

Impact Of Parental Alienation On Parental Competency Among Separated Parents In Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Parental alienation is a complex phenomenon that can have significant implications for separated families, including challenges in parental competency. This study aimed to investigate the impact of parental alienation on parental competency among separated parents in Pakistan. A sample of 150 participants completed the Parental Alienation Scale (PAS) developed by Gardner et al. (1985), which measures the degree of parental alienation, and the Parental Competency Scale (PCS) developed by Wallston et al. (1978), which assesses various aspects of parental competency. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and independent samples t-tests. The results revealed a moderate negative relationship between parental alienation and parental competency, suggesting that higher levels of parental alienation are associated with lower levels of parental competency. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions addressing parental alienation to improve parental competency and family dynamics among separated parents. Understanding the specific behaviors that contribute to parental alienation could help develop effective strategies to support separated families in Pakistan.

Keywords: Parental alienation, Parental competency, Separated parents

Introduction

Globally, almost a million marriages end in divorce worldwide, leaving over 100,000 families to deal with the difficulties of child custody and visitation issues (Bell, 2020). When children see turbulent divorces, they frequently show less emotional and psychological pain than children raised in households where parents are separated but still have constant arguments (Heller, 2022). Although divorce can have a significant detrimental effect on children, it seems that children of separated parents who continue to have disagreements may face much more difficult consequences (Donohue, 2022).

Parents who are separated frequently encounter many difficulties navigating the nuances of co-parenting (Anderson, 2020). Parental alienation is a particularly upsetting situation in this scenario, as one parent purposefully damages and upsets the child's relationship with the other parent (Ferraro & Lucier-Greer, 2022).

Parental alienation is an interaction by which one parent adversely impacts a child's impression of the other parent. This outcome in the child unreasonably maligning the separated parent while areas of strength for communicating with the distancing guardian (Galbally, 2021). Eventually, this can bring about the distancing guardian crushing the connection between the child and the targeted parent. There is as of now no settled-upon conclusive arrangement of ways of behaving that comprise parental alienation, in any case, parent alienation is perceived to include various strategies involved by the estranging guardian trying to program the designated child to terminate the targeted parent (Guida, 2023).

Parental alienation happens when one of the guardians purposefully slows down the connection between the child and the other parent (Marques et al., 2020). This resistance from one of the guardians includes ways of behaving intended to defame the targeted parent and to decrease the contact between the child and that distanced parent, a reality that prompts the dismissal of that parent by the child (Anderson, 2020).

Children can encounter three degrees of parental alienation: gentle, moderate, and serious. In gentle cases there is some parental programming against the other parent however appearance isn't genuinely impacted, and the youngster figures out how to arrange to have a relationship with the two guardians without an excess of trouble. In instances of moderate parental alienation, there is extensive programming against the other parent, bringing about battles around appearance (Boch-Galhau, 2020). The concept of different degrees of parental alienation, ranging from gentle to serious, helps to understand the varying levels of impact on the child-parent relationship. In gentle cases, there may be some programming or negative influence from one parent against the other. Still, the child can maintain a relationship with both parents without significant difficulty. The child can navigate the situation and does not show substantial signs of rejection or conflict towards either parent.

The complicated dynamic of parental alienation in separated families has far-reaching effects on parents' ability to co-parent after a divorce or separation (Miralles et al., 2023). The complexity of this occurrence creates difficulties that may make parenting in these situations less successful.

Parental alienation, in which one parent purposefully or inadvertently damages the relationship between the child and the other parent, frequently results in communication problems. It is difficult for separated parents to work together and make decisions for their children's welfare when there is a communication gap (Marques et al., 2020).

Parental alienation frequently results in the erosion of trust, which is a fundamental component of effective co-parenting (Mercer, 2021). When trust is undermined, it becomes more difficult for parents to collaborate on shared parenting

responsibilities (Miralles et al., 2023). Both parents suffer emotionally from parental alienation, which adds stress and strain to their lives. Their parenting abilities may be hampered by their inability to concentrate on their children's demands as a result of their emotional anguish (Milchman, 2020).

Parental alienation can lead to an increase in legal battles and custody conflicts. The targeted parent might become involved in court cases, which would take time and money away from constructive co-parenting initiatives (Rathus, 2020). Diminished parental competency may affect children the most when they are caught in the middle of parental alienation (Andreopoulos & Wexler, 2022). Children's general well-being can be impacted by an unstable and emotionally taxing environment that arises from strained parent-child relationships (Gibson, 2021).

When parental alienation is prevalent, it can be difficult to keep routines and parenting practices consistent. Children may find it challenging to adjust to the new dynamics and expectations in the divided family structure as a result of the disruption (Meier, 2021). Parental alienation can disrupt family routines and parenting practices, making it challenging for children to adjust to the new dynamics and expectations in a divided family structure. When one parent is actively alienating the child from the other parent, it can lead to inconsistent parenting practices, as the alienating parent may undermine the authority and decisions of the targeted parent. When alienating behaviors damage the targeted parent's reputation with the children, parental authority is put in jeopardy. The co-parenting interaction grows more complex as enforcing norms and boundaries becomes more difficult (Zaccour, 2020).

Rationale

The increasing incidence of separations worldwide has resulted in a rise in the number of couples battling for child custody and visitation rights (Zaccour, 2020). Parental alienation has become a crucial phenomenon in this complicated landscape, affecting the psychological health of parents as well as their offspring. With a particular focus on the effects on Pakistani separated parents, this study aims to investigate the complex aspects of parental alienation. Parental alienation affects families all around the world, making it imperative to comprehend and manage it on a global scale. The research attempts to contribute to the global conversation on parental alienation by looking at the distinct socio-cultural setting of Pakistan, where custody battles and separation rates are indicative of larger family dynamics.

Children are frequently the ones who experience the most emotional distress following a separation (Lapierre et al., 2020). Although the negative impacts of divorce on children have been extensively studied, this study acknowledges that the persistent conflicts between parents, which are typical of parental alienation situations, may exacerbate these effects. Through illuminating the effects of ongoing animosity between separating parents, the study aims to highlight the difficulties experienced by kids in divided families. To support the well-being of children following parental separation, interventions must be informed by a deeper awareness of these difficulties.

The research attempts to offer context-specific insights with a focus on Pakistan, where social and cultural factors impact custody disputes and separation rates. The study aims to support the creation of culturally sensitive treatments catered to the needs of divorced parents in the Pakistani context by identifying and addressing cultural variances.

The goal of the research is to discover issues in parental competency by examining the breaks in communication, the erosion of trust, and the emotional pain that arises from parental alienation. Comprehending these complexities is essential to suggest solutions that promote efficient co-parenting and guarantee the welfare of both parents and their kids following divorce.

Research Gap

Although a few examinations have investigated the long-term emotional consequences of parental alienation exposure in children of divorced parents by conducting qualitative research (Larsen et al., 2023; Vasconcelos et al., 2023; Ward et al., 2023), there remains a critical research gap in regards to the consequences for exploring more behavioral outcomes. This research attempts to address this gap by conducting a quantitative study of adult participants' experiences of being exposed to parental alienating behaviors in case of divorce or separation. More research is needed to explore the experience of adults exposed to parental alienating behaviors.

The present study aimed to add knowledge to the previous research (Ward et al., 2023) by continuing to quantitatively investigate the lived experience of individuals who were exposed to parental alienating behaviors. This study will explore the association between exposure to parental alienating behaviors and mental health outcomes in adults. This study will be descriptive. As such, hypothesis testing will be conducted and causal relationships between variables will be established.

Objectives

To examine the effect of parental alienation on parental competency among separated parents in Pakistan.

To determine gender differences in experiences of parental competency among separated parents affected by parental alienation in Pakistan.

Research Questions

What effect does parental alienation have on parental competency among separated parents in Pakistan?

What are gender differences in experiences of parental competency among separated parents affected by parental alienation in Pakistan?

Cultural Context:

The study recognizes the differences in Pakistan but mainly looks at the big picture of culture. It does not go deep into specific local or ethnic divisions. This study might not fully understand special cultural details that could affect parental alienation.

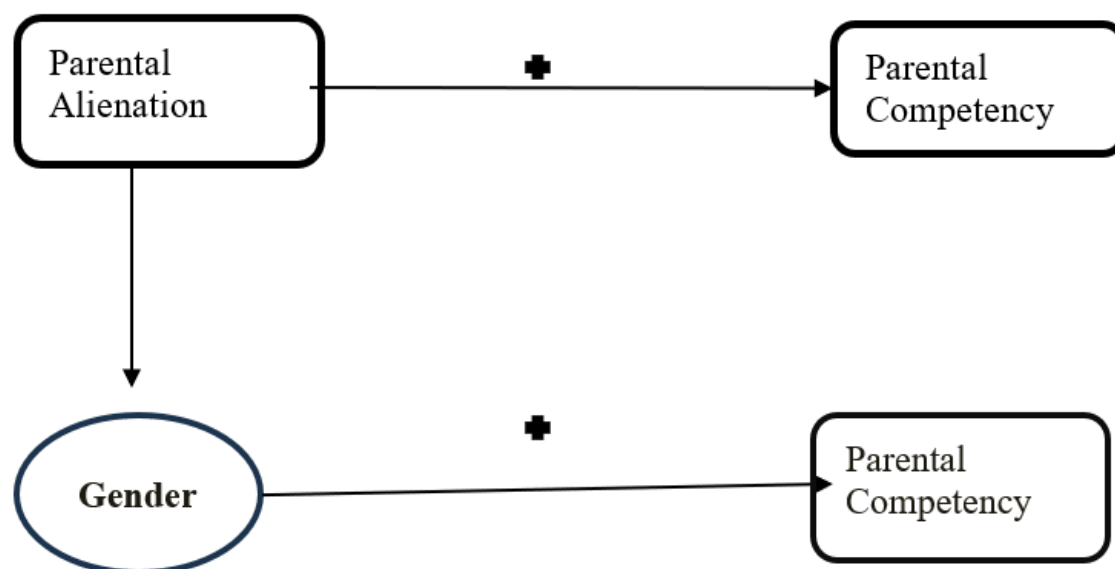
Legal Framework:

The research considers the current rules for family issues in Pakistan. However, understanding the legal details of parental alienation is not what this research focuses on.

Methodology

Conceptual Framework

Based on the above literature the following frame has been made.



Research Design

The study was based on a quantitative research design since the data will be examined using a questionnaire. This was primary research based on surveys of separated parents in Pakistan. Statistical analysis was employed to draw conclusions and make generalizations about the population.

Hypotheses

Parental alienation will have a positive impact on parental competency among Separated Parents in Pakistan.

There are significant gender differences in experiences of parental competency among separated parents affected by parental alienation.

Sample

The sample size was calculated using online Epitool by utilizing a parent article and turned out to be 150 (Verhaar et al., 2022). To gather data, a non-probability convenient sampling technique was utilized. Since the data was obtained at random from separated parents, a purposeful sampling strategy was adopted.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Separated Parents in Pakistan
2. Parents Experiencing Parental Alienation
3. Both Genders

Instruments

Parental Alienation Scale

This variable was measured using the Parental Alienation Questionnaire (PAS), which was developed by Richard A. Gardner and his team in 1985. This questionnaire is thoughtfully designed, consisting of 24 self-report items carefully curated to assess various dimensions related to parental alienation. Participants involved in this study were requested to utilize a 5-point Likert scale to articulate their responses, providing a nuanced perspective on their experiences. The reliability ($r = 0.92$) and validity ($ICC = 0.85$) of this tool make it an authentic tool to incorporate (Machuca, 2005).

Parental Competency

For the investigation of Parental Competency, the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale which was developed by Gibaud-Wallston and his team in 1978 was utilized. This questionnaire comprises 17 self-report items. Participants used a 6-point Likert scale to indicate their responses. The internal consistency coefficients, for this scale were calculated to be 0.79 (Tavares et al., 2020).

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 25.0). Descriptive statistics, including frequency tables, percentages, and graphs, were used to summarize the demographic characteristics and study variables. Correlation and regression analyses were employed to assess the relationships between parental alienation, psychological distress, and parental competency among separated parents. Specifically, correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables, while regression analysis was applied to evaluate the impact of independent variables (parental alienation and psychological distress) on the dependent variable (parental competency). Additionally, independent samples t-tests were conducted to analyze gender differences in psychological distress and parental competency. This comprehensive approach enabled a thorough understanding of the data and the relationships between the key variables of interest.

Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations were a key focus throughout the study to ensure the integrity and safety of participants. Informed consent was obtained from the concerned organization and all participants, with assurances that their responses would be used solely for research purposes. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, potential impact, and affiliations, ensuring transparency and avoiding any form of deception. Measures were taken to avoid emotional distress or intrusiveness, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. The study also emphasized confidentiality and anonymity, refraining from collecting personally identifiable information unless necessary and using unique identifiers to track responses. Secure survey platforms with encryption were employed to protect participant data, ensuring compliance with ethical research standards.

Results

The population of 150 revealed a moderate positive relationship between parental alienation and parental competency, suggesting that higher levels of parental alienation are associated with higher levels of parental competency. However, there were no significant gender differences in psychological distress or parental competency among separated parents affected by parental alienation.

Table 01 *Demographics of the Enrolled Population (N = 150)*

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	71	47.3
Female	79	52.7
Total	150	100.0
Education		
Intermediate	1	0.7
Graduation	98	65.3
Master	51	34.0
Total	150	100.0
Age		
21-25	24	16.0
26-30	50	33.3
31-35	38	25.3
36-40	16	10.7
41-45	11	7.3
46-50	8	5.3
51-55	3	2.0
Total	150	100.0

Table 01 shows the analysis of the demographic data revealed that the sample of 150 participants was fairly evenly distributed between genders, with 71 participants (47.3%) identifying as male and 79 participants (52.7%) as female. In terms of age distribution (table 02), the majority of participants were in the 26-30 age group, comprising 50 participants (33.3%), followed by the 31-35 age group with 38 participants (25.3%). The education levels of the participants (table 03) varied, with 98 participants (65.3%) having completed graduation and 51 participants (34.0%) holding a master's degree.

Table 02 *Reliability of the Scales Used in the Current Study (N = 150)*

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
PAS*	0.915	23
PCS*	0.881	17

*PAS = Parental Alienation Scale, PCS = Parental Competency Scale.

Regarding the scales used in the study, the Parental Alienation Scale (PAS) demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.915 for its 23 items as shown in Table 02. The Parental Competency Scale (PCS) also showed good reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.881 for its 17 items as shown in Table 05.

Table 03 *Percentile ranks for the Parental Competency Scale and Parental Alienation Scale (N = 150)*

Variable	Percentile Rank	Frequency	Percent
Parental Alienation Scale	25 th	37.50	25.00
	50 th	75.00	50.00
	75 th	112.50	75.00
Parental Competency Scale	25 th	37.50	25.00
	50 th	75.00	50.00
	75 th	112.50	75.00

The distribution of total scores on the Parental Alienation Scale was examined in a sample of 150 separated parents. The percentile rank calculations (shown in Table 03) revealed that 25% of participants scored at or below the 25th percentile rank, indicating a relatively lower level of perceived parental alienation in this subgroup. In contrast, 50% of participants scored at or below the 50th percentile rank, suggesting a moderate level of parental alienation in this subgroup. Finally, 75% of participants scored at or below the 75th percentile rank, indicating a relatively higher level of perceived parental alienation in this subgroup. The current study revealed that 75% of the total population of separated parents in the sample exhibit higher levels of perceived parental alienation.

The results of the percentile rank calculations for the total score on the Parental Competency Scale (Table 03) indicate the distribution of parental competency levels in the study population. The results revealed that 25% of the participants scored at or below 37.50, indicating that a quarter of the participants have a relatively lower level of perceived parental competency. This subgroup may require additional support or resources to improve their parenting skills. Similarly, 50% of the participants scored at or below 75.0, suggesting that half of the participants have a moderate level of parental competency. This indicates a balanced distribution of parental competency levels in the study sample. Meanwhile, 75% of the participants scored at or below 112.50, indicating that a majority (three-quarters) of the participants have a relatively higher level of perceived parental competency. This subgroup may serve as role models or mentors for improving parenting practices. Overall, these results suggest that there is variability in parental competency levels among the participants, with a significant proportion demonstrating moderate to high levels of competency. Understanding these differences can help tailor interventions and support programs to meet the specific needs of parents with varying levels of competency.

Table 4 *Regression Analysis for Parental Competency with Parental Alienation (N=150)*

PAS total*	Scale	Mean	Std. Deviation	Correlation	Regression Coefficient (Beta)	Sig.
	PCS*	51.87	16.77	0.441	0.441	0.04

*PAS = Parental Alienation Scale, PCS = Parental Competency Scale.

The analysis of the data revealed several key findings regarding the relationship between parental alienation and parental competency among separated parents in Pakistan (Table 04). The mean score for the Parental Alienation Scale total score (PAS_{total}) was 51.87, with a standard deviation of 16.77, indicating some variability in the levels of parental alienation among the participants. The correlation coefficient between PAS_{total} and the Parental Competency Scale total score (PCS_{total}) was found to be 0.441, indicating a moderate positive relationship between parental alienation and parental competency. This suggests that higher levels of parental alienation are associated with higher levels of parental competency in this sample. Furthermore, the regression analysis showed a regression coefficient (Beta) of 0.441 for PAS_{total}, indicating that for every one-unit increase in parental alienation, there is a corresponding 0.441-unit increase in parental competency, according to the regression model. Importantly, the significance value (Sig.) associated with this coefficient was 0.04, indicating that the relationship between parental alienation and parental competency is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that parental alienation has a meaningful impact on parental competency among separated parents in Pakistan. These findings highlight the importance of considering parental alienation in interventions and support programs aimed at improving parental competency and family dynamics in this population.

Table 5 *Descriptive statistics of Parental competency scale*

Variable	N (Valid)	Missing	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
Rank of PCS total	150	0	0.006	0.198	-1.194	0.394

Table 5 shows the The Rank of PCS, on the other hand, has a nearly symmetric distribution with slightly less peakedness than normal (negative kurtosis)

Table 6 *Independent T-test for Parental Competency Scale (N=150)*

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	df	p-value
Parental Competency Scale	Male	71	42.90	10.76	-0.221	148	0.825
	Female	79	43.30	11.45			

Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the study regarding the impact of parental alienation on parental competency and psychological distress among separated parents in Pakistan. The study aimed to investigate the relationships between these variables and explore potential gender differences in their experiences.

Parental alienation will have a positive impact on parental competency among Separated Parents in Pakistan.

The analysis of the Parental Alienation Scale (PAS) in the current study revealed that a majority of the participants in this study exhibited moderate to high levels of parental alienation. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that parental alienation is a prevalent issue among separated parents (Miralles et al., 2023). The moderate positive relationship between parental alienation and parental competency found in this study is also supported by existing literature, which suggests that higher levels of parental alienation are associated with greater challenges in parenting (Bernet et al., 2020).

The current analysis of the Parental Competency Scale (PSC) indicated that a significant proportion of the participants in this study demonstrated moderate to high levels of parental competency. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that many separated parents are able to maintain effective parenting practices despite the challenges of separation (Mercer & Drew, 2021). The lack of significant gender differences in parental competency found in this study is also in line with previous research, which suggests that gender is not a significant predictor of parenting competence (Goldin & Salani, 2020).

The moderate positive relationship between parental alienation and parental competency suggests that as parental alienation increases, parental competency in managing parenting challenges decreases. In other words, parents who experience higher levels of alienation from their children may find it more difficult to effectively parent.

This relationship is supported by the study by Bernet et al. (2020) and aligns with existing literature. Parental alienation can create a hostile or strained relationship between a parent and child, leading to emotional distress and communication barriers. These factors can, in turn, affect a parent's ability to provide appropriate care, guidance, and support to their child.

Parental competency encompasses various aspects, including emotional support, discipline, communication, and problem-solving skills. When a parent feels alienated from their child, they may experience feelings of rejection, helplessness, and frustration, which can interfere with their ability to parent effectively.

It's important to note that the relationship between parental alienation and parental competency is likely bidirectional and influenced by various factors. For example, a parent's competency in managing parenting challenges may also affect the level of alienation experienced. Additionally, other factors such as the child's behavior, the co-parenting relationship, and external support systems can play a role in this complex dynamic.

Overall, understanding the relationship between parental alienation and parental competency is crucial for developing interventions and support systems that can help improve outcomes for both parents and children affected by parental alienation.

well as parental competency among separated parents affected There are no significant gender differences in experiences of psychological distress as by parental alienation.

The study found no significant gender differences in parental competency among separated parents affected by parental alienation in Pakistan. This is consistent with some previous research that has also failed to find significant gender differences in these factors. However, other studies have reported gender differences in the experience of parental alienation, with some suggesting that mothers may be more likely to experience alienation than fathers.

The lack of significant gender differences in this study could be due to cultural or contextual factors specific to the sample population. Further research is needed to explore these factors and understand how they may influence the experience of parental alienation and its effects on parental competency. Additionally, the lack of significant gender differences in parental competency supports the notion that these factors are not determined by gender but rather by individual and contextual factors (Thakre et al., 2022).

The finding of no significant gender differences in parental competency among separated parents affected by parental alienation in Pakistan is an interesting observation. This result is consistent with some previous research that has also failed to find significant gender differences in these factors. However, it contrasts with other studies that have reported gender differences in the experience of parental alienation, with some suggesting that mothers may be more likely to experience alienation than fathers.

One possible explanation for the lack of significant gender differences in this study could be cultural or contextual factors specific to the sample population in Pakistan. Cultural norms and societal expectations regarding gender roles and parenting may influence how parental alienation is experienced and expressed by men and women. In some cultures, there may be less emphasis on gender differences in parenting roles, leading to more similar experiences of parental alienation and its effects on parental competency.

The findings also support the notion that parental competency are not determined by gender but rather by individual and contextual factors. This aligns with the broader understanding that gender is just one of many factors that can influence psychological well-being and parenting behaviors. Other factors, such as personality traits, coping mechanisms, social support, and cultural beliefs, may play a more significant role in determining how individuals experience and respond to parental alienation.

Further research is needed to explore the cultural and contextual factors that may influence the experience of parental alienation and its effects on parental competency in different populations. Understanding these factors can help inform interventions and support services that are sensitive to the unique needs of separated parents, regardless of gender.

Limitations

The reliance on self-report measures is a common limitation in psychological research, including studies on parental alienation, and parental competency. Self-report measures rely on participants' subjective perceptions and interpretations of their experiences, which can be influenced by various factors such as social desirability bias, memory recall issues, and individual differences in reporting styles. In the context of this study, using self-report measures to assess parental alienation, psychological distress, and parental competency among separated parents in Pakistan may have limitations. The small sample

size is another limitation that may impact the generalizability of the study findings. To address these limitations, future studies should consider using a combination of self-report and objective measures to assess parental alienation, and parental competency.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made regarding interventions and support services for separated

parents affected by parental alienation: Given the moderate positive relationship between parental alienation and parental competency, interventions aimed at improving parental competency among separated parents should consider addressing parental alienation. These interventions could include psychoeducation about the effects of parental alienation, communication skills training to improve co-parenting relationships, and strategies for managing and reducing alienating behaviors. Future research should explore the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving parental competency and addressing parental alienation among separated parents. Interventions and support services for separated parents affected by parental alienation should take into account the complex interplay between parental alienation, and parental competency. By addressing these factors, interventions have the potential to improve family dynamics and well-being among separated parents and their children.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into how parental alienation impacts separated parents in Pakistan, particularly in terms of parental competency and psychological distress. The results reveal a significant association between parental alienation and lower parental competency, emphasizing the detrimental effects of alienation on family dynamics. Additionally, the study finds fathers, with no significant gender differences observed. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems to mitigate the negative effects of parental alienation and improve the overall well-being of separated parents. Further research should investigate the specific behaviors associated with parental alienation that most strongly affect parental competency and psychological health, which would help develop more effective strategies to address these challenges. By addressing these issues, interventions have the potential to improve family well-being and promote healthy parent-child relationships in the context of separation.

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