



UNIVERSITY OF  
**WEST LONDON**

The *Career* University

# Examining the prevalence of childhood parental alienating behaviours (PABs) in 18-25-year-old adults in the UK

Ben Hine, Professor of Applied Psychology, University of West London

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

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Key Findings</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Full report</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Aims, Objectives, Research Questions, and Outcomes</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Aims	8
Objectives	8
Research Questions	8
Anticipated Outcomes	8
<b>Background</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Method</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Sample</b>	<b>11</b>
Contextual Information	11
<b>Mother information</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Father information</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Measures</b>	<b>12</b>
Parental Acceptance	12
Alienating Behaviors	12
Mental Health	13
<b>Procedure</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Results</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Prevalence of PABs</b>	<b>14</b>
Mental Health Outcomes	14
<b>Discussion</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Implications</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Limitations	15
Future Research Directions	16
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>18</b>

# Acknowledgements

First, we would like to thank Good Egg Safety for funding this crucially important research. The findings provided by this report will have a fundamental role in shaping our approach to this issue, benefiting thousands of parents and children across the UK.

Second, we thank Atomik Research for their assistance in completing this project through a rigorous and rapid data collection processes.

Third, we thank all of the participants in this study, for sharing their experiences and answering questions about a very difficult topic openly and honestly.



# Executive Summary

Parental Alienating Behaviours (PABs) are behaviours enacted by a parent to harm the relationship between a child and the other parent. The evidence around these behaviours has grown rapidly, and professionals are beginning to understand the widespread and hugely impactful nature of these behaviours.

To further this understanding, we conducted a large survey of over 1,000 adults aged between 18 and 25 years to see how common PABs were during childhood and how they impacted them as adults.

We found that most adults had experienced PABs during childhood, with a quarter of the sample experiencing over 20 (out of 30) alienating behaviours from mothers or fathers. We also found that men were more likely to report childhood PABs than women. These results demonstrate just how widespread alienating behaviours are.

**We also found that those affected by PABs show greater signs of serious mental stress, like PTSD symptoms, depression, and thoughts of suicide in adulthood.**

The recommendations made in this report recognise the need for a comprehensive approach to address Parental Alienating Behaviours (PABs), incorporating policy and legal reforms to clarify and integrate PABs into family law, alongside educational programs for professionals and students. They also suggest enhancing support through mental health services and support groups, conducting public awareness campaigns, promoting ongoing research, and fostering collaboration between various community and social services to ensure a coordinated and effective response to the challenges of PABs.

**PABs are a real and pressing issue. We need a response that is rapid, effective, and protects children from immense harm.**



# Key Findings

## 1. High Prevalence of Alienating Behaviours:

- Most participants reported experiencing alienating behaviours from both parents often or most of the time.

## 2. Gender Differences:

- Men reported higher levels of alienating behaviours from both mothers and fathers compared to women.

## 3. Strong Correlation Between Parents' Behaviours:

- Mothers' and fathers' behaviours were highly correlated, indicating they often occur together.

## 4. Impact on PTSD:

- Higher levels of reported alienating behaviours were linked to increased PTSD symptoms in participants.

## 5. Suicide-Related Concerns:

- Alienating behaviours were significantly associated with thoughts and behaviours related to suicide, including thinking about suicide and likelihood of attempting it.

# Recommendations

## 1. Policy and Legal Reforms:

- Develop Clear Legal Definitions and Guidelines: Establish clear legal definitions and guidelines for identifying and managing cases of PABs to help judicial systems better recognize and address these behaviours.
- Incorporate PABs into Family Law: Advocate for the incorporation of specific considerations of PABs into family law to protect children and the alienated parent, potentially through custody decisions and parental rights.

## 2. Educational Programs:

- Training for Professionals: Implement training programs for family law practitioners, therapists, and social workers to identify and manage cases involving PABs effectively.
- School-Based Education: Introduce educational programs in schools to teach students about the dynamics of healthy and unhealthy family relationships, including the identification of alienating behaviours.

## 3. Support and Intervention Services:

- Enhanced Mental Health Support: Develop and fund mental health services specifically aimed at families experiencing PABs, offering therapy and counselling to help mitigate the adverse effects on both children and parents.
- Support Groups: Create support groups for alienated parents and children, providing a platform for sharing experiences and coping strategies.

## 4. Public Awareness Campaigns:

- Launch Awareness Initiatives: Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate the community about PABs, their signs, and long-term effects to reduce stigma and promote supportive interventions.
- Partner with Media: Work with media outlets to spread information on the realities of parental alienation, emphasizing the psychological impact on children and families.

## 5. Community and Social Services Collaboration:

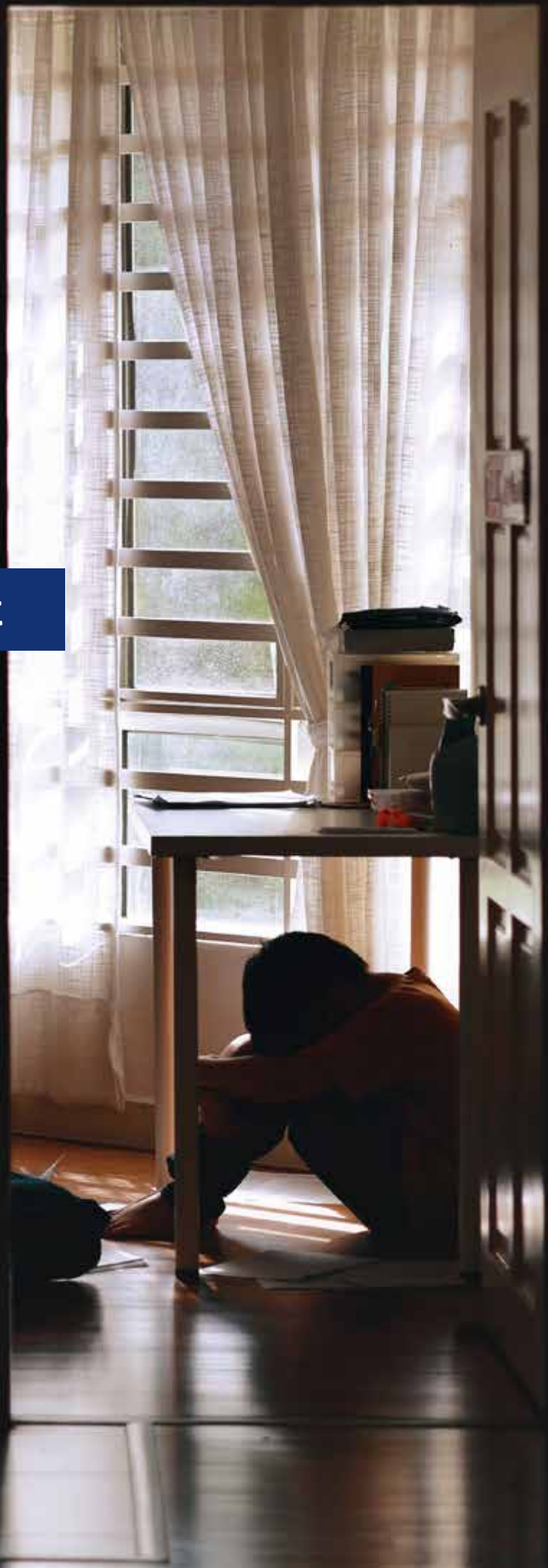
- Integrate Services: Foster collaboration between educational institutions, healthcare providers, social services, and legal bodies to provide a coordinated response to families affected by PABs.
- Resource Allocation: Ensure that community resources are adequately equipped to address the needs of families impacted by parental alienation, including legal aid and counselling services.

## 6. Research and Continuous Learning:

- Ongoing Research: Encourage and fund research to further explore the prevalence, causes, and effects of PABs, aiming to refine intervention strategies and therapeutic approaches.
- Longitudinal Studies: Initiate longitudinal studies to track the long-term outcomes of children exposed to PABs and evaluate the effectiveness of different intervention strategies over time.

These recommendations aim to create a multi-faceted approach involving legal reform, education, direct support, and broad public engagement to effectively address and mitigate the impacts of Parental Alienating Behaviours.

Full report



# Aims, Objectives, Research Questions, and Outcomes

## Aims

1. To further establish the prevalence of abusive behaviours targeting the parent-child relationship, otherwise known as Parental Alienating Behaviours (PABs) in the UK
2. To highlight the impact of such behaviours on the mental health of UK adults experiencing this form of abuse in childhood

## Objectives

1. To create and administer a comprehensive questionnaire to a representative sample of adults aged between 18 and 25 years old
2. To analyse results for prevalence rates, group differences, and predictive relationships
3. To directly disseminate project findings to stakeholders, policymakers, and service providers

## Research Questions

1. How many UK adults aged 18-25 experienced abusive behaviour targeting the parent-child relationship whilst children?
2. What are the impacts of these behaviours on these adults' mental health?
3. Are there any demographic groups (i.e., men versus women) which experience the above behaviours/issues to a greater or lesser extent?

## Anticipated Outcomes

1. Improved understanding as to the prevalence of experience of abusive behaviours targeting the parent-child relationship
2. Improved understanding as to the relationship between these behaviours and mental health
3. Identification of groups potentially more vulnerable to these behaviours
4. A robust, UK evidence base as to the prevalence and impact of these behaviours, with implications for: the commissioning of support mechanisms for parents and children, improved legal practice, and enactment of intervention opportunities.



# Background

Parental alienating behaviours (PABs) are coercively controlling forms of abuse (Harman & Matthewson, 2020) that can result in what is known as ‘parental alienation’ (PA), defined as “one type of contact refusal when a child— typically whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict separation or divorce—allies strongly with one parent and resists and rejects contact and/or a relationship (i.e., contact refusal) with the other parent without legitimate justification” (Bernet et al., 2022, p. 5). In other words, PA refers to the actions and attitudes manifested by the child when there a psychologically and coercively controlling abusive dynamic exists in the family system.

As outlined in (Harman et al., 2022) and Hine (Hine, 2023, 2024), research on PA has expanded rapidly over the last decade. There is now a robust evidence base detailing many aspects of PA, including how it is enacted (i.e., the identification of PABs), its impact on both alienated parents and children (and its manifestation therein), and pathways to intervention (Harman et al., 2022). Research has also outlined the extensive impact PA has on alienated parents (Lee-Maturana et al., 2022), children (Miralles et al., 2023), and other family members (Bounds & Matthewson, 2022), as well as its complex application in legal disputes on custody and child contact (Harman & Lorandos, 2021; Sharples et al., 2023).

Recent research identifies PA as a form of family violence, linking it to coercive control, psychological abuse, and child abuse (Harman et al., 2018). Alienating parents often misuse legal and social services to further isolate the targeted parent, aligning PA with legal and administrative abuse. Testimonies from alienated parents and evidence from studies in the US and Canada reveal a strong overlap between PA and intimate partner violence. These findings highlight the severity of PA and underscore the need for effective legal and social interventions.

Until recently, assessment of the prevalence of PABs was limited to the United States (Harman et al., 2016, 2019) and focused

on the perpetration and targeting of PABs between parents. A recent report has begun to investigate the prevalence and impact of Parental Alienating Behaviours (PABs) in the UK (Hine et al., 2024). Through a survey of over 1,000 separated or divorced parents, it revealed that while 39.2% of respondents acknowledged experiencing PABs when asked directly, this figure rose to 59.1% when specific behaviours were measured, highlighting the widespread nature of PABs. The study demonstrated significant mental health repercussions for those affected, including heightened PTSD, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Additionally, it found a correlation between PABs and other forms of domestic abuse. Among parents. The report underscored the necessity of a dual strategy: enhancing mental health support and raising public awareness through comprehensive campaigns. It was further argued that these findings provide a critical basis for future policymaking and intervention strategies aimed at mitigating the impact of PABs on affected families.

Whilst this evidence gap has now begun to be addressed, the prevalence of alienating behaviours as experienced by children themselves has yet to be assessed. Research on the impact of PABs on children has predominantly been undertaken in Italy by Verrocchio and colleagues (Baker & Verrocchio, 2016; Verrocchio et al., 2016; Verrocchio et al., 2018; Verrocchio et al., 2019) and has demonstrated that PABs are widely experienced by children and that there are long lasting effects into adulthood (specifically on mental health outcomes), although this data was based on convenience samples rather than samples reflecting the general population. Providing an assessment of prevalence using a representative sample in the UK would likely complement the results above in demonstrating the high prevalence of PABs in this country, provide further evidence on their impact on children into adulthood (Miralles et al., 2023), and continue to point to these behaviours as a global public health issue.

The present study therefore utilised similar measures to those used in Hine et al., (2024) alongside other established measures of mental health to conduct the first ever UK study on the prevalence of PABs and PA in children as reported by those children as young adults. Using a specialist research panel service, a representative sample of over 1,000 adults aged

between 18 and 25 in the UK were surveyed and asked questions used in previous prevalence research on this topic (Harman et al., 2016, 2019; Verrocchio et al., 2018), to create directly comparable UK data. This method provided the only and most comprehensive assessment of the scale of this issue within the UK to date.



# Method

## Sample

Participants were 1,004 residents of the UK, all aged between 18 and 25 years old. The average age for the sample was 21.24 years (SD = 2.04). Two hundred and forty-four (24.3%) of the sample identified as male, with 804 (80.1%) identifying as heterosexual (11.1% Bisexual, 4.7% Lesbian/Gay, 4.2% Other). Most of the sample identified as White (69.8%), with 14.9% identifying as Asian/Asian British, 8.6% as Black/Black British, 5.5% as Mixed or Multiple, and 1.2% as Other. The most common household income bracket was £20,001-£30,000, followed by £30,001-£40,000, £10,001-£20,000, and then £40,001-£50,000 (55.7% of sample). 20.8% of the sample had secondary school qualifications as their highest qualification, with a further 43.5% and 25.1% having A-level/equivalent and bachelor's degrees as theirs respectively (89.4% of sample). Half of the sample (50.6%) were single, with the next highest categories being in a committed relationship (not cohabiting or married) (18.8%), married or in a civil partnership (18.5%), and cohabiting (10.2%). Based on available national figures for sexual orientation, and ethnicity distributions, this sample can be classified as broadly representative of

the UK population, although there were proportionally **fewer men than women**, and **higher percentages of sexual and ethnic minorities than the general population**.

## Contextual Information

Most of the sample (84%) reported having two parents or caregivers during their childhood (16% had a single parent/caregiver). Most of the sample reported having two parents present in the household for most of their childhood (71.5%), while 18.2% reported having one parent only, 6.3% had one parent and a stepparent, and 3.1% reported having one parent and another relative or family friend (0.9% other) as their caregivers. When asked about the composition they experienced most recently, these figures were 65.1%, 22.7%, 8.8% and 2.9% respectively, suggesting that as childhood progressed, some children transitioned from two to one parent households. When reporting on the parental relationship, 58.5% of the sample reported their parents as being married for their whole childhood. 15.2% reported a divorce, 12.1% reported a separation, 2.7% reported a widow, and 10.3% said they were never married (1.3% other). Of those whose parents were divorced or separated, (See Table 1).

Table 1. Child contact arrangements for children whose parents were separated or divorced in childhood

Child Contact Arrangement	Freq	%Sub sample	% Whole sample
It was fairly equal	39	14.2	3.9
I lived primarily with my mother and had some parenting time with my father	136	49.6	13.5
I lived primarily with my father and had some parenting time with my mother	19	6.9	1.9
I lived entirely with my mother and never or almost never had parenting time with my father	68	24.8	6.8
I lived entirely with my father and never or almost never had parenting time with my mother	7	2.6	0.7

## Mother information

Most participants (93.8 %) reported having a biological mother growing up, with 2.5 % reporting an adopted mother, and 3.7 % reporting no mother figure. On reporting feelings about their mother (where one was present), 85.8 % reported that the mother figure was somewhat to completely good to them, 85.7 % reported some to very many good memories of them, 54.7 % reported that they could 'not at all' or 'have been a little bit' a better caregiver, and 88.9 % reported somewhat to very much spending time with them. Reporting on the present, 69 % stated they were 'not at all' or 'a little bit' angry or upset with their mother now, and 68.6 % reported that they had 'not at all' or 'a little bit' done something to hurt their mother. Just over half (52.2 %) reported that, in disagreements, sometimes the mother and sometimes the other caregiver were right, followed by 43 % reporting that always the mother was right. Most participants reported that feelings about their mother came only from them (61.9 %) with 35.1 reporting partly from them and partly from others (3 % only others).

## Father info

Most participants (86.7 %) reported having a biological father growing up, with 3.7 % reporting an adopted father, and 9.7 % reporting no father figure (noticeably higher than the same figure for mothers). On reporting feelings about their father (where one was present), 77 % reported that the father figure was somewhat to completely good to them, 73.7 % reported some to very many good memories of them, 45 % reported that they could 'not at all' or 'have been a little bit' a better caregiver, and 78.1 % reported somewhat to very much spending time with them. Reporting on the present, 61.7 % stated they were 'not at all' or 'a little bit' angry or upset with their father now, and 68.7 % reported that they had 'not at all' or 'a little bit' done something to hurt their father. Just over half (56 %) reported that, in disagreements, sometimes the father and sometimes the other caregiver were right, followed by 24.3 % reporting that always the father was right. Most participants reported that feelings about their father came only from them (53.9 %) with 40.2 reporting partly

from them and partly from others (5.8 % only others).

## Measures

### Positive Co-Parenting Behaviors

Participants reported on the extent they recalled their primary caregivers engaging in nine different positive co-parenting behaviours (e.g., my parents supported each other in disciplining me) using a 5-point semantic differential scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). This scale was reliable (0.89), and the items were averaged together.

### Parental Acceptance

The Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) is a self-report questionnaire designed to assess children's current perceptions and adults' retrospective remembrances of the degree to which they experienced parental (maternal and paternal) acceptance or rejection in childhood (Rohner & Ali, 2020). The measure consists of four scales: (1) warmth and affection (or coldness and lack of affection, when reverse scored), (2) hostility and aggression, (3) indifference and neglect, and (4) undifferentiated rejection. Undifferentiated rejection refers to individuals' feelings that the parent does not really love them, want them, appreciate them, or care about them in some other way without necessarily having any objective indicator that the parent is cold, aggressive, or neglecting. Collectively, the four scales constitute an overall measure of perceived or remembered parental acceptance-rejection in childhood. This scale was administered twice to participants, once for mothers and once for fathers, with Cronbach's alphas of 0.85 for both, demonstrating excellent reliability.

### Alienating Behaviors

Participants rated 30 different behaviours that have been identified in the research literature as parental alienating behaviours (Harman & Matthewson, 2020). Reactance is a potential concern in surveying individuals who were alienated from a parent, as the alignment with the preferred parent can influence perceptions that they are "perfect" and are justified in their behaviours. The items were created for another research study (Harman et al., 2024) to minimize potential reactance in respondents.

For example, if an alienated individual is asked whether their mother or father spoke badly about their other parent, it is unlikely they will report the parent did this because they believe they were only telling the “truth” about them. The 30 items used in this study were developed based on a broad array of different behaviours (e.g., loyalty inducing) rather than just parental denigration, and two positive behaviours were included to minimize response bias, and these were reverse scored. Participants rated each behaviour for their mother and father separately, and reliability of the scales was high ( $\alpha = 0.92$  and  $0.93$  respectively).

## Mental Health

We assessed posttraumatic stress symptoms using a shortened version of the PTSD Checklist (Weathers et al., 1993). Seven problems were selected from the original item list of 17 due to concerns about survey fatigue, and respondents were asked to indicate how much each of the seven problems had bothered them in the last month (using a 5-point scale with not at all and extremely serving as anchors). The items formed a reliable scale ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ), and they were averaged together.

We also administered a 20-item depression screening tool published by the Centre for Epidemiological Studies (Radloff, 1977) to assess depressive symptoms. Respondents rated how often in the last week they have felt certain ways (e.g., I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me), and respondents answered with rarely or none of the time (less than a day), some or a little of the time (1–2 days), occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3–4 days), and most or all of the time (5–7 days). The scoring of the measure is a summed score across the 20 items (4 of which are reverse scored) so that the range of scores is between 0 and 60, with higher scores indicating greater levels of depression. The reliability of this scale was high ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ).

We assessed suicidality by asking respondents whether and how often they have thought about suicide in the last year (never, rarely [1 time], sometimes [2 times], often [3–4 times] and very often [5 or more times]). For those participants who did not answer “never” for whether they have thought about suicide in the last year, we then asked whether their thinking about suicide in the last year was

related to conflict around their child custody situation with their ex (using a 5-point scale with strongly disagree and strongly agree as endpoints). Finally, we asked participants who had contemplated suicide in the last year whether they knew anyone who committed suicide due to child custody issues with their ex-partners (Yes, No, I don't know/Don't care to say).

## Procedure

The study was conducted through an online, mixed-methods survey, facilitated by Atomik Research—an independent creative market research agency accredited with Market Research Society (MRS)-certificated researchers and abides to the MRS code. It was carried out over a two-week span from the 21st February to the 3rd March 2024. Participants for this study were recruited from an online consumer panel known as the ‘Power of Opinions’. They were chosen based on specific criteria: being aged 18-24 years old, residing in the UK, willing to consent to the study requirements, and having one or more children from a previous broken relationship.

The sample was drawn using a probability sampling methodology, and a total of 1,004 respondents participated in the survey. It is important to note that there were no hard quotas, and the socio-demographic composition was a natural fallout within this subgroup of the general population. However, as previously mentioned, based on available national figures for demographic distributions, this sample can be classified as largely representative of the UK population, except for gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

The data collection process entailed the use of self-report questionnaires administered online. These questionnaires were divided into multiple sections, such as qualification, social demographic, and sections related to harmful and abusive behaviours. Upon completion of the study, qualified respondents were rewarded with a £5 incentive for their participation. Throughout the research, strict adherence to ethical guidelines was maintained, thereby ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' responses.

This study was approved by the appropriate ethical review process and board at the University of West London.

# Results

## Prevalence of PABs

Participants reported on frequency of parental alienating behaviours for both parental figures. The mean score for reports of mothers' alienating behaviours was 2.49 (SD = 0.72), which equates to between rarely (2) and sometimes (3) on the scale. This outcome was similar for ratings of fathers (M = 2.42, SD = 0.76). Interestingly, scores on the positive coparenting behaviours scale were not correlated to reports of PABs (the expectation being that this would be a negative relationship).

However, when looking at the sum of individual responses for mothers' behaviours, 90.7 % of participants answered 'often' or 'most of the time' to at least one item. Almost a quarter (22.1 %) of the sample answered in this way to at least 10 items, and 4.2 % answered this to at least 20 of the 30 items. For fathers behaviours 87.4 % of participants answered 'often' or 'most of the time' to at least one item. About one-third (21.4 %) of the sample answered in this way to at least 10 items, and 3.2 % answered this to at least 20 of the 30 items.

When including 'sometimes' responses (3 on the scale), 98.3 % of participants answered affirmatively to at least one item. Over half (58.5 %) of the sample answered in this way to at least 10 items, and 25.9 % answered this to at least 20 of the 30 items. For fathers' behaviours, 95.7 % of participants answered 'often' or 'most of the time' to at least one item. Over half (53.1 %) of the sample answered in this way to at least 10 items, and 25.1 % answered this to at least 20 of the 30 items.

Men in the sample reported having experienced more alienating behaviours from mothers (M = 2.74, SD = 0.85) than women (M = 2.42, SD = 0.66),  $t(944) = 5.89, p < 0.001$ . Men also reported having experienced more alienating behaviours from fathers (M = 2.67, SD = 0.89) compared to women (M = 2.35, SD = 0.69),  $t(884) = 5.38, p < 0.001$ .

No other demographic characteristics were statistically significant from each other ( $ps > .05$ ).

Mothers' alienating behaviours and fathers' alienating behaviours were also highly correlated with one another,  $r(894) = .783, p < 0.001$ .

## Mental Health Outcomes

There was a positive correlation between the mothers' alienating behaviours and PTSD scores,  $r(965) = .35, p < 0.001$ , and between fathers' alienating behaviours and PTSD scores,  $r(905) = .32, p < 0.001$ . There was also a positive correlation between mothers' alienating behaviours and depression scores,  $r(965) = .36, p < 0.001$ , and between fathers' alienating behaviours and depression scores,  $r(905) = .325, p < 0.001$ .

Moreover, there was a positive correlation between mothers' alienating behaviours and all suicide related questions, and between fathers' alienating behaviours and all but one suicide related questions.

Question	Mothers		Fathers	
	df	r	df	r
Thought about suicide	965	.123*	905	.087*
Told someone about wanting to complete suicide	965	.196*	905	.172*
Likelihood of attempting suicide one day	965	.202*	905	.180*
Thought about killing yourself in last year	965	.084*	905	.249

Note - \* =  $p, 0.01$ .

# Discussion

To further understand the complex dynamics of parent-child relationships, this study delved into the prevalence and consequences of PABs specifically with adults reporting on their experiences as children. Surveying a diverse pool of participants intended to be representative of the UK general population, the research uncovered a high prevalence of PABs experienced by children, as well as a significant correlation between exposure to PABs and adverse mental health outcomes in adulthood. This is the first study in the UK to examine the prevalence of PABs in children and their outcomes.

**Prevalence of abusive behaviours targeting the parent-child relationship:** Our study found that, using the most conservative categorisations, most of the sample had experienced at least one alienating behaviour by mothers and fathers, with around a fifth experiencing more than 10. When using an expanded categorisation (including sometimes), figures were significantly higher, with around a quarter of the sample experiencing over 20 alienating behaviours from mothers or fathers. Though measured in a different way, there is a relationship here to previous work by Verrocchio and colleagues (Verrocchio et al., 2018). Specifically, that study found that around 58 % of the sample had experienced some form of PABs by mothers, and 46 % by fathers, at some point across childhood. Our data therefore significantly advances prior studies, offering a robust UK-centric perspective. Specifically, these findings suggest that thousands of children are likely to experience parental alienating behaviours every year.

**Impact on adult mental health:** Our findings demonstrate a strong correlation between experiencing PABs in childhood and adverse mental health outcomes, including PTSD symptoms, depression symptoms, and lifetime suicide ideation. This aligns with the substantial evidence base that details the profound effects of PA on children (Miralles et al., 2023) and further supports the contention that PABs, by definition, are psychologically distressing and can have far-reaching consequences on mental health.

**Prevalence by demographics:** Our research found that men were more likely to have experienced PABs than women. This demonstrates that whilst mothers and fathers are equally capable of perpetrating PABs, they may be more likely to do so towards sons. For other demographic characteristics, our study found no significant differences in the experience of PABs, emphasizing that PA can affect a wide range of individuals.

## Implications

1. **Legal and policy implications:** Given the profound impact on mental health, there is an urgent need for UK policymakers and legal systems to address PABs systematically. Our results can serve as a catalyst for designing interventions, drafting guidelines, and crafting policies targeting these behaviours.
2. **Clinical Implications:** Mental health professionals should be informed about the implications of PA on parents' mental well-being, given its association with serious conditions like PTSD and depression.
3. **Intervention:** The results from this report also reinforce the necessity to tackle PABs from the beginning, specifically, to change narratives around acceptable behaviour both within intact and separated relationships. Much larger conversations and interventions targeting family dynamics and separation processes are clearly required.

## Limitations

There are several limitations, many of which are shared with Hine et al. (2024) worth noting in this study:

1. **Self-Report Bias:** The data is based on self-reports, which can sometimes be influenced by memory biases. The accuracy and reliability of self-reported data can vary, especially when discussing sensitive topics such as abusive behaviors. This bias is the reason we asked about PABs in multiple ways and using multiple measures.

2. **Lack of Longitudinal Data:** The study is cross-sectional, capturing data at one point in time. Without longitudinal data, it is challenging to understand the evolution and dynamics of parent-child relationships and the impact of abusive behaviors over time.
3. **Causality Limitations:** As with the study of other forms of family violence, it is unethical to employ an experimental design. Therefore, while the current study can highlight correlations or associations, it cannot determine causality. Though it should be mentioned that we did ask about childhood experiences versus adult outcomes, which may give some indication of causality (but one that could only truly be assessed via a longitudinal study).
4. **Underreporting:** Given the covert nature of PABs and the associated stigma, it is plausible that some instances might be underreported.
5. **Cultural and Socioeconomic Considerations:** While demographic factors like gender, age, and income were considered, deeper cultural and socioeconomic variables might play a role in shaping parental behaviors and children's responses that were not delved into.
6. **Representative nature of the sample:** Whilst every effort was made to capture a population representative of the UK population, there was an under representation of men and an over representation of ethnic and sexual minority groups within the sample. However, it should be noted that whilst this may affect the reporting of descriptive statistics, all of the inferential evaluations made in this report account for differences in sub-sample size and can therefore still be reliably reported.

### Future Research Directions

It is arguably most important to next examine childhood experiences of PABs directly. Specifically, to work with children to explore how PABs are experienced in real time, and then to potentially track the long-term effects of these behaviours across the lifespan. Obviously this would be challenging for several reasons, but it would also be powerful to capture.





## Conclusion

The present study suggests that the prevalence and impact of Parental Alienating Behaviors (PABs) in the UK is alarmingly high and may significantly affect children's mental health into adulthood. This project specifically highlights the widespread nature of PABs, with most participants experiencing these behaviors and a strong correlation to PTSD symptoms, depression symptoms, and suicidal thoughts.

Men reported higher incidences than women, highlighting potential gendered victimisation. To address this, comprehensive legal reforms, educational initiatives, mental health support, and public awareness campaigns are urgently needed. These steps are crucial to protect children from the severe psychological harm caused by PABs and to foster healthier family dynamics.



## References

- 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. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2016.1230480>
- Bernet, W., Baker, A. J. L., & Adkins, K. L. (2022). Definitions and terminology regarding child alignments, estrangement, and alienation: A survey of custody evaluators. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 67, 279-288. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.14868>
- Bounds, O., & Matthewson, M. (2022). Parental alienating behaviours experienced by alienated grandparents. *Journal of Family Issues*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X221126753>
- Harman, J. J., Kruk, E., & Hines, D. A. (2018). Parental alienating behaviors: An unacknowledged form of family violence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 144, 1275-1299. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000175>
- Harman, J. J., Leder-Elder, S., & Biringen, Z. (2016). Prevalence of parental alienation drawn from a representative poll. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 66, 62-66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.04.021>
- Harman, J. J., Leder-Elder, S., & Biringen, Z. (2019). Prevalence of adults who are the targets of parental alienating behaviors and their impact. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 106, 104471. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104471>
- Harman, J. J., & Lorandos, D. (2021). Allegations of family violence in court: How parental alienation affects judicial outcomes. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 27, 184-208. <https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000301>
- Harman, J. J., & Matthewson, M. (2020). Parental alienation: How is it done. In D. Lorandos & W. Bernet (Eds.), *Parental alienation - science and law*. Charles C. Thomas.
- Harman, J. J., Warshak, R., Lorandos, D., & Florian, M. J. (2022). Developmental psychology and the scientific status of parental alienation. *Developmental Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001404>
- Harman, J. J., Warshak, R., Sharples, A., & Marsden, J. (2024). The differential impact of parental alienating behaviors on children. *Manuscript in preparation*.
- Hine, B. A. (2023). *Parental alienation: A contemporary guide for parents, practitioners, and policymakers*. Amazon.

Hine, B. A. (2024). Parental Alienation – What do we know, and what do we (urgently) need to know? A narrative review. *Partner Abuse*. <https://doi.org/10.1891/PA-2023-0015>

Hine, B. A., Harman, J. J., Leder-Elder, S., & Bates, E. A. (2024). *Acrimony and abuse: Establishing the prevalence of family violence in the context of family breakdown, separation, and divorce (FBS) in the United Kingdom*. <https://drbenhine.co.uk/acrimony-and-abuse-establishing-the-prevalence-of-family-violence-in-the-context-of-family-breakdown-separation-and-divorce-fbsd-in-the-united-kingdom/>

Lee-Maturana, S., Matthewson, M., & Dwan, C. (2022). Ten key findings on targeted parents' experience: Towards a broader definition of Parental Alienation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 43, 2672-2700. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X211032664>

Miralles, P., Godoy, C., & Hidalgo, M. D. (2023). Long-term emotional consequences of parental alienation exposure in children of divorced parents: A systematic review. *Current Psychology*, 42, 12055-12069. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02537-2>

Radloff, L. S. (1977). The CES-D Scale: A self-report depression scale for research in the general population. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, 1, 382-401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01466216770010030>

Rohner, R. P., & Ali, S. (2020). Parental acceptance-rejection questionnaire (PARQ). In *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences*. Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3\\_56](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_56)

Sharples, A., Harman, J. J., & Lorandos, D. (2023). Findings of abuse in families affected by parental alienation. *Journal of Family Violence*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00575-x>

Verrocchio, M. C., Baker, A. J. L., & Bernet, W. (2016). Associations between exposure to parental alienating behaviors, anxiety, and depression in an Italian sample of adults. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 61, 692-698. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.13046>

Verrocchio, M. C., Baker, A. J. L., & Marchetti, D. (2018). Adult report of childhood exposure to parental alienation at different developmental time periods. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 40, 602-618. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6427.12192>

Verrocchio, M. C., Marchetti, D., Carrozzino, D., Compare, A., & Fulcheri, M. (2019). Depression and quality of life in adults perceiving exposure to parental alienation behaviors. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12955-019-1080-6>

Weathers, F. W., Litz, B. T., Herman, D. S., Huska, J. A., & Keane, T. M. (1993). The PTSD Checklist (PCL): Reliability, validity, and diagnostic utility. *Annual convention of the international society for traumatic stress studies*.



UNIVERSITY OF  
**WEST LONDON**  
The **Career** University

The University of  
West London  
St Mary's Road  
Ealing  
London W5 5RF

The University  
of West London  
Boston Manor Road  
Brentford  
Middlesex TW8 9GA

The University of  
West London  
Fountain House  
2 Queens Walk  
Reading RG1 7QF

Drama Studio London  
Grange Court  
1 Grange Road  
Ealing  
London W5 5QN

Ruskin College  
Ruskin Hall  
Dunstan Road  
Old Headington  
Oxford OX3 9BZ