



Original idea: Andries van Tonder
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Defining Parental Alienation and PAS

About this document:

This October 2020 update, is a revision of the original PAAA documents. This is a summary of known definitions used in Ireland and internationally. This is not an attempt to draft a new definition.

On 20 October 2020, the steering committee of A.C.F. confirmed to operationally use the popular-culture and widely recognised construct of “Parental Alienation”, that is known under different terms in different jurisdictions. To name a few – Hostile Aggressive Parenting, Poisoning Parenting, ECAPA (emotional Child Abuse by Parental Alienation), ECAPE (Enforced Child Abandoning and Procured Estrangement), AB-PA (attachment based parental alienation), and more.

At the same meeting it was again confirmed that A.C.F. agrees that the outcomes are not a “syndrome”¹ but the resulting consequences, therefore a “sequela”, a condition which is the consequence of the psychological injury to the child. Hence, the term Parental Alienation Syndrome would not describe the issue of Parental Alienation properly.

The authors also believe that PA is “an action or deed, perpetrated by a person with a mental disorder” and not a “mental health disorder”.

There is no official State sanctioned definition in Ireland for either PA or PAS.

Parental Alienation

Known definitions or explanations, used by Irish State bodies or officials in the past up till present

Minister Roderic O’Gorman comment²

(2020 – Quoted during Dáil Éireann Debate, Wednesday - 14 October 2020)

“.. parental alienation is highly complex.”, “.. an offence of frightening, bullying or threatening a child in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to the child’s physical, mental or emotional health or wellbeing. ..”.

¹ Medical and psychological professionals define a syndrome in the medical context.

² [Minister for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2020-10-14/231/](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2020-10-14/231/)

Minister Mary Butler³

(2020 – Used during Dáil Éireann Debate, Tuesday - 21 July 2020)

Parental alienation describes a process through which a child becomes estranged from a parent as the result of the psychological manipulation of another parent.

Minister Helen McEntee⁴

(2020 – Used during Dáil Éireann Debate, Tuesday, 28 July 2020)

Parental alienation has been described as a situation when a child’s resistance or hostility towards one parent is not justified and is the result of psychological manipulation by the other parent.

Mary Elizabeth Banotti comment⁵

(2020 – Quoted by Dan Neville⁶ during Dáil Éireann Debate, 2 June 1999⁷)

“.. extremely traumatic cases where parents were prepared to go to extreme lengths in the context of the break-up of a relationship..”, “.. the conduct by one parent which tends to alienate the child's affection from the other as so inimical to the child's welfare as to be grounds for a denial of custody or a change of custody from the parent guilty of such conduct. In some US states, parental alienation syndrome is now a criminal offence for which a parent could be jailed.”

Edward M. Stephens (modified)⁸

(1967 - observed in St Vincent Hospital and other old Health Board documents)

A condition that arises as a result of a distinctive form of psychological injury to children in high conflict divorce or other custody matters. It occurs when the child becomes aligned with one parent (or carer) as a result of the unjustified and/or exaggerated denigration of the other parent (or parents).

Note: ACF operationally uses the popular-culture and widely recognised construct of “Parental Alienation” which needs to be addressed by the Minister and the State. ACF also recognises that a child alienation from a parent/parents can be also a result of alienating behaviours performed by either carers related to a child by blood (eg. grandparents or other relatives) or the State institutions and the carers appointed by them.

3 [Minister of State at the Department of Health, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2020-07-21/757/](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2020-07-21/757/)

4 [Minister for Justice and Equality, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2020-07-28/746/](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2020-07-28/746/)

5 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/1426/MARY+ELIZABETH_BANOTTI/history/5,](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/1426/MARY+ELIZABETH_BANOTTI/history/5)

6 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/members/member/Dan-Neville.S.1989-10-01/>

7 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1999-06-02/27/>

8 Edward M. Stephens, M.D. (N.U.I. Galway 1967) “Rye Hospital program”, copied in other documents and opinions of the HSE

Known definitions or explanations, used by Irish legal professionals during hearings

Justice Binchy (As quoted by Caroline Langley)⁹

Parental Alienation exists where one parent is deliberately undermining any relationship that [the child] might have with the target parent, which could only be to the detriment of the child's welfare¹⁰.

Internationally

Cafcass UK¹¹

We recognise parental alienation as when a child's resistance or hostility towards one parent is not justified and is the result of psychological manipulation by the other parent.

Childress (2014) (Modified)¹²

The presence in the child's symptom display of three specific diagnostic indicators that represents definitive clinical evidence for the presence of pathogenic parenting practices by the allied and supposedly "favoured" parent (or carer) that are directly responsible for the child's symptomatic cut-off of a relationship with the other parent (or parents)

1. Attachment system suppression
2. Personality disorder symptoms
3. Delusional belief system

Linda Kase-Gottlieb (Edited)

Parental Alienation is an observable family interactional dynamic in which the Alienating Party engages in a pattern of behaviors to co-opt a child in a coalition with that party to deprecate and reject the Target Parent or parents.

Brazilian Law

Brazilian Law No. 12,318 , OF AUGUST 26, 2010.

(Taken from the English translation.)

Art. 2. An act of parental alienation is deemed the interference in a child's or adolescent's psychological education promoted or induced by either parent, by grandparents, or by those who

⁹ Speech at the Parental Alienation Conference, EU Parliament, 06.02.2020 and The High Court of Ireland Family Law Case, 16.01.2019. <https://www.casemine.com/judgement/uk/5da061ef4653d07dedfd6d7c>
https://youtu.be/3rKc7lrS_wI

¹⁰ PA Guideline per Binchy J, C.G. v B.G. [2019] IEHC 15.

¹¹ <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/divorce-and-separation/parental-alienation/>

¹² C.A. Childress, Psy D. Treatment of Attachment-Based "Parental Alienation" (Modifications in *italic*)

hold the child or adolescent under their authority, guardianship, or surveillance to reject one of the parents, or that hampers building or maintaining bonds with them.

Mexican Law¹³

The transformation of the consciousness of a child in order to prevent, hinder or destroy its links with one of their parents.

Janet Johnston - Professor Emeritus. Justice Studies, San Jose State University¹⁴

Parental abduction encompasses a broad array of illegal behaviors that involves one parent taking, detaining, concealing, or enticing away his or her child from the parent having custodial access. When the abducted parent intends to permanently alter custodial access by hiding the child or removing the child to another locale, the effects on the family, and the obstacles to the child's recovery are compounded.

Justice Acton¹⁵

Parental alienation occurs when one parent convinces the children that the other parent is not trustworthy, loveable or caring – in short, not a good parent.

Such manipulation of the children, with the resulting alienation, carries very high risks. It can seriously distort a child's developing personality and subsequent life adjustment. The sooner it is identified and appropriate interventions are implemented, the better the child's chances of avoiding its worst long-term effects.

Wikipedia

The Wiki article is out of date but the definition as hereunder can be mentioned.

Parental alienation is a dynamic when a child expresses unjustified hatred or unreasonably strong dislike of one parent, making access by the rejected parent difficult or impossible. These feelings may be influenced by negative comments by the other parent or grandparents, generally occurring due to divorce or separation. Characteristics, such as lack of empathy and warmth, between the rejected parent and child are other indicators.

Current definition¹⁶:

Parental alienation describes a process through which a child becomes estranged from a parent as the result of psychological manipulation of another parent. The child estrangement may manifest itself as fear, disrespect or hostility toward the distant parent, and may extend to additional relatives or parties.

13 Unofficial translation - FAMILY VIOLENCE
Article 323 Septimus.

14 Published in ERIC - Juvenile Justice Bulletin USA, January 2001

15 B.S.P. v. D.G.P., 2008 SKQB 63 (CanLII)

16 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parental_alienation

Parental Alienation Syndrome or Sequela (PAS)

Note: APS agrees that the outcomes are not a “syndrome”¹⁷ but the resulting consequences, therefore a “sequela”, a condition which is the consequence of the psychological injury to the child. Hence, the term Parental Alienation Syndrome would not describe the issue of Parental Alienation properly.

APS

Parental Alienation Sequela is a combination of two or more psychological conditions with a life long effect on a person that experienced parental alienation¹⁸ as a child. The recognised conditions¹⁹ involved may be (but are not limited to) delusional symptoms in the partner of an individual with delusional disorder (better known as shared psychotic disorder or folie a deux), factitious disorder imposed on another, Child affected by parental relationship distress, Parent-child relational problem.

Edward Stephens²⁰

This condition (PAS) arises as a distinctive form of psychological injury to children in high conflict divorce. It occurs when the child becomes aligned with one parent as a result of the unjustified and/or exaggerated denigration of the other parent. This leads to an impaired relationship with the alienated (target) parent and an absolute loss of parenting as a result of the hostility of the parent producing the alienation. In most cases of high conflict divorce, there are degrees of alienation. In severe cases, the child's once love-bonded relationship with the target/rejected parent is destroyed.

Justice Sheppard²¹ (in brief)

The parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is a childhood disorder that arises almost exclusively in the context of child-custody disputes. Its primary manifestation is the child's campaign of denigration against a parent, a campaign that has no justification.²²

Justice Perkins²³

Children who are subject to the parental alienation syndrome (I will call them PAS children) are very powerful in their views of the non-alienating parent. The views are almost exclusively negative, to the point that the parent is demonized and seen as evil...

PAS children feel empowered and are rewarded for attacking the other parents and feel no remorse or shame for doing so.

17 Medical and psychological professionals define a syndrome in the medical context.

18 See APS definition of Parental Alienation

19 See DSM 5

20 <https://responsibledivorce.com/parenting/pas-rye.htm>

21 R v KC

22 Gardner, R. 2001 Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS): Sixteen Years Later - *last accessed 12-5-2014*
www.fact.on.ca/Info/pas/gard01b.htm

23 C.S. v. M.S., 2007 CanLII 6240 (ON SC)

PAS children have a knee jerk, reflexive response to support the alienator against the targeted parent, often on the basis of minimal evidence or justification. PAS children broaden their attacks to encompass members of the other parent's extended family.

PAS children are recruited by the alienating parent and alienated siblings to the alienating parent's cause.

With PAS children, you cannot be sure who you are listening to – is it the child (or) is it the alienating parent?

Justice Graham²⁴

... a disorder that arises primarily in the context of child custody disputes. Its primary manifestation is the child's campaign of denigration against a parent, a campaign that has no justification. It results from a combination of a programming (brainwashing) parent's indoctrinations and the child's own contributions to the vilification of the target parent.

"PAS is more than brainwashing or programming, because the child has to actually participate in the denigrating of the alienated parent. This is done in primarily the following eight ways:

The child denigrates the alienated parent with foul language and severe oppositional behaviour;

The child offers weak, absurd, or frivolous reasons for his or her anger;

The child is sure of him or herself and doesn't demonstrate ambivalence, i.e. love and hate for the alienated parent, only hate;

The child exhorts that he or she alone came up with the idea of denigration;

The child supports and feels a need to protect the alienating parent;

The child does not demonstrate guilt over cruelty towards the alienated parent;

The child uses borrowed scenarios, or vividly describes situations that he or she could not have experienced;

Animosity is spread to also include the friends and/or extended family of the alienated parent."

²⁴ P.L.C. v. C.J.P., 2007 CanLII 57080 (ON SC)