Analysis of the Psychometric Properties of a Parental Alienation Scale[1]

Paula Inez Cunha Gomide[2]
Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná,
Curitiba-PR, Brazil

Everline Bedin Camargo
Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná,
Curitiba-PR, Brazil

Marcia Gonzales Fernandes
Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná,
Curitiba-PR, Brazil

Abstract: The development of forensic evaluation scales is fundamental. This study's purpose was to explore the psychometric properties of a parental alienation scale. Forensic technicians completed 193 scales concerning parents involved in a lawsuit: 48 families with at least one parent indicated as the alienator (group A) and 48 families with no parental alienation claim (group B). The scale consisted of five categories and 69 items: denying access to the child; derogatory comparisons; emotional manipulation; behavior of parent and child during assessment. The results show Cronbach's alpha = .965 and split-half = .745; KMO = .884 and Bartlett's sphericity test ($p < .001$). Concurrent criterion validity applied to data showed that the scale is able to distinguish between the alienator and target parent. The results showed significant and consistent standards in the instrument's psychometric characteristics.

Keywords: child custody, psychological test, test reliability

Análise das Propriedades Psicométricas da Escala de Alienação Parental

Resumo: O desenvolvimento de instrumentos de avaliação forense da alienação parental é fundamental. O objetivo da pesquisa foi investigar as propriedades psicométricas da escala de alienação parental. Foram respondidas 193 escalas sobre genitores em processo judicial por técnicos forenses: 48 famílias com ao menos um dos genitores apontados como alienador parental (grupo A) e 48 famílias sem alegação de alienação parental (grupo B). A escala foi composta por cinco categorias e 69 itens: impedir, difamar, manipulação emocional, genitor na avaliação e criança na avaliação. Os resultados mostraram alfa de Cronbach = 0,965 e split half = 0,745; KMO = 0,884 e o teste de esfericidade de Bartlett ($p < 0,001$). A validade de critério concorrente aplicada aos dados mostrou que a escala é capaz de discriminar entre genitores alienadores e alvo. Os resultados apontaram padrões consistentes e significativos nas características psicométricas do instrumento.

Palavras-chave: custódia de criança, testes psicológicos, validade de teste

Análisis de las Propiedades Psicométricas de una Escala de Alienación Parental

Resumen: El desenvolvimiento de medidas de evaluación forense de alienación parental es fundamental. El objetivo de la investigación fue identificar propiedades psicométricas de una escala de alienación parental. Técnicos forenses (193) calificaron escalas de padres involucrados en demanda judicial: estos pertenecían a 48 familias con al menos uno de los padres identificado como alienador (grupo A) y 48 familias sin pretensión de alienación parental (grupo B). La escala consistió en cinco categorías y 69 ítems: evitar, difamar, manipulación emocional, padre e hijo en la evaluación. Los resultados mostraron un alfa de Cronbach = 0,965 y = 0,745 media de split; KMO = 0,884 y el teste de esfericidad de Bartlett ($p < 0,001$). El análisis discriminante mostró que la escala es capaz de discriminar entre padres alienadores y alienados. Los resultados mostraron niveles significativos y consistentes en las características psicométricas del instrumento.

Palabras clave: custodia del nino, tests psicológicos, validación de test

Law n. 12,318 (2010), the Parental Alienation Law, was created to prevent parents with custody of children, from denying access to children after a divorce or separation and to combat the slow pace of justice, as it establishes faster handling of the process, avoiding damage caused by indefinite separation between parents and children. The law is composed of items that are considered alienating behaviors and that can be briefly described as: disqualifying a parent's behavior; impeding the other parent's time with the child and disavowing the other parent before the child; omitting the child's or adolescent's personal information regarding school, health or address; untruthfully reporting the other parent or his/her family members (including grandparents); moving away to impede the child or adolescent from spending time with the other parent, relatives or grandparents with no apparent justification (Law n. 12.318, 2010).

This legislation enables changing custody arrangements and even impeding the contact of one of the parents if parental alienation is determined to exist. Forensic assessment instruments need to be developed to properly identify parents with alienating behavior. There is great demand for judicial

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[2] Correspondence address:
Paula Inez Cunha Gomide. Rua Capitão Souza Franco, 1019, apto. 162. CEP 80730-430. Curitiba-PR, Brazil. E-mail: paulainezgomide@gmail.com

assessment due to the enactment of this law. Hundreds of custody disputes claim the existence of alienating behavior on the part of one of the parents and demand change of custody. Because this is a new phenomenon in the legal framework (this law has been operative for only five years) and scientific production addressing this subject is still incipient (there are only a few studies), judges must rely on the arguments presented in the case to make decisions. Besides what is described in the law, the courts' technical teams have little knowledge regarding the parental alienation phenomenon because the subject is not addressed in undergraduate programs.

Arce, Fariña, and Seijo (2005) investigated 783 court sentences in Spain, most of which were homologated without considering the concept or presence of parental alienation and, only in cases where mothers presented severe behavior, was custody assigned to fathers. Gaffal (2012) analyzed divorce sentences from Spanish courts from 2008 and 2011 in which parental alienation was mentioned as grounds for appeal. The author found that, despite the different reasons presented by the parents for initiating the process (parental authority, custody change, visitation regimen for the parent without custody, establishment of bedroom and furniture to accommodate children, pension, division of property, and support provided by former spouse), accusations of parental alienation permeated most pleas. Tapias Saldaña, Sánchez Bobadilha, and Torres Torres (2013) investigated the knowledge of court professionals (judges, lawyers, technicians) concerning parental alienation and found a lack of knowledge and misconceptions regarding the construct, suggesting there is a need for training.

Parental alienation is a complex concept. First, parental alienation assumes that any of a child's rejection of the target parent is unfounded. Here, we need to note there is a differentiation between real problems in the relationship between parents and children and parental alienation. The term *estrangement* is used in the international literature to designate what is considered a harmful relationship (Darnall, 2008). Kelly and Johnston (2001) state that estrangement is a real reason for a child to reject a parent. Such reasons may include neglect, physical or sexual abuse, abandonment, or domestic violence. Understanding estrangement can help to differentiate between problematic parental behavior and parental alienation. It means that the evaluator should be able to identify whether a child's rejection of a parent is founded on real motives or is caused by parental alienation. If real motives are discarded, the hypothesis of parental alienation is considered (Drozd & Olesen, 2004).

Bala, Hunt and McCarney (2010) identified four grounds for children to righfully refuse a parent's visitation: (a) in 7% of the cases the cause was abuse or violence; (b) in 35% the rejected parent presented inability or limitations, a lack of affection, interest or sensitivity to the child's needs, alcohol or drug abuse, or violent temperament on the part of the parent or stepfather/stepmother; (c) in 20% of the cases the child disliked the parent but did not reject him/her; the children independently made the decision to have other priorities or preferences, especially older children who wanted to spend time with friends or avoid conflict or tension

with stepfathers/stepmothers; (d) evidence was not clear in 38% of the cases or the parent's visitations were infrequent.

Another important factor to be considered in the assessment of parental alienation is the parent's behavior. The protector parent behaves in a similar way to the alienating parent. Parents who protect their children from domestic violence try to avoid contact and vilify the abuser's image. These behaviors are typical of an alienator: denying access to the child and vilifying the other parent's image. Darnall (2008, p. 5) describes parental alienation as an intentional campaign on the part of one of the parents to disqualify the other, systematically interfering in the child's relationship with the other parent, and exhibiting constant resistance or disobedience to legal determinations. This definition is extremely important to understanding the phenomenon.

The parent who promotes a defamatory campaign and distances the child from the other parent is called in the literature the Alienator and is usually the one with custody of the child. The other parent, the one without custody, is called Alienated Parent or Target Parent. Three variables of the parental alienation construct are present in the definition provided by Darnall (2008). The first refers to the guardian's behavior, such as defamation or disqualification of the non-guardian parent. The second describes systematic interference in the parental relationship. Even though researchers (Baker, 2006; Hands & Warshak, 2011) state that Parental Alienation occurs in intact families, we verify that parents need to be separated for one parent actually to impede the relationship between the other parent and the child. The target parent in intact families has daily opportunities to relate with the child and respond to a defamatory campaign. The third aspect of the definition refers to the parent's non-compliant behavior by resisting court orders. The parents need to be separated and in a custody dispute for the court to take a stance in regard to parental care. In that case, the phenomenon exclusively occurs in a situation in which parents are disputing custody of the children and for this reason it refers to a forensic assessment.

Gardner (1985) was the first to disseminate a view of the parental alienation phenomenon in the forensic milieu. The author warned of the importance of a conflict context between parents for the phenomenon to occur, which he coined Parental Alienation Syndrome. He defined this syndrome as a child disorder that occurs almost exclusively in the context of a child custody dispute. In his first paper addressing the subject he mentioned "Recent trends in divorce and custody litigation". He described the syndrome as a 'defamatory campaign against one of the parents promoted by the child him/herself without any foundation.' He also stated that it is a result of a combination of one of the parent's instructions, who programs, indoctrinates and does what he calls 'brainwashing' the child. After it is effectively installed, the alienated child makes her/his own contributions to defame the target parent.

Later, Baker (2006) conducted studies to better define the behavior of alienators. They applied a self-report questionnaire to 97 individuals who identified 66 strategies used by their parents to alienate; 11 of these were mentioned by at least 20% of the responders. Narcissistic personality

patterns were found among mothers who alienated their children, while alcohol abuse, maltreatment, and personality disorders were found in alienating families. Studies conducted by Lass (2013) indicated that alienator mothers presented at-risk parental child-raising practices, failed to supervise their children and were not available to promote the appropriate development of their children; rather the focus of their attention was their own needs.

Some researchers also studied the short and long term effects of parental alienation. Ben-Ami and Baker (2012) conducted a retrospective study with two groups of participants: those who reported alienation on the part of one of the parents and those who were not alienated by parents. Long term effects included alcohol abuse, depression, insecure attachment and low self-esteem. Faccini and Röhnelt Ramires (2012) verified the presence of insecure attachement in children who experienced parental alienation. Vilalta Suárez (2011) used the syndrome criteria to assess two groups, those with and without visitation, and found that behaviors described by Gardner (1985) were much more frequent in the group without visitation. Other researchers also studied maltreatment experienced by child victims of parental alienation (Maida S, Herskovic M, & Prado A, 2011).

Few studies report treatment for families who suffered parental alienation. Darnall (2011) advises that, for treatment to be effective, it needs to be implemented early on. Tejedor Huerta (2007) suggests family mediation for mild cases of parental alienation and state that traditional therapy is not efficacious in these cases.

Bernet, von Boch-Galhau, Baker and Morrison (2010) put forward a proposal to the American Psychiatric Association to include Parental Alienation Disorder (PAD) in the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Diseases, Fifth Edition) and ICD-11 (International Classification of Diseases, Eleventh Edition). They basically used Gardner's eight criteria to ground their proposals. Nonetheless, the criteria listed refer to the children's behaviors during the custody process and do not include the behaviors of alienators or target parents; that is, they do not consider the broadened concept of parental alienation that includes the father-mother-child triad.

The main critics of including Parental Alienation, Parental Alienation Disorder or Parental Alienation Syndrome in either the DSM-V or the ICD-11 listed a series of reasons to justify their positions (Bernet & Baker, 2013; Houchin, Ranseen, Hash, & Bartnicki, 2012; Kelly & Johnston, 2001; Pepiton, Alvis, Allen, & Logid, 2012). Some agree that parental alienation occurs in a situation of custody but do not agree that it should be considered a mental disease. Basically, they argue that: insufficient data support the proposal: studies were conducted with a reduced number of participants; many of Gardner's papers were published in journals with no peer review and the concept does not clarify the difference between victims experiencing real maltreatment and victims of parental alienation.

Few attempted to develop forensic instruments to measure the phenomenon. Perez Agüero, and Andrade (2013) designed an instrument with 71 items and 10 dimensions based on the symptoms proposed by Gardner (1985), which after psychometric analysis, ultimately had 48 items and six dimensions, with a Cronbach's alpha of .95, explaining 72.02% of total variance. The factors are related to the eight symptoms proposed by Gardner.

Hands and Warshak (2011) applied the Parental Alienation Behavior Scale (PABS) to 50 college students who provided their perceptions regarding their parents' alienating behaviors and the quality of their current relationship with each parent; both intact families and divorced families were included. The results indicated men and women practice similar alienating behaviors. Divorced families tended to present more alienating behavior than non-divorced families. The study's limitation, according to the authors, was a total dependence on the respondents' personal information. They deemed it would be ideal to collect information from parents, in addition to including direct observation to more deeply understand the degree of alienation, considering that the individuals described the parents' alienating behaviors but did not feel alienated.

The instruments found were either self-report instruments addressing the parents' alienating behaviors (Hands & Warshak, 2011) or ones that used the criteria proposed by Gardner (1985) for the child's behaviors (Perez Agüero & Andrade, 2013). No instrument measuring the behaviors of all those involved in the process, target parent, alienator and children, was found.

This study's objective was to analyze the psychometric properties of a Parental Alienation Scale (PAS) to be used by a forensic evaluator considering the behaviors of alienator, target parent and the child victim of alienation described in the literature (Baker, 2006; Gardner, 1985; Vilalta Suárez, 2011).

Method

Participants

Three forensic professionals (one technician of the Family Court in the state of Santa Catarina, and two experts in parental alienation from the state of Paraná, Brazil) collected data. The technician was a state psychologist from the Court of Justice of the state of Santa Catarina who routinely interviewed families in child custody disputes. The experts were MSc in forensic psychology working in family courts in Curitiba, PA in cases of custody dispute where there was a suspicion of parental alienation. The three psychologists were oriented by the primary author and received training in parental alienation for approximately three months.

Two groups of court proceedings were selected as a convenience sample based on the pleas contained therein. The judges responsible for the processes decided whether there were indications of parental alienation. The participants completed 193 scales on the behavior of parents involved in the legal context: 48 families (96 parents) with at least one of the parents accused by the justice system of being an alienator (Group A) and 48 families (97 parents) without any accusation of parental alienation (Group B). The parents in Group A were assigned to two groups: those indicated by the

legal system as alienators and those considered being targets. Of the 96 parents who composed the sample in Group A, 26.4% were considered alienators (5.6% were men and 20.8% were women) and 23.3% were considered to be target parents (17% men and 6.3% women). Group B was composed of 97 parents (23.3% men and 26.9% women), while the evaluator completed the PAS for three individuals (father, mother and stepfather) from one family in Group B, which is why the sample resulted in an odd number (97 cases).

Instruments

Parental Alienation Scale. The instrument was composed of 96 items divided into five categories: (1) denying access to the child (13 items); (2) Derogatory comparisons (12 items); (3) Emotional manipulation (17 items); (4) Parent's behavior during assessment (12 items); and (5) Child's behavior during assessment (15 items). The evaluators completed each item using a three-point Likert scale (always, sometimes, never, which were equivalent to 2, 1, and 0 respectively) where *Always* was checked when the behavior occurred more than 80% of the time, *Sometimes* when it occurred between 30% and 70% of times, and *Never* when the behavior occurred less than 20% of the time. Scores were obtained by totaling the points from each item and ranged from zero to 138 points.

Each participant completed the PAS after interviewing the target family using data collected from reports, processes and interviews held with other people (technicians, family members or teachers) who had contact with the individual under assessment. This is a measure that includes multiple informants and is exclusively used within the forensic sphere, due to the complexity and relevance of the behaviors it assesses.

Procedure

Data collection. After semantic analysis of items and scale reformulation (Camargo, 2014), the participants were asked to complete the PAS concerning recent or past cases. The interviews were conducted in the Court of Justice of Santa Catarina, in the Family Courts of the judicial district of Joinville and in the experts' private offices. Data were collected during four months. A database was created in the Statistical Package for the Social Science v.20 for Windows (SPSS).

Data analysis. The sample was initially tested for normality and KMO index; Barlett's sphericity test and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were also performed. The Principal Component Analysis technique, a factor model in which factors are based on total variance, was used because this study's objective was to achieve the minimum number of components necessary to explain the highest percentage of variance and also because it is a totally psychometric procedure (Pasquali, 2012). According to Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham (2009), the Principal Components Analysis, when compared to Factor Analysis' similar techniques, such as Principal Factors Analysis, present essentially identical results in most cases. Later, based on the structure of principal components and on the analysis of each item's component loading, the items with a load below .3 were discarded. Internal consistency of the PAS' adjusted

version was assessed using the split-half technique and Cronbach's alpha coefficient; both techniques are commonly used in reliability analysis (Zanon & Hauck Filho, 2015). The split-half technique divides the test's items into two groups and high correlation must to be found between the two since, in theory, they measure the same construct. The statistical analysis applied in each of the instrument's categories and its whole tested the internal correlation between each category's items and of the instrument as a whole. The instrument remained with 59 items with an alpha coefficient of .96. The five principal components explained 62.9% of total variance, considering that all the components are related to the Parental Alienation construct. Criterion validity was verified using the non-parametric Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which compared the medians of Group A with those of Group B and within Group A, e.g. a subgroup of alienators and targets.

Ethical Considerations

The study was submitted to and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Faculdade Evangélica do Paraná (CAAE n. 22862113.1.0000.0103) on December 5th, 2013.

Results

The sample was composed of mothers (48.2%), fathers (45.1%), grandparents (grandmothers) (5.2%) and partners (1.6%). In most cases, the mothers had custody of the children (80.3%), while fathers had custody in 10.9% of cases and grandmothers in 5.7% of the cases. Three cases (3.1%) from group B, classified as 'others', were assessed (two with joint custody and one case in which the child was in a shelter).

Psychometric Properties

Three tests assessed whether the sample distribution was appropriate for the factor analysis. KMO statistics presented a value close to 1 (0.884), which is valid and acceptable according to the literature, indicating that the matrix of correlations among the instrument's variables is perfectly factorable (Pasquali, 2012), while Bartlett's test was significant ($p < .001$) so that the results indicated that factor analysis was appropriate. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated the sample was not normally distributed ($Z = 2.063$; $p < .001$). Even though the distribution is expected to be normal for a factor analysis to be conducted, this procedure can still otherwise be performed because normality is necessary only if the test is applied to obtain the significance of factors. From a statistical standpoint, deviation from normality, as well as homoscedasticity and linearity, only diminish observed correlations and critical assumptions in the factor analysis and are of more a conceptual than a statistical nature. Additionally, some multicolinearity is desirable because the objective of the factor analysis is precisely to identify sets of inter-related variables (Hair et al., 2009).

A factor analysis was conducted using the principal components method and the factor loads of items were highly significant; 100% of them were above .3. Eleven items of the scale presented loadings between .4 and .5; 14 items between

.5 and .6; 16 items between .6 and .7; and 16 items greater than .7. For Pasquali (2012), the factor loading of an item shows the degree of relatedness between the item and the factor, which is called covariance. Covariance can range from 0% to 100%. The higher the covariance and the closer it is to 1, the greater the representativeness of an item in a factor. In other words, if a statement has good behavioral representation of a latent trait, it will present high factor loading.

Ten items were removed from the PAS after the factor analysis, eight of which because they presented factor loading below the necessary level (item 16 = .384, item 17 = .349, item 19 = .448, item 25 = .271, item 33 = .377, item 35 = .355, item 53 = .335, and item 55 = .371), and two of them (items 51 and 52) were removed because their statements were considered to be confusing. Pasquali (2012) considers that the scale's polytomous items (items with more than two categories of response) require content analysis to verify whether it should be kept or discarded. Based on the item-total correlation, we verified that the PAS' items are appropriately translating the parental alienation construct.

The instrument's internal consistency was assessed using the split-half technique and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used for the adjusted version of the PAS. Statistical analyzes applied to each category and for the instrument as a whole indicated strong internal correlation among the items of each category and the instrument as a whole (Table 1).

Table 1
Analysis of Categories and Total Analysis of the Instrument Using Cronbach's Alpha and Split-Half

Categories	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Split-half
Impede/Interfere	13	.972	.942
Defame/disqualify	8	.846	.807
Emotional manipulation	14	.904	.789
Parent's behavior during assessment	10	.879	.885
Child's behavior during assessment/visitation	14	.937	.894
Total	59	.965	.745

The K-S test presented $p < .001$ indicating the use of non-parametric statistics to correlate the instrument's data. Spearman's test, which classifies data at an initial point and applies Pearson's equation after data are ordered, served the purpose (Hair et al., 2009). The coefficient of correlation between the two variables in the category denying access to the child was .77; derogatory comparisons resulted in .84; for emotional manipulation, it was .75; regarding parent's behavior, it was .75; and for the child's behavior, the coefficient was .60. All obtained $p < .0001$ for a sample of 193 cases. The value of significance for this coefficient of correlation was less than .05, indicating there is a significant

relationship between the first four categories and the instrument's general construct. The category child's behavior presented moderate significance. Dancey (2013) suggests the use of statistical techniques to indicate the relationship among the instrument's variables based on the distribution of the sample's data (within normality or non-normality).

The concurrent validity criterion compared the medians of the participants from group A and group B using the non-parametric Kolmogrov-Smirnov test. The results indicated that the distributions differed significantly, while the median from group A was higher than group B's in all the categories and in the total, with $p < .001$, meaning that the null hypothesis is incorrect and the variances are significantly different. Group A with parents indicated by the court as being alienators, presented a higher score for all the variables of the parental alienation construct (denying access to the child, derogatory comparisons, manipulation, parent's behavior, and child's behavior). Similar results appear in the comparison between the medians of the subgroup of alienators and target parents from Group A: all the comparisons presented statistically significant differences with $p < .001$. The analysis suggests that the instrument discriminates the parents' alienating behaviors from those behaviors of target parents. It is also able to discriminate the parents belonging to the group with alienating characteristics (Group A) from the other (Group B). Comparison between medians from the category child's behavior between alienators and target parents from Group A did not present significant differences. This result was expected considering that the target of the analysis was the child of a couple including alienator and target. On the other hand, children from group B were distinguished from the children from group A because they did not present behavior specific of victims of parental alienation (Table 2).

Table 2
Comparison Between Groups A and B and Between Alienator and Target From Group A For Categories and Total of the Instrument Using the Mann-Whitney Test

Categories	Groups A and B	Alienator and Target
Impede/interfere	2858.500 ($p < .0001$)	98.000 ($p < .0001$)
Defame/disqualify	2355.500 ($p < .0001$)	231.500 ($p < .0001$)
Emotional manipulation	3165.500 ($p < .0001$)	236.000 ($p < .0001$)
Parent's behavior during assessment	1553.000 ($p < .0001$)	201.000 ($p < .0001$)
Parent's behavior during assessment/visitation	3261.000 ($p = .861$)	1124.500 ($p = .861$)
Total	1896.500 ($p < .0001$)	142.000 ($p < .0001$)

The participants were assigned to four groups according to the scores obtained on the PAS: (1) up to 40 points, (2) from 41 to 60 points, (3) from 61 to 80 points, and (4) more

than 81 points. Similar scores can be used to normalize the scale. All the parents from group B, regardless of sex, scored less than 40 points, indicating a low incidence of alienating behaviors. Most male parents from Group A (91%) obtained low scores on the PAS with only four cases between 41 and 80 points. Two thirds of the mothers in this group totaled less than 40 points; 21% scored between 41 and 60 points; 9.6% scored between 61 and 80 points, and 7.7% scored more than 81 points, in which the highest score was found (118 points).

Discussion

Even though the distribution of data was not normal, the results show that the scale met its main objective; that is, it showed statistically significant differences in the comparison between groups A and B (U = 1896,500; *p* < .001) and between alienator and target parent (U = 142,000; *p* < .001). The parents from group B, fathers or mothers, presented a low incidence of alienating behaviors (below 40); higher scores appeared among 20 mothers (38.5%) and four fathers (9%) from group A. These results indicate that PAS distinguished between the groups' members, making it possible to foresee to which group a new individual belongs based on his/her characteristics, as stated by Zanon and Hauck Filho (2015).

The analysis of psychometric properties resulted in a PAS with 59 items grouped into five factors that translated the parental alienation phenomenon: (1) Denying access to the child (13), (2) Derogatory comparisons (8), (3) Emotional manipulation (14), (4) Parent's behavior during assessment (10) and (5) Child's behavior during assessment (14). Factor 1 grouped the strategies alienators used to prevent their children from relating with the target parent. These behaviors are essential and characteristic of the theoretical construct; parental alienation is not present in their absence (Gaffal, 2012; Gardner, 1985). Ben-Ami and Baker (2012) verified a series of formats used by parents to prevent their children from maintaining a relationship with the other parent from "simple not giving messages" to moving the child from a school or city without warning.

Defaming/disqualifying the target parent (Factor 2) is pointed out by Darnall (2008) as one of the adverse effects originating from alienating strategies used by parents because children and adolescents feel rejected and abandoned by the target parent, remaining at the mercy of the alienator, who takes advantage of the fragile relationship and distances the child from the target parent. These behaviors are also called psychological abuse and occur in intact families (Baker, 2006; Hands & Warshak, 2011).

Darnall (2011) and Gardner (1985) described a series of manipulative strategies used by the alienator during the process (Factor 3 and 4). These are ways to circumvent rules, delivering unnecessary documents, rescheduling audiences, and criticizing the technicians, and are basically intended to hinder the legal process (Bala et al., 2010).

Factor 5 gathered behaviors the child presents during the process, described by Gardner (1985) as Parental Alienation Syndrome. PAS showed that children from group B were distinguished from children from group A because they did not present behaviors that are characteristic of victims of parental alienation. The levels of severity presented by victims of parental alienation have been discussed by many researchers (Coelho & Morais, 2014; Darnall, 2008; Maida S et al., 2011) and should be relevant in court decisions.

Parental alienation occurred primarily among women, who, in most cases, have custody of the children, as already indicated by Rand (2010). The relationship between gender and the incidence of parental alienation needs to be investigated. Lass (2013) found paranoid personality disorders, narcissism and antisocial disorders among female alienators and an absence of disorders among target parents. Considering that individuals with personality disorders do not change in the face of a court decision, counseling, or mediation, this information adds an additional difficulty to an already complex decision to be made on the part of judges when facing these cases (Darnall, 2011; Tejedor Huerta, 2007).

The sample was selected by convenience and groups A and B were composed according to the information contained in the processes without previously verifying whether parental alienating behavior was described in the cases. This will be the likely context in which this instrument will be used and because it is a forensic sample to which only technicians and experts have access, assessment of alienating behavior will only occur during the course of legal processes.

Criterion (Pasquali, 2012) and ecological validity (Davids, 1988) analysis will be conducted in the future in order to acquire greater reliability for PAS. For that, families (alienator and target parents and their respective children) with extreme scores, either too high or too low, that is, those cases considered to be outliers, will be submitted to tests, observations, and interviews in order to identify behaviors that compose the construct.

This is the first Brazilian instrument intended for use by forensic psychologists in assessing parental alienation in the father-mother-child triad during lawsuits. Law No. 12.318 (2010) establishes penalties for parents who alienate their children, which demands an appropriate assessment since the repercussions of judicial decisions are devastating for those involved in litigation. The Parental Alienation Scale, aided by information obtained during forensic assessment, can help the court to make objective decisions free from procedural biases.

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Paula Inez Cunha Gomide is a Professor of the Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná.

Everline Bedin Camargo holds a master's degree in Forensic Psychology from Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná.

Marcia Gonzales Fernandes holds a master's degree in Forensic Psychology from Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná.