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Scholarly rumors: Citation analysis of vast misinformation regarding parental alienation theory

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Abstract

Parental alienation is widespread in political discourse, mental health literature, and legal decisions. Misinformation regarding parental alienation is widespread in the literature on parental alienation (PA), that is, variations of the statement: PA theory asserts that the mental health of children who resist or reject a parent is harmed by being forced to spend time with the rejected parent. Scholarly rumors about PA theory contradicting or proving alienating behavior by the favored parent.[1] Ninety-four examples of the same misinformation were identified in the literature on parental alienation. Citation analysis showed that the misinformation is being repeated and cited regularly. The mental health consequences of misinformation are critical. Mean statements and significant misinformation of PA theory. Plausible explanations for why misinformation is being repeated and cited regularly. Misinformation is a threat to the integrity of the field. Misinformation is a threat to the integrity of the field. Misinformation is a threat to the integrity of the field

The research reported here pertained to peer-reviewed articles in mental health and legal publications, books that discuss PA theory, a few government documents, and four legal briefs. This literature review did not reach into the world of judicial opinions as reported by trial courts and appellate courts. It would be important to know whether the misinformation reported here has influenced judicial decisions in the United States and elsewhere. That is a likely scenario, since the largest propagators of this misinformation were law professors (Bruch, 2001; Hoult, 2006; Meier, 2009) and a professional organization for family court judges (Bowles et al., 2008; Dalton et al., 2006). If false statements have contaminated precedent setting decisions, that trend should be identified and addressed to prevent the spread of this misinformation from one legal case to another. That is a worrisome prospect, which legal scholars should investigate and correct in order to protect children and families from injury by future judicial decisions based on false information.

6 CONCLUSION

This article reports an unusual bibliometric research project, which documents 94 examples of the same misinformation that occurred in mental health and legal literature and professional presentations between 1994 and 2022. Although the cited misinformation pertained to a rather narrow topic—a specific but important aspect of PA theory—the broader implications of this research relate to the integrity and scholarship of authors, peer reviewers, and editors. The misinformation spread from journal articles to presentations at national meetings, government documents, legal briefs, and even official policies of professional organizations. The research data—that is, the 94 quotations of misinformation in published articles and other sources—were subjected to citation analysis, which revealed an unbroken trail of misinformation from 1994 to 2022. The authors recommend that these false statements should be corrected or retracted by their editors and publishers.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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