



## **Parental Alienation June 2022.**

### **Introduction**

Men's Aid provide a national service underpinned by a victim centric and human rights proofed approach aimed at ensuring all male victims of Domestic Violence / Coercive Control (DV/CC) receive the required support.

Men's Aid regard the Child as of paramount importance in all our interactions with victims of Domestic Violence/Coercive Control and accordingly we are fully committed to meeting our responsibilities under The Children First Act 2015 and Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017.

Men's Aid support those victims who, from a gender perspective, primarily identify as male, including non-binary, intersex and transgender men within its support and services provision. However, it also acknowledges its responsibility to support all victims of domestic violence / coercive control and we provide 'support to report' for any victim, irrespective of gender, by referral to the most relevant of our civil society partners, with the informed consent of the victim.

Unfortunately, no prevalence figures for actual male victims of DV/CC are available at this time.

That said in 2021 almost 8,000 men engaged with Men's Aid an increase of 42% on the previous year (2020). Anecdotally we have observed reference to Parental Alienation in our daily inter-action with the male victim. Issues around Access/ Guardianship and Custody are commonly raised as are perceived concerns around engagement or lack of fulfilling engagement with children by Men presenting or otherwise engaging with our service i.e., Helpline/ Counselling/ Court Support / Outreach One to Ones.

**Mission:** Empowering and supporting men and their families who are experiencing Domestic Violence to be safe.

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Men's Aid Ireland - CHY 13025

Company No.: 489263 RCN: 20039479

Chairperson: David Foot

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In this regard, we can advise that Children First referrals increased year on year in 2021 by 118% on 2020 figs. Men's Aid are guided in our referrals and excellent working relationship with TUSLA by the **Children First National Guidelines** in particular '*Circumstances which may make children more vulnerable to harm*' including 'conflictual relationships and Domestic violence (CFpg11). Accordingly, instances brought to our attention involving Physical/Sexual/Neglect or Emotional abuse are referred to TUSLA.

Men's Aid thank you for your invitation to participate in this consultation. We view this as important and most positive with particular regard to your committed endeavours to meet the needs of the Child. We note your reference to the need to exercise care not to identify any parties and be respectful to privacy. We also note that submissions may be subject to disclosure via FOI.

### **Parental Alienation.**

Parental alienation generally refers to a process through which a child becomes estranged from a parent as the result of the psychological manipulation of the other parent. It may also refer to situations where one parent is wrongfully influencing their child or children against the other parent. As a concept, parental alienation is contested, and little is known about how different jurisdictions and systems address it.

There is no clear agreed definition of parental alienation in Ireland and there are no reliable statistics on its prevalence. However, it would appear that the term has been increasingly cited in the Irish courts. (DOJ 2022).

We acknowledge the above interpretation of Parental Alienation provided by the Department of Justice in this consultation process.

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The term Parental Alienation is indeed one which is familiar to those engaged in supporting Victims of Domestic Violence/ and Coercive Control including the Judiciary, Solicitors, Barristers, Social workers, Child Protection workers, Domestic Abuse support workers and the Victim.

In the absence however of a Legal or Social definition, Men's Aid use the following definition as set out below:

***“Parental Alienation is a deliberate attempt by one parent to distance or separate his / her children from the other parent”.***

Men's Aid acknowledges that the welfare of the child is paramount. This is the cornerstone of all our interactions with Victims and has its authority in:

- **The United Nations Convention** on the Rights of the Child (ratified in Ireland 1992)
- **Children First National Guidelines** for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017
- **The Children First act 2015.**

In circumstances where a child may be vulnerable to harm in Domestic Violence/ conflictual relationships **“Children First National Guidelines page11, Circumstances which may make children more vulnerable to harm”** the best interests of the child are served by engaging with and reporting any concerns to Tulsa the Child and Family agency. The agency has a statutory responsibility to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and attention, (section 3 Child Care Act 1991).

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It should be noted that Tusla have been of significant assistance both formally and informally and have assisted us and worked in close partnership with Men's Aid in incidences where there were questions around referral "unsure whether you should report" reports which were in need of guidance from TUSLA.

Some examples of "Parental Alienation" Male victims of DV /CC disclose to us:

- Limiting contact with that parent, and or extended family.
- Erasing the other parent from the life and mind of the child (forbidding discussion and pictures of the other parent).
- Seeking to have the child reject the other parent.
- Creating the impression that the other parent is dangerous.
- Forcing the child to choose between the parents by means of threats of withdrawal of affection.
- Belittling and limiting contact with the extended family of the targeted parent, e.g. - Grandparents.
- Not meeting access arrangements / agreements/ court orders.
- Not allowing delivery of gifts, messages, milestone cards.
- Not allowing participation in milestone events, e.g., birthdays,

Men's Aid recommend in cases where access is being determined by the courts, consideration be given to endeavoring to avoid where possible any unnecessary time delay which may in turn impact negatively on child welfare.

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Furthermore, Men's Aid recommends that the family law courts should consider providing sufficient qualified child safety assessors to provide **free** reports where domestic violence or child abuse is present. They should be qualified and have expertise in the dynamics of coercive control and parental alienation/dangerousness and prioritizing Child safety first.

Men's Aid recommends that the subject of so termed "Parental Alienation" be the subject of empirical research to assist stakeholders and those who serve the Victim going forward.

In conclusion, Tusla might consider updating Children First, National Guidelines 2017 to inform the reader and those impacted regarding the definition / actions required when Parental Alienation is identified. Indeed, in the original Children First guidelines document a definition was provided for a separate and distinct subject matter i.e., ***Munchausen by proxy syndrome***, this was of significant assistance in informing service users/providers at that time. Men's Aid are of the view that a similar approach that explains what parental alienation is, what are the key indicators/what actions are required that would be most beneficial going forward.

**ENDS.**

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