

Working Document: Italy Data

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When referencing the findings of this working document, kindly attribute the data to the Parental Alienation and Domestic Violence (PADV) study conducted under the leadership of Simon Lapierre from the University of Ottawa. Also acknowledge that this research was financially supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



This report presents preliminary findings from an international survey conducted as part of a research project entitled *Parental Alienation and Domestic Violence: International Partnership for Innovative Strategies*, funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The main objective of the survey was to document the impacts of “parental alienation” discourses and practices on abused women and their children.

The online survey was conducted between October 2022 and April 2023. In total, 137 participants from Italy completed the questionnaire¹.

This report is divided into six sections, starting with the participants’ profiles. The second section focuses on men’s violence towards women and children. The following sections examines the “parental alienation” allegations, and the impacts of these allegations on custody arrangements and on other aspects of women’s and children’s lives. The sixth section focuses on women’s attempts at challenging “parental alienation” allegations.

1. Participants’ Profiles

To participate in the survey, women had to meet the following criteria:

- She was 18 years old or older;
- She had at least one child under 18 years old;
- She had experienced domestic violence and abuse perpetrated by the child’s father, which could include physical violence, sexual violence, verbal or psychological abuse, financial abuse or coercive control;
- She had been through either child protection or child custody proceedings, which could include but does not have to include court proceedings;
- She had been seen as an alienating parent at some point during these proceedings, whether or not the term alienation was explicitly mentioned;
- These allegations were made in one of the following countries: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States.

Most women who participated in the survey (65; 47.4%) were between 36 and 45 years old, while 38.7% were between 46 and 55 years old (53). There were 17 participants (12.4%) between 26 and 35 years old. Two participants were aged 56 or older (1.5%).

Four women (3.1%) considered themselves to be racialized or as a part of a minority group based on their skin colour. Twelve women (8.8%) had been concerned about accessing services for themselves and their child due to their immigration status in the country in which they resided.

Most participants had completed a higher education degree. Indeed, 50.4% of the respondents (69) held a university degree, while 0.7% of the respondents (1) had completed a college degree, and 46.7% of the respondents (64) had a secondary or high school diploma.

¹ The participants who completed less than 60% of the questionnaire were not included in the sample. In all questions, participants were given the option to select *Prefer not to answer*. These data are presented in the graphs, but not elaborated upon in the report.

Over 70% of the women who took part in the survey had one or two children. In total, 81 women (59.1%) had one child, and 39 women (28.5%) had two children. The other participants had either three children (11; 8%), four children (5; 3.6%), and more than five children (1; 0.7%).

Regarding the number of children who had been involved in the allegations of “parental alienation”, 73% of the respondents (100) reported that only one child had been involved in these allegations, and 19.7% of the respondents (27) reported that two children had been involved in these allegations. The other participants indicated that three children (8; 5.8%) and four children (1; 0.7%) had been involved in these allegations.

In cases where more than one child had been involved in the allegations, the participants were instructed to answer the questionnaire with regard to the oldest child (who was still under 18 years old) who had been involved in the allegations. The average age of these children was 9 years old. There were slightly more girls (72; 52.6%) than boys (64; 46.7%). In addition, one participant (0.7) selected ‘non-binary’ as their child’s gender identity.

2. Violence towards Women and Children

The survey included questions regarding men’s violence towards women and children. These questions included questions regarding the disclosure of domestic violence and child abuse, even though we acknowledged that there are a variety of reasons why women and children may decide not to disclose or report these situations.

2.1. Domestic Violence and Abuse

All the women involved in the study had experienced domestic violence and abuse. Most women (130; 94.9%) had disclosed the violence and abuse that had been perpetrated towards them by the child’s father to at least one professional involved in child custody or child protection proceedings (social worker, psychologist, lawyer, doctor, judge, etc.). 57.7% of the respondents (79) also indicated that the child had also disclosed domestic violence to at least one of these professionals.

In addition, 75.9% of the respondents (104) had reported the violence that had been perpetrated towards them to the police. Almost a quarter of the respondents (35; 25.5%) indicated that the child had also disclosed domestic violence to the police. Even though the vast majority of women had reported the violence to the police, only 28 women (20.4%) stated that the father had been convicted or found guilty in criminal proceedings.

2.2. Child Physical and Sexual Abuse

The research findings indicate that the allegations of “parental alienation” were not only associated with domestic violence, but also with men’s violence towards children. In this regard, Figure 1 shows that 32.1% of the participants (44) reported that the father had also perpetrated physical abuse towards the child, and 18% of the participants (24) reported that the father had perpetrated sexual abuse towards the child.

Figure 1

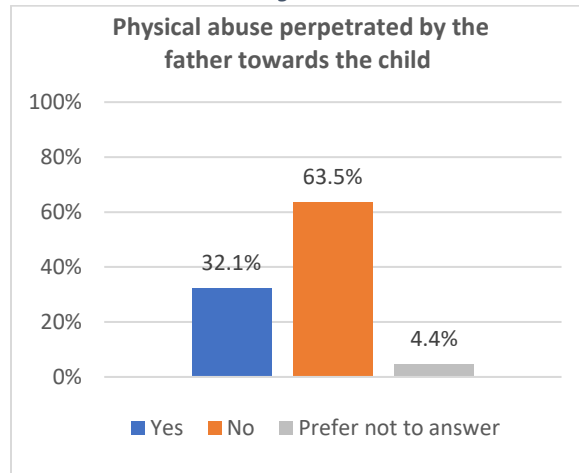
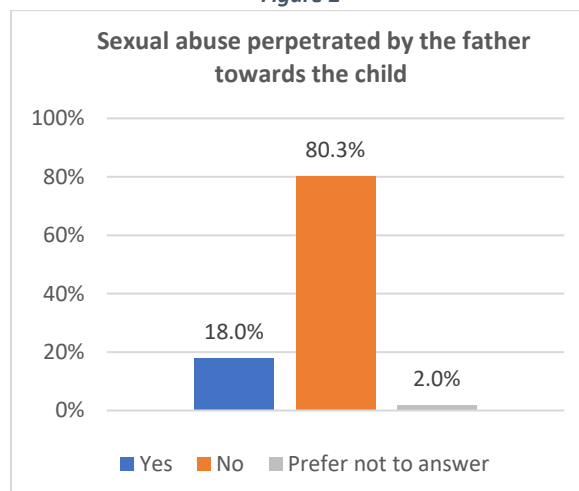


Figure 2



Amongst the women who indicated that the father had perpetrated child physical or sexual abuse, most women indicated that child physical or sexual abuse had been disclosed to at least one professional involved in child custody or child protection and had been reported to the police. Indeed, 95.5% of the women who indicated that the father had perpetrated child physical abuse (42) had disclosed this abuse to at least one professional involved in child custody or child protection proceedings, and 38 women (86.4%) had also reported it to the police. Regarding child sexual abuse, 24 respondents (100%) had disclosed the sexual abuse to at least one professional involved in child custody or child protection proceedings, and 23 women (95.8%) had also reported it to the police.

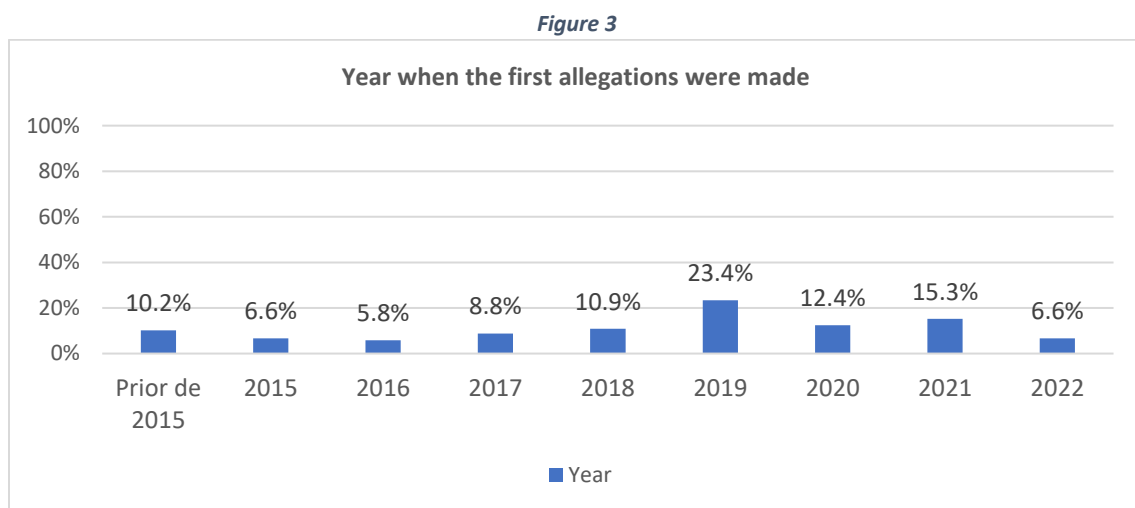
Moreover, 79.5% of the women who indicated that the father had perpetrated child physical abuse (35) stated that the child had disclosed this abuse to at least one professional involved in child custody or child protection proceedings, and 15 women (34.1%) stated that the child had also reported or disclosed it to the police. Furthermore, 16 women (66.7%) stated that the child had disclosed sexual abuse to at least one professional involved in child custody or child protection

proceedings, and 8 women (33.3%) stated that the child had also disclosed or reported it to the police.

However, in most cases the father had not been convicted or found guilty in criminal proceedings for his abusive behavior towards the child. Indeed, the father had been found guilty or convicted in criminal proceedings in only 4.5% (2) of cases where the father had perpetrated physical abuse towards the child. In addition, the father had been found guilty or convicted in criminal proceedings in 4.2% (1) of cases where the father had perpetrated sexual abuse towards the child.

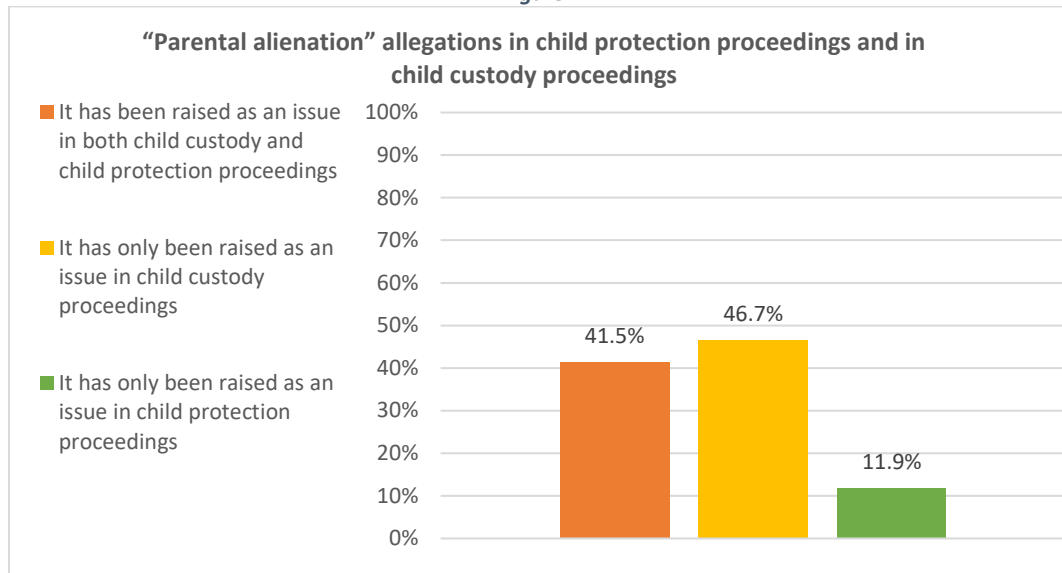
3. The “Parental Alienation” Allegations

Figure 3 shows that, in most cases, the allegations of “parental alienation” had been made recently. Indeed, 23.4% of the respondents reported that the first allegations had been made since 2019.



The participants were also asked if the allegations of “parental alienation” had been made in the context of child protection or child custody proceedings. Figure 4 shows that, in 63 cases (46.7%), the allegations had been made in child custody proceedings. 56 of the respondents (41.5%) reported that the allegations had been made in both child custody and child protection proceedings, while 11.9% of the respondents (16) indicated that they had been made in child protection proceedings.

Figure 4



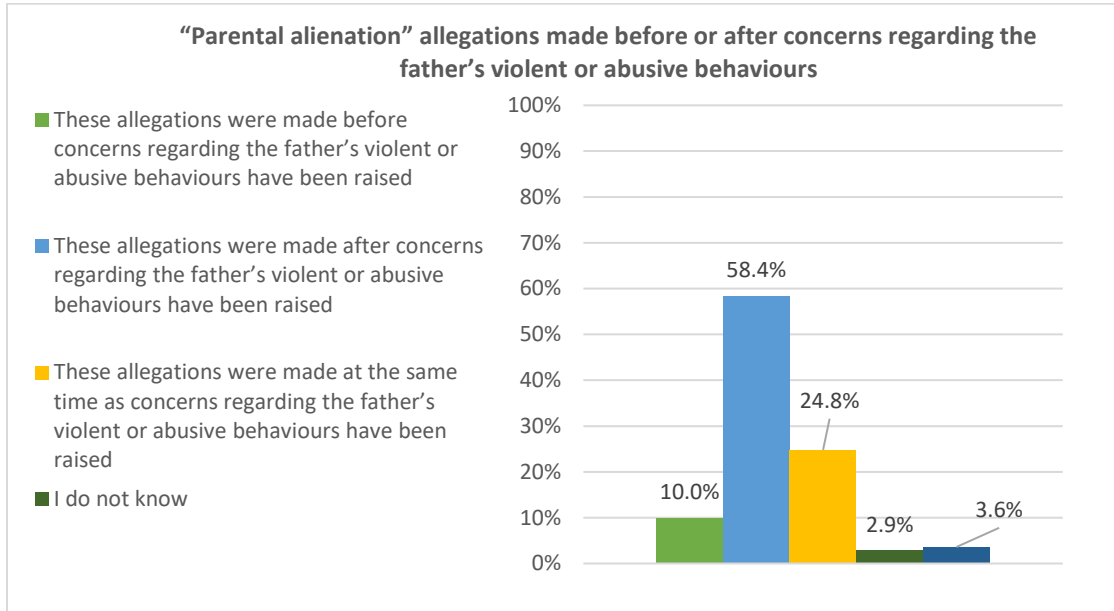
The participants were asked to identify who had described them as “alienating” mothers in the context of child custody or child protection proceedings². They were also asked to identify the first person who had made these allegations. Regarding child custody proceedings, the most frequent answers were the *father or father’s lawyer* (55; 98.2%), the *expert or professional who conducted an evaluation or wrote a report on the family dynamic or on custody/residence evaluation* (43; 76.8%), *supervised visitation services* (35; 62.5%), *judge* (30; 51.7%) and the *supervised visitation services* (35; 62.5%). In most cases (38; 69.09%), the *father or father’s lawyer* had been the first person to describe them as “alienating” mothers.

Regarding child protection proceedings, the most frequent answers were the *father or father’s lawyer* (52; 96.3%), *expert or professional who conducted an evaluation or wrote a report on the family dynamic or on custody/residence evaluation* (37; 68.5%), *supervised visitation services* (32; 59.3%) and the *judge* (25; 46.3%). In most cases (37; 68.5%), the *father or father’s lawyer* had been the first person to describe them as “alienating” mothers.

Furthermore, 58.4% of the respondents (80) reported that “parental alienation” allegations had been made after they had raised concerns regarding the father’s violent behaviours, as demonstrated in Figure 5. These findings suggest that labelling abused women as “alienating” mothers can be a tactic used by perpetrators to divert attention away from their own violent and abusive behaviours.

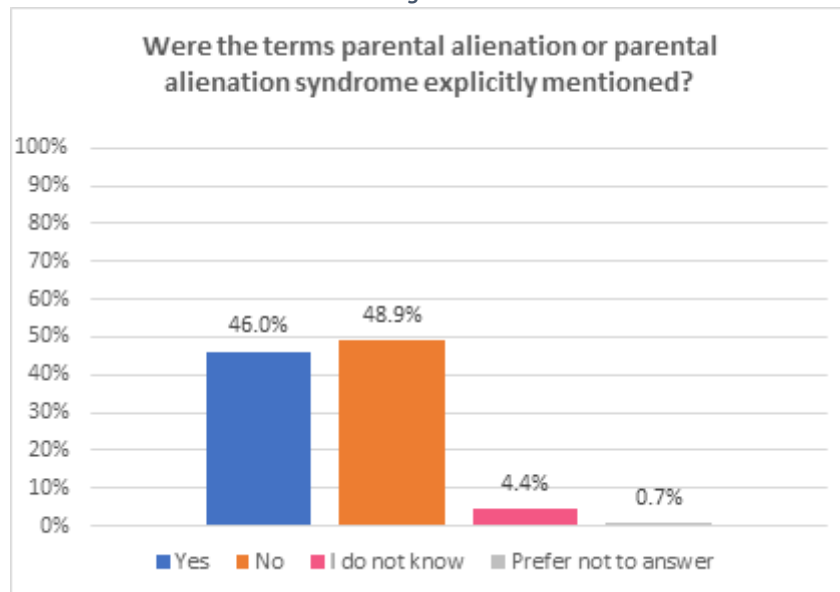
² The participants had to select one or more items in the following list: 1) father or father’s lawyer; 2) her own lawyer; 3) child’s lawyer or guardian; 4) police officer; 5) judge; 6) public/criminal prosecutor; 7) expert or professional who conducted an evaluation or wrote a report on the family dynamic or on custody/residence evaluation; 8) expert who has not conducted an evaluation; 9) child’s psychologist, psychiatrist or mental health professional; 10) her own psychologist, psychiatrist or mental health professional; 11) doctor/general practitioner; 12) family mediator; 13) supervised visitation services; 14) child protection worker or child protection lawyer; 15) others.

Figure 5



Overall, most women (67; 48.9%) reported that the terms “parental alienation” and “parental alienation syndrome” had not been explicitly mentioned. However, 63 (46%) reported that the terms “parental alienation” and “parental alienation syndrome” had been explicitly mentioned.

Figure 6



4. Impacts of “Parental Alienation” Allegations on Custody Arrangements

The participants were asked about child custody arrangements prior to and following the allegations of “parental alienation”. Figure 7 shows that 94 reported shared custody (71.2%) and 21 participants reported that they had primary custody (15.9%). Only 5 women reported that the father had primary custody of the child before “parental alienation” had been alleged (3.8%).

Most participants (75; 56.8%) reported that the custody arrangements had changed since “parental alienation” had been alleged. In this regard, 90.2% of the women who reported that the custody arrangements had changed considered that the allegations had influenced these changes (74).

Figure 8 illustrates the custody arrangements following the “parental alienation” allegations, which were different from the custody arrangements before the allegations. In this context, 14.6% of the respondents (12) reported that they had primary custody of the child, while 22% of the respondents (18) reported that the father had primary custody of the child. Moreover, 34.1% of the respondents (28) reported shared custody and 28% of the respondents reported (23) third party had primary custody.

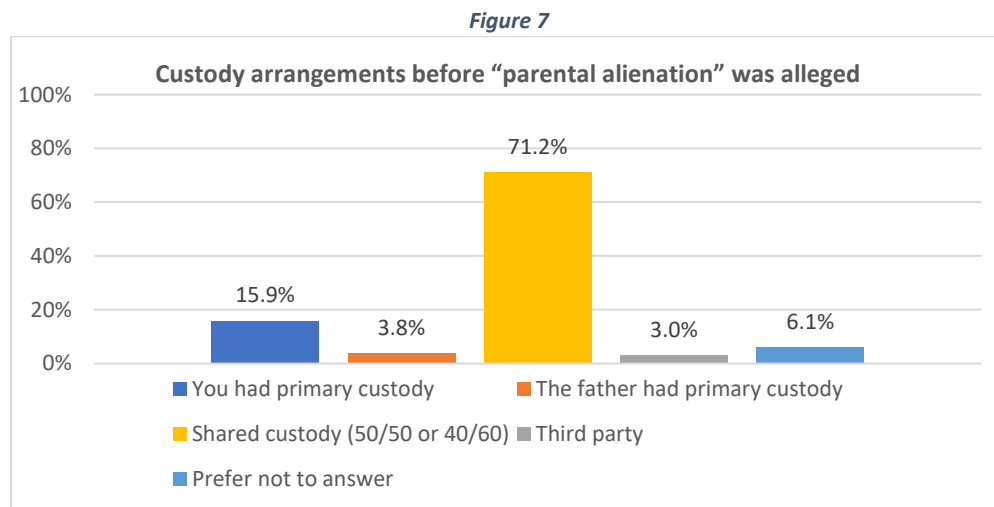
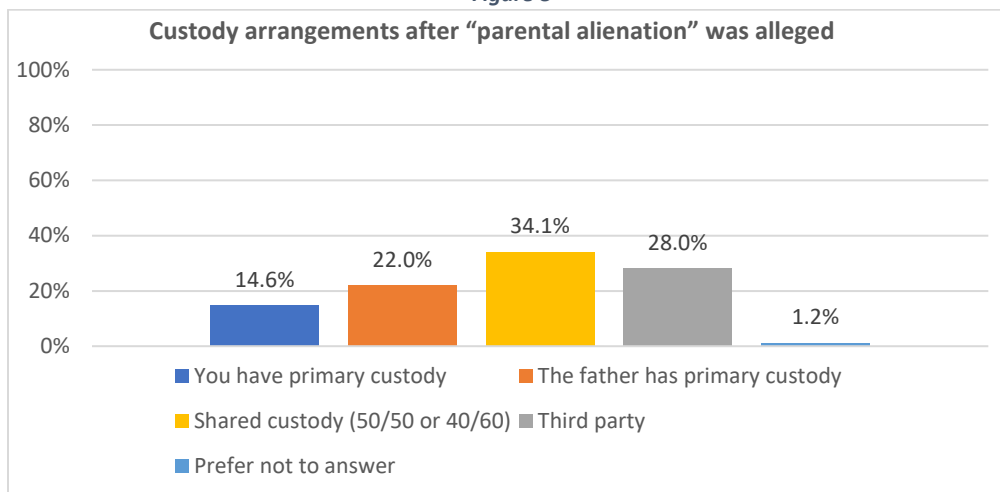


Figure 8



5. The Impacts of “Parental Alienation” Allegations on Women and Children

The participants were asked about the impacts of “parental alienation” allegations in different areas of their lives. In this regard, almost all women (124; 93.96%) considered that the allegations had affected their ability to heal from violence and abuse, and to regain control over their lives. Moreover, most of the women (78; 58.8%) considered that the “parental alienation” allegations had affected their relationship with the child.

The participants were also asked about the impacts of these allegations in other areas, including their financial situation, mental health and well-being, physical health, attendance and performance at work, feeling of safety, relationship with a new partner, relationship with members of the extended family, relationships with friends, reputation in the community, and confidence in the justice system. Most women reported that the allegations had had impacts in all these areas:

- Physical health (130; 98.4%);
- Mental health and well-being (129; 97.7%);
- Feeling of safety (128; 96.9%);
- Attendance and performance at work (128; 96%);
- Confidence in the justice system (124; 93.9%);
- Financial situation (117; 88.6%);
- Reputation in the community (108; 81.75%);
- Relationship with friends (105; 79.4%);
- Relationship with members of the extended family (92; 69.5%);
- Relationship with a new partner (92; 69.7%).

In addition, the participants were asked about the impact of the allegations on the child’s mental health and well-being, physical health, attendance and performance at school, feeling of safety, relationship with siblings, relationship with members of the father’s extended family, relationship with members of the mother’s extended family, relationships with friends, and confidence in the

justice system. Most women considered that the allegations had affected several areas of the child's life:

- Feeling of safety (122; 92.3%);
- Mental health and well-being (121; 91.5%);
- Physical health (108; 81.6%);
- Attendance and performance at school (104; 78.7%);
- Relationship with friends (93; 70.4%);
- Confidence in the justice system (82; 62.1%);
- Relationship with members of the father's extended family (73; 55.3%);
- Relationship with members of the mother's extended family (68; 51.4%);
- Relationship with siblings (56; 42.4%).

6. Challenging the “Parental Alienation” Allegations

The majority of the women (113, 85.6%) had faced difficulties when trying to challenge the “parental alienation” allegations. When asked about the specific difficulties that they had faced³, the most frequent difficulties were related to professionals involved in child custody and child protection proceedings. The following difficulties were identified by at least 40% of the respondents:

- Professionals did not acknowledge the father's violent and abusive behaviors and its impacts (94; 83.2%);
- Professionals did not conduct an adequate safety assessment (74; 65.5%);
- Professionals did not listen to the child's wishes and feelings (64; 56.6%);
- Participants had limited access to financial resources limited their ability to challenge these allegations (46; 40.7%);
- Participants did not have access to an expert or a professional with a good understanding of violence and abuse to conduct an evaluation or write a report (37; 32.7%).

The participants were also asked about the support that had been available to help them challenge these allegations⁴. In this regard, the women had had limited access to formal support. The following sources of support were identified by more than 40% of the participants:

³ They had to select one or more items in the following list: 1) Professionals who made recommendations and decisions in child custody/residence or child protection proceedings did not acknowledge the father's violent and abusive behaviors and their impacts; 2) Professionals who made recommendations and decisions in child custody/residence or child protection proceedings did not conduct an adequate safety assessment; 3) Professionals who made recommendations and decisions in child custody/residence or child protection proceedings did not listen to the child's wishes and feelings; 4) No access to legal information or legal advice; 5) No access to a lawyer to represent me during these proceedings; 6) No access to an expert or a professional with a good understanding of violence and abuse to conduct an evaluation or write a report; 7) Limited access to financial resources; and 8) Other difficulties.

⁴ They had to select one or more items in the following list: 1) Woman's own lawyer; 2) Child's lawyer or guardian; 3) Judge; 4) Expert or professional who conducted an evaluation or wrote a report on the family dynamic or on custody/residence evaluation; 4) Child protection worker or child protection lawyer; 5) Woman's own psychologist, psychiatrist or mental health professional; 6) Child's psychologist, psychiatrist or mental health professional; 7) Domestic violence or shelter worker; 8) Criminal or public prosecutor; 9)

- Their own lawyer (92; 69.7%);
- Their extended family (68; 51.5%);
- Their friends (64; 48.5%);
- Domestic violence or shelter worker (57; 43.2%);
- Their psychologist, psychiatrist, or mental health professional (51; 38.6%).

Certain women considered that they had been unsuccessful in both accessing support and challenging the allegations. Indeed, 26.5% of the respondents (35) reported that they had not been able to access support, and 32.5 % of the respondents (43) reported that they had been unsuccessful in challenging allegations of “parental alienation”. 47.7% (63) of women reported that they had been successful in accessing support to challenge these allegations. 39.4% of women (52) reported that they had been successful in challenging these allegations.

NGO or community association; 10) Doctor/general practitioner; 11) Police officer; 12) Extended family; 13) Friends; 14) Child’s school or daycare staff; 15) Politician; 16) Journalist; 17) Academics; 18) Network on social media; 19) Religious groups; and 20) Others.