

INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON PARENTAL ALIENATION AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Forum Report

This report highlights the main issues discussed by the speakers.

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University of Ottawa



PARENTAL
ALIENATION &
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH FOR INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES



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Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Reem Alsalem, United Nations

The [report](#) submitted to the Human Rights Council focuses on the links between custody, violence against women and violence against children and highlights the misuse of the term “parental alienation” and similar pseudo-concepts.

The Junk Science of Parental Alienation

Carrie Leonetti, University of Auckland, New Zealand

- There are high rates of domestic violence amongst families referred to child custody evaluations.
- Experience, judgment, and good professional practices cannot substitute for actual evidence of foundational validity and reliability.
- There are no evidence-based health care interventions for “parental alienation”.

The Use of Parental Alienation in Courts and the Impacts on Woman and Child Rights

Adrienne Barnett, Brunel University, United Kingdom

- A collaborative action research project is being conducted along with Rights of Women in England and Wales, funded by the BA/Leverhulme Small Grants Scheme. It aims to explore how “parental alienation” is used in family court cases and how courts respond to accusations of “parental alienation” against victims of domestic violence.
- A first round of interviews with 25 mothers accused of “parental alienation” found that many of the mothers were encouraged by their lawyers not to mention domestic abuse, and that in the majority of cases no fact-finding hearing was held to determine the allegations.
- The mothers reported that “parental alienation” was most commonly raised by fathers, but in some cases by their lawyers, and the “evidence” of “parental alienation” ranged from mothers not promoting contact, to mothers raising domestic abuse or child sexual abuse, and to mothers sending “subliminal messages” to children.

Findings from the International Survey on Parental Alienation and Domestic Violence

Simon Lapierre, Camila Cardeal, Raheleh Sazgar, Tanishka Sharma, Naomi Abrahams, Patrick Ladouceur, University of Ottawa, Canada

- An international survey conducted across thirteen countries was designed to examine the effects of “parental alienation” discourses and practices on women who have experienced abuse and violence.

- The study included 911 women who had experienced domestic violence and who had been accused of parental alienation.
- The allegation of “parental alienation” impacted child custody arrangements, and various aspects of the women’s and children’s lives, including their mental and physical health.
- Data suggested that perpetrators use the allegations of “parental alienation” as a strategy to shift the focus away from their violence against women.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Working with Domestic Violence Survivors who have been accused of Parental Alienation

Eija Katarina Jonadotter, Líf án ofbeldis (Life Without Violence), Iceland

- There is a grave lack of protocols, transparency, and accountability within family justice systems.
- The lack of contact between abusive fathers and their children is regarded as being more harmful to the child than the violence they are at risk of being subjected to.
- GREVIO expresses grave concerns regarding the welfare of children in the Icelandic family justice system.

Olive Craig, Rights of Women, United Kingdom

- When survivors ask a court to protect them and their children from abuse, they instead face minimisation or blame, which causes a huge amount of trauma. When working with survivors, it is important to acknowledge the impact of this.
- Lawyers should work in partnership with the survivors they represent and help them build their case with a focus on domestic abuse and abuse experienced by the children, ensuring the children's voices are prominent in arguments.
- Challenging the appointment of experts, ensuring domestic abuse is always raised and appealing poor decisions should be viewed as standard tools used by survivors’ lawyers.
- Training on domestic abuse, child abuse, and the origins and problems with “parental alienation” beliefs should be a standard part of judicial training and lawyer training and must be kept up to date so they can challenge myths and recognise beliefs about “parental alienation” when they use different language.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Challenging Parental Alienation and Activism Against Parental Alienation in Europe and America.

Pierre-Guillaume Prigent, Université de Brest, France

- Based on interviews conducted with 20 mothers accused of “parental alienation”, the findings demonstrate that they were victims of domestic abuse and coercive control, and that had continued after separation.
- The accusation of “parental alienation” can be explicit (one third of the cases) but it can also be implicit.
- One third of the mothers have lost custody of their children, and the others were at risk of losing it.
- Initially, fathers' groups and associations promoting the concept of "parental alienation" organized to disseminate it. Maintaining child-parent relationships took precedence over the risk of exposing children to violence. The concept was institutionalized in family courts and joint custody was being presented as a solution. Then, the CIIVISE (Independent Commission on Incest and Sexual Violence against Children) criticized and discredited "parental alienation". There has then been a reversal of interpretation in the press, from fathers being "falsely" accused of incestuous sexual abuse to children in need of protection.

Ludmila Ribeiro, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil

- The Parental Alienation Law in Brazil (Law# 12.318) subjects parents accused of this behavior to fines, loss of custody, and psychological treatment.
- Although perpetrators often use the strategy of accusing mothers of “parental alienation” when they report domestic violence, judicial decisions rarely recognize “parental alienation” when domestic violence is reported.
- Advocacy groups and legal organizations are working to utilize, transform, and revoke “parental alienation” laws in favor of women's rights.

Danielle Pollack, The Court Said, United States of America

- Growing out of research and policy work by the National Family Violence Law Center at George Washington University, a landmark federal law called the Keeping Children Safe from Family Violence Act (Kayden’s Law) was added to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 2022 as Title XV, marking the first time a section dedicated specifically to improving family courts handling of abuse allegations.
- The four core elements of Kayden’s Law focus on requiring civil courts adjudicating child custody to: 1) consider all evidence of past family violence, 2) restrict expert evidence on abuse to those only appropriately qualified to offer it, 3) restrict unproven “reunification treatments”, and 4) mandate training on abuse for family court judges and other court professionals which relies only on evidence-based research.
- Several states have since adopted the federal Kayden’s Law provisions (partially or in entirety), including Colorado, Utah, California, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Maryland, and New Hampshire.



This forum has been organized by the Parental Alienation & Domestic Violence Research Group

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