

Parental Alienation is Real



What is PA?

Parental alienation (PA) occurs when a child aligns with one parent and rejects their other parent for reasons that are not legitimate. This is different from estrangement, when a child's resistance to have a relationship is for justifiable reasons. **Causing PA in a child is psychological abuse.**

Bernet, 2010; Lorandos & Bernet, 2020; Warshak, 2019



What causes PA?

Abusive parents often use their children as weapons to harm the other parent and manipulate them. Domestic violence researchers call this behavior a form of coercive control. Scientists who study PA call this **very same behavior** parental alienating behavior. They are two terms describing the same phenomenon.

Harman, Kruk, & Hines, 2018; Harman & Matthewson, 2020



Is research on PA "scientific?"

Clinical, legal, and scientific evidence on PA has accumulated for over 35 years. There have been over 1,000 scholarly papers published on the topic, and the empirical research on the topic has expanded greatly over the last few years, leading to what has been considered a "blossoming" of the scientific field.



Harman, Bernet, & Harman, 2019; Lorandos & Bernet, 2020; Lorandos, 2020; Marques, Narciso, & Ferreira, 2020

Are there recognized criteria for the diagnosis of PA?

Yes. There is a great deal of conformity among authorities on PA as to there being clear and discernible diagnostic criteria. These criteria are found in a simple Five-Factor Model.

Bernet, 2020; Lorandos & Bernet, 2020; Freeman, 2020



How many children are alienated from a parent?

At least **3.9 million** children in the U.S. are moderately to severely alienated from a parent. More than three times as many children in the U.S. are alienated from a parent than there are children with autism.

Bernet, 2010; Harman, Leder-Elder, & Biringen, 2019



How does PA affect alienated parents?

Alienated parents are unable to get closure and have unresolved grief with the loss of their child(ren). They also suffer from being the target of abusive behaviors of the alienating parent.

They have high levels of depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms, and many become suicidal.

Harman et al., 2019; Lee-Maturana, Matthewson, & Dwan, 2020; Poustie, Matthewson, & Balmer, 2018

How serious is PA for children?

Causing PA in a child is a serious form of psychological abuse and results in the same types of outcomes that other abused children experience: stress and adjustment disorders (e.g., PTSD, anxiety), psychosocial problems and externalizing behaviors (e.g., substance abuse, suicidality).

Baker & Verrocchio, 2016; Godbout & Parent, 2012; Harman et al., 2018



What can be done to stop PA?

Legal and professional recognition of the problem (e.g., adding parental alienation to child abuse statutes). Funding for research to promote identification of effective assessment, prevention, and intervention programs. Funding for training of legal and mental health professionals.

Reference

Baker, A. J. L., & Verrocchio, M. C. (2016). Exposure to parental alienation and subsequent anxiety and depression in Italian adults. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 44, 255-271.

Bernet, W. (Ed.). (2010). *Parental alienation, DSM-5, and ICD-11*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Bernet, W. (2020). The five-factor model for the diagnosis of parental alienation. *Feedback- Journal of the Family Therapy Association of Ireland*, 6, 3-15.

Freeman, B. (2020). The psychosocial assessment of contact refusal. In D. Lorandos, & W. Bernet, *Parental alienation: Science & Law*, 44-81. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas, LTD.

Godbout, E., & Parent, C. (2012). The life paths and lived experiences of adults who have experienced parental alienation: A retrospective study. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 53, 34-54.

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.

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

Harman, J. J., & Matthewson, M. (2020). Parental alienating behaviors. In D. Lorandos and W. Bernet (Eds.), *Parental Alienation- Science and Law*, pp. 82-141. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas Publisher.

Harman, J. J., Leder-Elder, S., & Biringen, Z. (2019). Prevalence of adults who are the targets of parental alienating behaviors and their impact: Results from three national polls. *Child & Youth Services Review*, 106, 1-13.

Lee-Maturana, S., Matthewson, M., & Dwan, C. (2020). Targeted parents surviving parental alienation: Consequences of alienation and coping strategies. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 29, 2268-2280.

Lorandos, D. & Bernet, W. (2020). *Parental alienation: Science & Law*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas, LTD.

Marques, T. M., Narciso, I., & Ferreira, L. C. (2020). Empirical research on parental alienation: As descriptive literature review. *Children & Youth Services Review*, 119, 1-12.

Poustie, C., Matthewson, M., & Balmer, S. (2018). The forgotten parent: The targeted parent's perspective of parental alienation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39, 3298-3323.

Warshak, R. A. (2019). When evaluators get it wrong: False positive IDs and parental alienation. *Psychology, Public Policy & Law*, 26, 54-68.