

# Family breakdown, mental health and parental alienation

[Professor Ben Hine](#) has carried out pioneering research into the impact of family breakdowns, separation and divorce upon the mental health of both men and women. Across two projects, Professor Hine examines the impact of family breakdown upon parental alienating behaviours, the increased vulnerability faced by men, and the need for increased understanding, support and recognition.

## Alienating behaviours in separated mothers and fathers in the UK



Parental Alienating Behaviours (PABs) are the actions taken when one parent tries to harm the relationship between their child and the other parent. To understand this problem better, Professor Hine and his collaborators conducted a large survey of over 1,000 separated and/or divorced parents to see how common PABs are and how they impact families.

Professor Hine said,

“ This first ever national study on parental alienating behaviours involving women and men shows just how prevalent such actions are. The higher signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and suicidal thoughts should be a concern for healthcare professionals, family courts and policymakers.”

The survey found that when asked directly, about 39.2% of people said they had experienced PABs. However, when we measured this using specific examples of behaviours, **almost 60% (59.1%) seemed to have faced PABs**. This difference shows that PABs can be hard to identify just by asking people about them, but that they are widespread.

The survey also found that **those affected by PABs show greater signs of serious mental stress, like PTSD symptoms, depression and suicidal thoughts**. The way we identify PABs can change these effects, making it crucial to have a full understanding. Participants experiencing PABs also talked about facing more domestic violence, which reflects recent studies from the U.S. and Canada.



Considering all this, the report recommends a two-fold plan. First, we need to **boost mental health support** by training professionals, creating support groups, and offering counselling to families. It is also key to get schools and the legal system involved. Second, we need to **make the public more aware of PABs** through large-scale awareness campaigns, which will help society stand against these harmful behaviours. And, of course, we need better research tools to fully understand PABs.

Put simply, **PABs are widespread, and they are complex**. They deeply affect mental health and often co-occur with other harmful behaviours. This study highlights the need for careful methods and a detailed approach to really understand and tackle the problem of parents being alienated from their children.

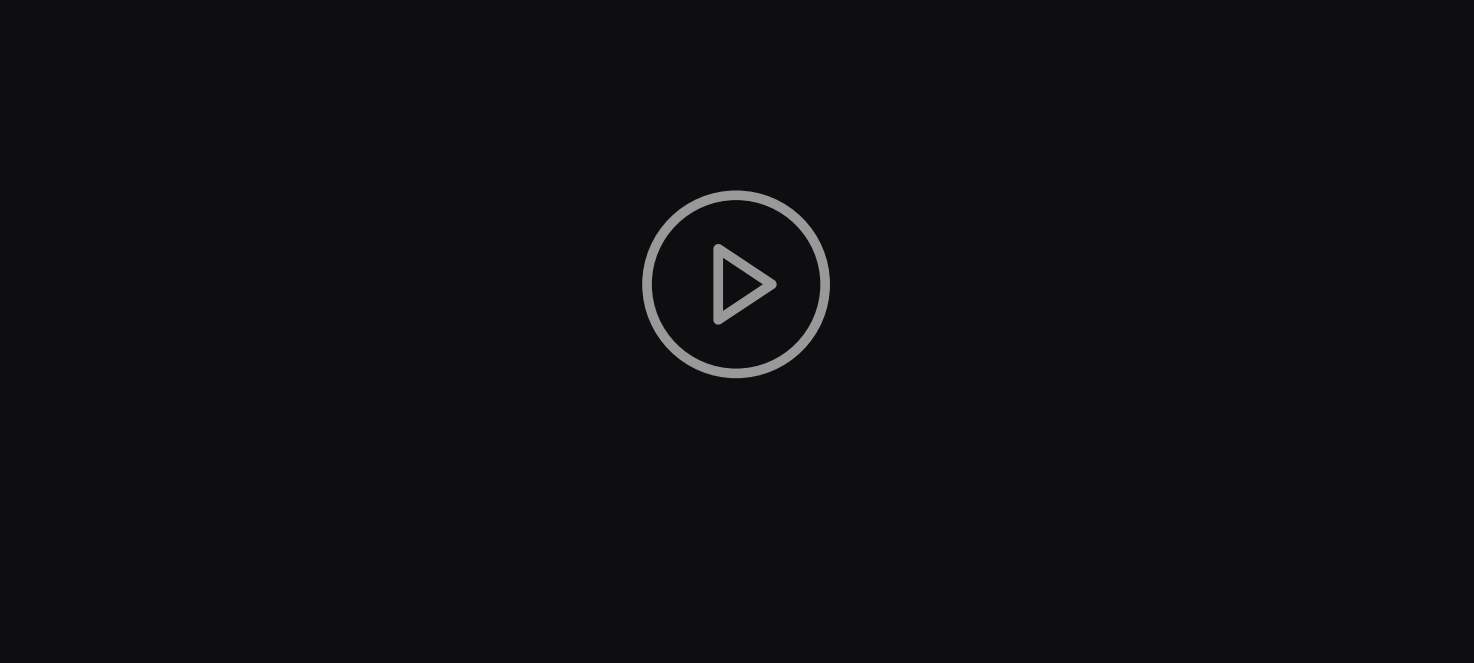
### Research team and collaborators

- [Professor Ben Hine](#), Professor of Applied Psychology
- Jennifer Harman, Associate Professor, Colorado State University
- Sadie Leder-Elder, Associate Professor of Psychology, High Point University
- Elizabeth Bates, Associate Professor in Family Violence and Abuse, University of Cumbria

### Read the full report:

Full report: Alienating behaviours in separated mothers and fathers in the UK →

## Lost Dads: The Fathers and Family Breakdown, Separation and Divorce (FBSD) Project



The Samaritans report that in the UK, around 800,000 people make contact every year because they are considering taking their lives. **5,000 people will complete suicide**. Men are 2.4 times more likely than women to do this; equating to **11 men every day**. Suicide is also the **leading cause of death for men under 50** and men are particularly **vulnerable to suicide after separation or divorce**; they are **11x** more likely than women to engage in suicide ideation at this time.

There have been many studies looking at the impact of family breakdown on women, however relatively few about men, and about men as fathers. To address the question of why men are more likely to take their lives following family breakdown, we need to understand much more about the impact of breakdown and its aftermath on the mental health of fathers.

This project utilised a quantitative client case review, a qualitative survey and interviews with fathers, and a deliberative inquiry with organisations supporting men to provide the most comprehensive examination of the experiences of separated fathers to date. This study brings together material and new research from over 1,000 clients, 130 fathers and six organisations.

Following FBSD, fathers most often become the non-resident parent and are therefore much less likely to have continued and stable contact with their children compared to mothers. Fathers are also less likely to seek help for their stress and poor mental health related to separation, and far less support is generally available to men as fathers. The report also found that extensive and draining family court processes further traumatised men, who suffer from a feeling of invisibility and a lack of support.

All of these experiences were shaped by negative stereotypes about both fatherhood and masculinity, which limited men's ability to seek and receive effective support.

The report recommends that we need to act, not only to support already separated fathers, but to change and reshape attitudes and stereotypes that produce such experiences. Most importantly, we must urgently recognise the impact on the child when the presence of their father is lost, including through suicide.

### Research team and collaborators

- [Professor Ben Hine](#), Professor of Applied Psychology
- Eilish Roy, Research Assistant
- Funded by the [Woodward Charitable Trust](#)

### Read the full report:

Full report: Lost Dads - The Fathers and Family Breakdown, Separation, and Divorce (FBSD) Project →

### Research Centres and Groups

Find out about our multi-disciplinary areas of expertise, research, and teaching.

→

### Research impact

Learn how our research has helped communities locally, nationally and internationally.

→

### The Graduate School

If you are interested in studying for a PhD or Professional Doctorate, the Graduate School is here to support your research.

→

### Quick links

Browse all courses

→

Join an open day

→



- Accessibility
- Cookies
- Disclaimer
- Privacy
- Modern slavery statement

Call us

0800 036 8888

Calling from outside the UK

+44 (0)20 8231 2468