

Home › Culture War › Denying parental alienation is one of the greatest unrecognised failures in modern family justice

Denying parental alienation is one of the greatest unrecognised failures in modern family justice

By **Melanie Gill** July 1, 2026



A series of articles we are publishing in TCW over the next two weeks, of which Melanie Gill's is the first, challenges one of the most powerful orthodoxies currently shaping family justice across the Western world. Written by a coalition of psychologists, a senior magistrate, legal professionals, therapists, police investigators, academics, campaigners, parents and professionals from the United Kingdom, Denmark, Australia and beyond, the articles address questions that few public institutions appear willing to confront. Why are increasing numbers of children presenting with anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal distress following prolonged family conflict? Why are separated parents taking their own lives at such alarming rates? Why are court orders intended to preserve children's relationships so often left unenforced? And why do so many professionals working within the system privately express deep concern while feeling increasingly unable to speak publicly?

EVERY year tens of thousands of children enter family justice systems across the developed world. In England and Wales alone, more than 27,000

children are involved in open private law proceedings. Thousands more enter the system every quarter as parental conflict escalates into litigation. I'm not talking about disputes about school runs and Christmas arrangements. I am talking about often bitter, highly adversarial child custody conflicts involving allegations, counter-allegations, fractured relationships and children trapped in the middle.

Yet the court statistics, bad as they are, tell only part of the story.

They don't describe the way children, during and as a result of this, are routinely torn from the lives of one or other of their parents and on a scale that would be politically explosive if it were honestly measured. They don't tell of the way this severing erases their sense of belonging – their family histories, identities and relationships. How it can cut them off from one entire side of their family for ever. Nor, importantly do they flag up the child abuse that is the result of legally catalysed or endorsed parental alienation. There are no government taskforces, no national campaigns, no emergency funding streams and no meaningful public discussion. In fact, the complete opposite.

They don't, in Lady Justice Parker's words, tell of the rise in the number of unfounded allegations of domestic violence as a defence against enforcement; or of the failure of courts to see where either parent may be manipulating the child or children against the other (and succeed) in order to gain custody. Because behind the numbers lies this other story – a story of the harms perpetrated by parental alienation on both children and parents though the mechanisms of family courts. It is a story of the ideological capture of both the courts and media coverage by a cabal of radical feminist lawyers and journalists who are locked into a mother-as-victim narrative, from which the truth is most often absent and parental alienation denied as even existing.

[Research led by Professor Ben Hine](#) shows that such parental alienating behaviours are extremely common; that a substantial proportion of separated parents experience behaviours intended to damage or undermine their relationship with their children.

More troubling still, exposure to such behaviours leads to unique forms of trauma and risk for psychopathology in children. My own clinical findings show these cases are pumping out narcissistically traumatised children as if from a factory. More research shows elevated rates of self-harm. These findings should be ringing alarm bells throughout government. Instead, they are largely ignored. In fact, not just ignored but denied. On June 10, in a debate in Parliament the Labour MP for Scarborough doubled down on this denial. Parental alienation was described as 'harmful pseudoscience', an 'ideology', 'a concept with no legitimate scientific basis'. An inconvenient truth in other words and particularly for the extreme feminist fraternity.

If any other form of childhood trauma was associated with such widespread psychological harm, governments would act. Yet children caught in these cases remain largely invisible. The causes are denied. The answer to the question why is at hinted above. It lies in the profound ideological shift that has taken place across family policy over the last two decades.

At precisely the moment when attachment science, developmental psychology and neuroscience have given us unprecedented insight into

children's needs, family policy has become increasingly organised around adult feminist ideological frameworks, the idea that family conflict should primarily be understood through the lens of violence against women and girls.

Protecting women from violence is an important and legitimate goal. No reasonable person disputes that. The problem arises when one explanatory framework becomes so dominant that it begins to crowd out every other way of understanding family relationships.

Once family conflict is viewed primarily through a victim-perpetrator model, other forms of harm become harder to recognise. Complex family dynamics are reduced to assumptions about power and control. Most importantly of all, children cease to be the central focus of policy and become supporting characters in stories about adults.

This pattern is not confined to Britain.

Over the last 20 years I have spoken to professionals, researchers and campaigners from across Europe, North America and Asia. Conservative estimates suggest that about 11 per cent and 15 per cent of all divorces involving children result in some level of parental alienation globally. That translates to more than 768,000 families and more than a million children every year in the UK; studies estimate that up to 22million American adults (roughly 10 per cent of the adult population) have been the targets of parental alienation, with about 10million facing severe alienation from their children. There are thousands of organisations advocating for and supporting parents and grandparents, helping with false allegations and attempting to counter the constant stream of misinformation produced by radical feminist groups and journalists.

Different countries. Different cultures. Different political traditions. Yet totally matching concerns. The voices of millions of parents and children across the world are literally being ignored.

Yet increasingly professionals are encouraged to treat the child's stated wishes as the end of the investigation rather than the beginning. A fundamental fact which is not understood within these dynamics is that a child has no voice whatsoever. Neuroscience shows us that their developing brains use radical adaptations to cope with this, meaning their thought processing is always changed.

Nowhere is this more dangerous than in the family courts. A recent case provides a heartbreaking [example of what can happen when assumptions replace curiosity](#). The case involved escalating allegations on both sides, deteriorating mental health and profound family conflict. The father repeatedly raised concerns about the welfare of his child. The child became increasingly isolated from him. Professionals failed to recognise what was happening. Ultimately, the child took her own life.

Following the judgment, June Venters KC, who successfully represented the father, issued a warning that should have reverberated throughout family justice. She argued that professionals, lawyers and courts risk unconsciously defaulting to narratives in which fathers are presumed perpetrators and mothers presumed victims rather than investigating what is actually

happening within individual families. Yet despite the significance of the case, the wider public conversation remained silent. Little attention is paid to cases that challenge established assumptions or reveal harm experienced by fathers and children.



The result is not balanced scrutiny. It is selective visibility.

Some victims become highly visible. Others disappear.

Some harms are endlessly discussed. Others are ignored or denied

This is how children vanish from public policy. It is not because nobody cares about them, but because adult ideological battles gradually consume the space where children's needs should be discussed.

The only 'official' attempt made to recognise this as a form of child abuse was initiated by the former Labour MP Simon Danczuk who, in 2017, put in for an Adjournment Debate on parental alienation and got it – the first of its kind in parliament. During the debate, [Simon said](#): 'Parental alienation is another form of child abuse that has gone both unreported and under-discussed. Such abuse is not properly recognised by the United Kingdom Government. While Westminster remains silent on the issue, parents and children suffer. The Government and the courts need to recognise parental alienation as a form of emotional abuse, and as such they need to step up efforts to prevent it and, in some circumstances, punish perpetrators.' Notably the Conservative Party MPs Tim Loughton and Suella Braverman, attended and made interventions on his behalf.

Tragically radical feminist lawyers and journalists, through persistent lobbying, ensured that this never reached the statute book, leaving children at the mercy of their ideology ever since, and compassion consigned to the dustbin.

Tomorrow a family court magistrate explains, from his own experience, how children becomes pawns not just of their parents but of the inadequate clinical psychology techniques applied to establish the truth.