *Developmental Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001404

Hine, B. A., & Bates, E. A. (2022). “There is no part of my life that hasn't been destroyed”: The impact of parental alienation and intimate partner violence on fathers. *Manuscript under review - Partner Abuse*.

Hine, B. A., Harman, J. J., Leder-Elder, S., & Bates, E. A. (2023). Acrimony and abuse: Establishing the prevalence of family violence in the context of family breakdown, separation, and divorce (FBSD) in the United Kingdom. *Manuscript in preparation for submission to Current Psychology*.

Hine, B. A., & Hine, I. J. (2022). Fathers and Intimate Partner Violence: An Autoethnographic Analysis of Current Literature on Men’s experiences of Parental Alienation In E. A. Bates & J. C. Taylor (Eds.), *Domestic Violence Against Men and Boys: Experiences of Male Victims of Intimate Partner Violence*. Routledge.

Hine, B. A., & Roy, E. (2023). *Lost Dads: Examining the experiences of men following family breakdown, separation, and divorce (FBSD)*.

Isailă, O. M., & Hostiuc, S. (2022). Medical-legal and psychosocial considerations on parental alienation as a form of child abuse: A brief review. *Healthcare, 10*, 1134. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10061134

Jaffe-Geffner, N. (2021). Gender bias in cross-allegation domestic violence-parental alienation custody cases: Can states legislate the fix? *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law, 42*, 58-111.

Johnson, M. P. (2008). *A typology of domestic violence: Intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and situational couple violence*. Northeastern University Press.

Katz, E. (2019). Coercive control, domestic violence, and a five-factor framework: Five factors that influence closeness, distance, and strain in mother-child relationships. *Violence Against Women, 25*, 1829-1853. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218824998

Katz, E., Nikupeteri, A., & Laitinen, M. (2020). When coercive control continues to harm children: Post-separation fathering, stalking and domestic violence. *Child Abuse Review, 29*, 310-324. https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2611

Kleinman, T. G. (2021). Commentary: Use of the term "parental alienation" may be part of the problem. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development, 18*, 217-220. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2021.1937439

Kneier, G. (2021). *Parental alienation: A child-psychology approach*. Amazon.

Kruk, E. (2018). Parental alienation as a form of emotional child abuse: Current state of knowledge and future directions for research. *Family Science Review, 22*, 141-162.

Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J., Misra, T. A., Selwyn, C., & Rohling, M. L. (2012). Rates of bidirectional versus unidirectional intimate partner violence across sample, sexual orientations, and race/ethnicities: A comprehensive review. *Partner Abuse, 3*, 199-230. https://doi.org/10.1891/1946-6560.3.2.199

Lapierre, S., & Côté, I. (2016). Abused women and the threat of parental alienation: Shelter workers' perspectives. *Child and Youth Services Review, 65*, 120-126. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.03.022

Lapierre, S., Côté, I., & Lessard, G. (2022). "He was the king of the house." Children's perspectives on the men who abused their mothers. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development, 19*, 244-260. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2022.2036284

Lee-Maturana, S., Matthewson, M., & Dwan, C. (2022). Ten key findings on targeted parents' expereince: Towards a broader definition of Parental Alienation. *Journal of Family Issues, 43*, 2672-2700. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X211032664

Linden, A. H., & Sillence, E. (2021). "I'm finally allowed to be me": parent-child estrangement and psychological wellbeing. *Families, Relationships and Societies: An international journal of research and debate, 10*, 325-341. https://doi.org/10.1332/204674319X15647593365505

Lorandos, D. (2020). Admissability of the construct - Parental alienation. In D. Lorandos & W. Bernet (Eds.), *Parental alienation - Science and law* (pp. 324-364). Charles C Thomas.

Lorandos, D., & Bernet, W. (2020). *Parental alienation - Science and law*. Charles C Thomas.

Lowenstein, L. F. (2010). Attachment Theory and Parental Alienation. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 51*, 157-168. https://doi.org/10.1080/10502551003597808

Lubit, R. (2019). Valid and invalid ways to assess the reason a child rejects a parent: The continued malignant role of “parental alienation syndrome”. *Journal of Child Custody, 16*, 42-66. https://doi.org/10.1080/15379418.2019.1590284

Lysova, A., Hanson, K., & Hines, D. A. (2023). “How can I be a victim when I have children?” Abused men’s perceptions of their children’s exposure to domestic violence. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2023.2186300

Madelyn, S. M. (2022). Assessing causes of children’s parent rejection in child custody cases: Differentiating parental alienation from child sexual abuse, psychological maltreatment, and adverse parenting. In R. Geffner, J. W. White, L. K. Hamberger, A. Rosenbaum, V. Vaughan-Eden, & V. I. Vieth (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal violence and abuse across the lifespan: A project of the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan (NPEIV)* (pp. 1607-1628). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-89999-2_318

Marques, T. M., Narciso, I., & FErreira, L. C. (2020). Empirical research on parental alienation: A descriptive literature review. *Children and Youth Services Review, 119*, 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105572

Marques, T. M., Narciso, I., & Ferreira, L. C. (2022). How do family court judges theorize about parental alienation? A qualitative exploration of the territory. *International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health, 19*, 7555. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19137555

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*, 370-396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

McCarten, D. (2022). *Parental alienation: An evidence-based approach*. Routledge.

Meier, J. S. (2009). A historical perspective on parental alienation syndrome and parental alienation. *Journal of Child Custody, 6*, 232-257. https://doi.org/10.1080/15379410903084681

Meier, J. S. (2020). U.S. child custody outcomes in cases involving parental alienation and abuse allegations: what do the data show? *Journal of Social Welfare & Family Law, 42*, 92-105. https://doi.org/10.1080/09649069.2020.1701941

Meier, J. S. (2022). Questioning the scientific validity of parental aleination in abuse cases. In J. Mercer & M. Drew (Eds.), *Challenging parental alienation: New directions for practitioners and parents* (pp. 216-235). Routledge.

Meier, J. S., Dickson, S., O’Sullivan, C. S., & Rosen, L. N. (2022a). Harman and Lorandos’ false critique of Meier et al.’s family court study. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development, 19*, 119-138. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2022.2086659

Meier, J. S., Dickson, S., O’Sullivan, C. S., & Rosen, L. N. (2022b). The trouble with Harman and Lorandos’ parental alienation in family court study (2020). *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2022.2036286

Mercer, J. (2021). Critiquing assumptions about parental alienation: Part 1. The analogy with family violence. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2021.1957057

Mercer, J. (2022a). Attachment issues and reunification of parents and children. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development, 19*, 320-339. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2022.2080147

Mercer, J. (2022b). Critiquing assumptions about parental alienation: Part 2. Causes of psychological harms. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2021.1957058

Mercer, J. (2022c). Parental alienation, science, and pseudoscience. In J. Mercer & M. Drew (Eds.), *Challenging parental alienation: New directions for professionals and parents* (pp. 236-248). Routledge.

Mercer, J. (2022d). Reunification therapies for parental alienation: Tenets, empirical evidence, commonalities, and differences. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2022.2080147

Mercer, J., & Drew, M. (2022). *Challenging Parental Alienation: New directions for professionals and parents*. Routledge.

Milchman, M. S. (2019). How far has parental alienation research progressed toward achieving scientific validity? *Journal of Child Custody, 16*, 115-139. https://doi.org/10.1080/15379418.2019.1614511

Milchman, M. S. (2022). Distinguishing parental alienation from child abuse and adverse parenting. In J. Mercer & M. Drew (Eds.), *Challenging parental alienation: New directions for practitioners and parents* (pp. 107-137). Routledge.

Milchman, M. S., Geffner, R., & Meier, J. S. (2020a). Ideology and rhetoric replace science and reason in some parental alienation literature and advocacy: A critique. *Family Court Review, 58*, 340-361. https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12476

Milchman, M. S., Geffner, R., & Meier, J. S. (2020b). Putting Science and Reasoning Back Into the "Parental Alienation" Discussion: Reply to Bernet, Robb, Lorandos, and Garber. *Family Court Review, 58*, 375-385. https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12477

Miralles, P., Godoy, C., & Hidalgo, M. D. (2023). Long-term emotional consequences of parental alienation exposure in children of divorced parents: A systematic review. *Current Psychology, 42*, 12055-12069. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02537-2

Monk, L., & Bowen, E. (2021). Coercive control of women as mothers via strategic mother-child separation. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence, 5*, 23-42. https://doi.org/10.1332/239868020X15913793920878

Morrison, S. L., & Ring, R. (2023). Reliability of the five-factor model for determining parental alienation. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 51*, 580-598. https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2021.2021831

Paquin-Boudreau, A., Poitras, K., & Bala, N. (2022). Family court responses to claims of parental alienation in Quebec. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family, 36*. https://doi.org/10.1093/lawfam/ebac014

Perrotta, G. (2021). Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS): Definition, humanistic profiles and clinical hypothesis of absorption with “adaptation disorder”. Clinical evidences. *Open Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health, 6*, 36-42. https://doi.org/10.17352/ojpch.000035

Pollack, D., & Reiter, E. (2021). *Reunification therapy: What's a court and a therapist to do?* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355913076_Reunification_therapy_What's_a_court_and_a_therapist_to_do

Rohner, R. P., & Ali, S. (2020). Parental acceptance-rejection questionnaire (PARQ). In *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_56

Roma, P., Marchetti, D., Mazza, C., Burla, F., & Verrocchio, M. C. (2021). MMPI-2 Profile of mothers engaged in parental alienation. *Journal of Family Issues, 42*, 722-740. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X20918393

Roma, P., Marchetti, D., Mazza, C., Ricci, E., Fontanesi, L., & Verrocchio, M. C. (2022). A comparison of MMPI-2 profiles between parental alienation cases and custody cases. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 31*, 1196-1206. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-021-02076-1

Rowlands, G. A. (2019). Parental Alienation: A measurement tool. *Divorce & Remarriage, 60*, 316-331. https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2018.1546031

Rowlands, G. A. (2020). Parental alienation: A measurement tool confirmatory analysis validation study. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 61*, 127-147. https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2019.1627162

Scourfield, J., & Evans, R. (2014). Why might men be more at risk of suicicde after a relationship breakdown? Sociological insights. *American Journal of Men’s Health, 9*, 380-384. https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988314546395

Sharples, A., Harman, J. J., & Lorandos, D. (2023). Findings of abuse in families affected by parental alienation. *Journal of Family Violence*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00575-x

Sheehy, E., & Boyd, S. B. (2020). Penalizing women’s fear: intimate partner violence and parental alienation in Canadian child custody cases. *Journal of Social Welfare & Family Law, 42*, 80-91. https://doi.org/10.1080/09649069.2020.1701940

Sher, L. (2015a). Parental alienation and suicide in men. *Psychiatria Danubina, 27*, 289.

Sher, L. (2015b). Suicide in men. *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 76*, 20430. https://doi.org/10.4088/JCP.14com09554

Sher, L. (2017). Parental alienation: the impact on men’s mental health. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health, 29*. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijamh-2015-0083

Silva, T. (2021). Parental Alienation: In the child’s worst interest. In S. A. Samadi (Ed.), *Parenting - Challenges of Child Rearing in a Changing Society*. IntechOpen.

Sîrbu, A. G., Vintilă, M., Tisu, L., Stefănut, A. M., Tudorel, O. I., Măguran, B., & Toma, R. A. (2021). Parental alienation - Development and validation of a behavioral anchor scale. *Sustainability, 13*, 1-18. https://doi.org/2071-1050/13/1/316

Speiker, S. J., Crittenden, P. M., Landini, A., & Grey, B. (2021). Using parental attachment in family court proceedings: An empirical study of the DMM-AAI. *Child Abuse Review, 30*, 550-564. https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2731

Sullivan, R., & Lasley, E. N. (2010). Fear in love: Attachment, abuse, and the developing brain. *Cerebrum: the Dana forum on brain science, 17*.

Sun, X., Qin, X., Zhang, M., Yang, A., Ren, X., & Dai, Q. (2021). Prediction of parental alienation on depression in left-behind children: A 12-month follow-up investigation. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences, 30*, e44. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045796021000329

Tavares, A., Crespo, C., & Ribeiro, M. T. (2020). Psychological adaptation and beliefs in targeted parents: A study in the context of parental alienation. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 29*, 2281-2289. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-020-01742-0

Tavares, A., Crespo, C., & Ribeiro, M. T. (2021). What does it mean to be a targeted parent? Parents' experiences in the context of parental alienation. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 30*, 1370-1380. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-021-01914-6

Templer, K., Matthewson, M., Haines, J., & Cox, G. (2017). Recommendations for best practice in response to parental alienation: findings from a systematic review. *Journal of Family Therapy, 39*, 103-122. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6427.12137

Torun, F., Torun, S. D., & Matthewson, M. (2022). Parental alienation: Targeted parent experience in Turkey. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 50*, 195-204. https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2021.1895903

Trane, S. T., Champion, K. M., & Hupp, S. D. A. (2022). Comparison of parental alienation treatments and evidence-based treatments for children and families. In J. Mercer & M. Drew (Eds.), *Challenging parental alienation: New directions for professionals and parents*. Routledge.

Verhaar, S., Matthewson, M., & Bentley, C. (2022). The impact of parental alienating behaviours on the mental health of adults alienated in childhood. *Children, 9*, 475. https://doi.org/10.3390/children9040475

Verrocchio, M. C., Baker, A. J. L., & Marchetti, D. (2018). Adult report of childhood exposure to parental alienation at different developmental time periods. *Journal of Family Therapy, 40*, 602-618. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6427.12192

Verrocchio, M. C., Marchetti, D., Carrozzino, D., Compare, A., & Fulcheri, M. (2019). Depression and quality of life in adults perceiving exposure to parental alienation behaviors. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes, 17*. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12955-019-1080-6

Viljoen, B. L. (2021). Unintentional state enforced parental alienation syndrome during the hard lockdown in South Africa. *The Family Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480720987998

von Boch-Galhau, W. (2021). Parental alienation: A serious form of child psychological abuse that affects children all over the world. *Highlights on Medicine and Medical Science, 3*, 127-137. https://doi.org/10.9734/bpi/hmms/v3/9041D

Warshak, R. (2020a). Parental alienation: how to prevent, manage, and remedy it. In D. Lorandos & W. Bernet (Eds.), *Parental alienation: Science and law* (pp. 142-206). Charles C Thomas.

Warshak, R. (2020b). When evaluators get it wrong: False positive IDs and parental alienation. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 26*, 54-68. https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000216

Zaccour, S. (2020). In J. Mercer & M. Drew (Eds.), *Challenging parental alienation: New directions for practitioners and parents* (pp. 189-215). Routledge.

Zicavo Martínez, N., Rey Clericus, R., & Ponce, L. (2021). ZICAP II Scale: Parental Alienation assessment in 9 to 15 years-old children of separated parents in Chile. *Ciencias Psicológicas, 15*. https://doi.org/10.22235/cp.v15i1.2159

Tables

Table 1. Key Narrative Findings

1. Recent evidence has made clear the theoretical and practical conceptualisation of parental alienation, and provided tools for its measurement
2. Sufficient evidence now exists to class parental alienation as a form of domestic violence and abuse
3. Parental alienation has a profoundly negative impact across a number of domains in both alienated children and parents, and extended family
4. Parental alienation claims are currently mismanaged in family court processes, in relation to erroneous claims being brought and in genuine claims not being recognised
5. Intervention programmes for alienated parents and their children currently lack sufficiently robust empirical evaluation

Table 2. Implications

Practice
Sufficiently more developed conceptualisations of parental alienation can and should now be translated into held understanding by legal professionals
Professionals involved in supporting legal professionals and parents involved in legal processes, should also be rapidly upskilled in recent understanding on PA
Policy
Parental alienating behaviours (PABs) should be included as a form of domestic violence and abuse (specifically coercive control) within legislation
Funding structures for provision of domestic violence and abuse services should consider also consider support for victim-survivors of parental alienation, and the inclusion of specialist support services for this form of abuse
Research
Work on parental alienation as a behavioural pattern within a family system, and as a representation of intergenerational attachment trauma, would be deeply beneficial to this area
A rapid expansion of scholarly work into the use of parental alienation within family court processes, especially when other claims of abuse are also brought, is urgently needed, particularly in the UK
Robust, empirical evaluation of available intervention programmes is also urgently needed