

**Parental Alienation:
The Lived Experience of Targeted Mothers**

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of nine self-identified targeted mothers of parental alienation in Malta. This study sought to address this research gap by adopting a systemic approach, specifically examining how this phenomenon impacted the targeted mothers' emotional and physical well-being, as well as their relationships with their children and other family members. Data elicited from the interviews with these mothers was analyzed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. Taking a social constructionist perspective, the findings were interpreted through the lens of ambiguous loss theory and contextual family therapy. The targeted mothers experienced parental alienation as a continuation of the abuse that started off in marriage, and continued after the separation, where the children were enlisted in perpetuating the abuse through the alienation. The ambiguous loss these mothers experienced was debilitating to their well-being. They sought various ways to cope, while also expressing the need for more understanding and support from their families and professionals. This study provided suggestions for targeted mothers enduring parental alienation, emphasizing the importance of seeking support for themselves and their children through family therapy. It also offered recommendations for therapeutic professionals and others working with these families, including the need for specialized training and expertise.

Keywords: Targeted mothers; parental alienation, targeted mothers' well-being; lived experience; ambiguous loss; targeted mothers' relationship with child/ren.

Dedication

**To my dear parents, who passed away during my studies and dissertation, for inspiring
me and accompanying me in spirit.**

To my partner Matteo, for his endless support and for always believing in me.

To my sister, for all your support and care.

**To the mothers, children, and families facing parental alienation, may you find meaning
and support in your experience of grief and abuse.**

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
FREC	Faculty Research Ethics Committee
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
MAFT-SP	Maltese Association of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice
MCP	Malta Chamber of Psychologists
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Glossary

Term	Definition
Alienation	Feeling isolated, estranged, or detached from others or society, marked by a sense of not belonging or feeling misunderstood (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
Targeted Parents	Parents who are subjected to behaviours or actions that undermine their relationship with their child/ren, often in the context of family conflict, such as separation or divorce (McCartan, 2022).
Targeted Mothers	A subset of targeted parents, referring specifically to mothers, to highlight their unique experiences and challenges (McCartan, 2022). For clarity and consistency, “targeted mothers” will be used throughout to refer to the participants.
Alienating Parents	Parents who engage in behaviours, including manipulation and false accusations, that harm the child/ren’s relationship with the targeted parents (Baker, 2010a).

Alienating Fathers	A subset of alienating parents, specifically referring to fathers who undertake alienating behaviours that harm the child/ren's relationship with their mothers (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019).
Alienated Children	Children influenced by the alienating parent (father) to unfairly fear, disrespect, or show hostility towards the targeted parent (mother), disrupting their relationship (Gottlieb, 2012).
Third-Party Alienation	Actions by extended family, friends, or institutions that exacerbate a child/ren's alienation from the targeted parent (mother) (McCartan, 2022).

Chapter 1 Introduction

Preamble

Parental alienation is a complex and controversial phenomenon that has been subjected to significant attention from researchers and practitioners over the past few decades. Some contend that it constitutes a form of child abuse with potentially severe long-term impacts on a child's emotional and psychological well-being (Bernet et al., 2010). Others argue that this concept is overused, and that it can lead to inappropriate interventions and policies, for instance in cases wherein a parent really poses a risk to the child's safety and well-being (Miller & Manzer, 2021), or that it can be used as a weapon in high-conflict custody battles (Nichols, 2014), with one parent accusing the other of "brainwashing" or "alienating" the child to gain custody or control over the child (Bernet et al., 2010).

Research also demonstrates the connection between domestic violence and parental alienation, since in intimate relationships where control and manipulation occur, these abusive behaviours can continue post-separation, potentially leading to the alienation of children from the targeted parents (Rowlands et al., 2022). Despite controversies around the role of gender in parental alienation research, it has been proved that this phenomenon is experienced by both genders (Harman et al., 2016).

What Is This Research About?

Studies show that targeted mothers of parental alienation can experience significant distress, resulting in low self-worth, excessive worrying, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and sleep issues (Baker, 2010b), as well as physical issues such as chest pains, heart attacks and fibromyalgia (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019). Parental alienation can also significantly affect the targeted mother's relationship with her children and extended family. Baker also notes that alienating behaviours by the other parent can cause children to blame

and avoid the targeted mother, potentially leading to the breakdown of the targeted parent-child relationship, and triggering feelings of grief for both the mother and the child (2010a). Additionally, the alienated children may suffer long-term negative impacts on their emotional and psychological well-being (Gottlieb, 2012), while the alienating parent might also isolate the targeted mother from extended family members, leading to further negative judgements or stigmatisation about her parenting (Baker, 2010a).

Existing literature predominantly focuses on targeted fathers of parental alienation, revealing a gender bias that favours males as the primary victims and resulting in more research efforts directed towards them (McCartan, 2022). As a prospective systemic family therapist, I am particularly interested in exploring the targeted mothers' lived experiences, an overlooked perspective, not only to balance the academic literature, but also to address the broader implications of parental alienation on affected mothers (Harman et al., 2016). Specifically, to address research gaps, I seek to understand how parental alienation affects the targeted mothers' well-being, and their relationship with their child/ren (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019).

Research Aims and Research Questions

This research study aimed to delve into the targeted mothers' lived experience of parental alienation in Malta, shedding light on their emotional and physical well-being, and their relationships with their child/ren and extended family members. The central research question driving this study was: "what is the lived experience of targeted mothers of parental alienation in Malta?" To provide a comprehensive understanding, additional research questions included: "how does parental alienation affect the targeted mothers' emotional and physical well-being?", and "how does parental alienation affect the targeted mothers' relationship with their child/ren and other family members?"

With these research questions in mind I conducted, recorded, and transcribed nine semi-structured interviews. I then analysed the transcripts through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to remain loyal to the participants' world in capturing the "essence" of the phenomenon (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009, p. 402). I recruited the participants through purposive sampling, with the Maltese Association of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (MAFT-SP), and Malta Chamber of Psychologists (MCP), acting as gatekeepers (see Appendix D and E).

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

This study adopted a social constructionist approach which posits that social phenomena, including parental alienation, are constructed through discourse and social interaction, emphasizing the role of language and communication in shaping individuals' experiences and perceptions (Burr, 2015). As a theoretical framework, systemic theory was adopted as it considers the family as an interconnected system, whereby each member influences each other's emotions and behaviours. As such, parental alienation can be understood as a dysfunctional family dynamic, resulting in the deterioration and possible loss of family relationships (Bernet et al., 2010).

I also employed Boss's (2010) concept of ambiguous loss to acquire a more profound understanding into the targeted mothers' lived experiences. Ambiguous loss refers to a type of loss where there is no resolution or clear understanding, leaving individuals seeking answers and obstructing the grieving process and their ability to move forward. In contextual family therapy, loyalty refers to an obligation and a connection that one feels towards another person in a close relationship. Boszormenyi-Nagy (2013) writes about split loyalties, where children are expected to be loyal to one parent against another parent.

Relevance of the Research and Usefulness of the Study

The relevance and usefulness of this research lies in its potential to increase awareness and understanding of parental alienation in Malta. Parental alienation is a common social phenomenon, and hence this study offered the participants with the opportunity to share their experiences (Bernet et al., 2010). Unfortunately, only a few local research studies have been conducted on parental alienation. Brannon's unpublished Masters dissertation (2021) found that changes in custody or residency in favour of targeted parents, alongside specialized family therapy, are the most effective ways of addressing parental alienation. Marmara's (2021) survey investigated the public's awareness of the phenomenon of parental alienation, its prevalence and risk, the participants' aptitude for seeking support, and their preferred sources of support. Meanwhile, the Faculty for Social Well-being's (2022) study provides insights acquired from professionals and adult children who were alienated from a parent during their childhood, examining how this impacted their mental well-being and ability to form relationships. Consequently, through this research study I intended to expand the local literature on parental alienation.

Lastly, this research will contribute to the body of knowledge about this topic, since the targeted mothers' experiences are often overlooked in parental alienation research (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019). The findings from this research can inform the development of effective interventions, support services, and policies for families experiencing parental alienation. This is particularly important given the limited understanding of the phenomenon among professionals working with these families (Harman et al., 2018).

Motivation and Self-Reflexivity: Position as a Researcher

Positionality refers to how a researcher's personal and social identities, experiences, and beliefs influence one's perspective and approach to research (Holmes, 2020). The

research questions that I am investigating hold significant personal meaning to me, since one of my relatives has experienced severe distress due to being alienated as a targeted parent. Before embarking on this study I reflected that having a personal connection to the topic not only increased my motivation to conduct this research, but it also added depth to my understanding of the relational complexities involved, such as loyalty conflicts, and supported my engagement with the participants (Smyth & Moloney, 2008).

Starting off this study, also informed by my family's experience, I believed that locally targeted parents are mostly fathers. To ensure that I properly bracketed my experiences, I sought to adopt a growth mindset by considering pertinent academic literature, by interviewing targeted mothers rather than fathers of parental alienation, and by being open and curious to explore different possibilities that can arise from such experiences, such as increased resiliency (Harris & Tadros, 2022). To engage in ongoing self-reflection and self-awareness regarding my own beliefs, assumptions, and biases, I kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research topic, its aims and research questions, the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, the study's relevance and usefulness, and my motivation and positionality as a researcher. The subsequent chapters will include the literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and a concluding chapter.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

Targeted mothers of parental alienation endure profound emotional anguish as they bear witness to the gradual erosion of their relationship with their children, a distressing situation fueled by the manipulation and emotional abuse perpetrated by alienating parents (Lorandos et al., 2013). Although not universally accepted, Bernet et al. (2010, p. 76) define parental alienation as “a mental condition in which a child—usually one whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict divorce—allies himself or herself strongly with one parent (the preferred parent) and rejects a relationship with the other parent (the alienated parent) without legitimate justification”. Taking this definition into consideration, this literature review begins by adopting a systemic perspective to explore the phenomenon, followed by a specific focus on the targeted mother-child relationship. It delves into how alienation disrupts this relationship, and explores its profound impact on the targeted mothers’ well-being and on their relationships with extended family members.

The Literature Review Strategy

A systematic search was conducted between the 7th and the 12th of August 2023, delving into the intricate realm of the lived experiences of targeted mothers ensnared in the web of parental alienation. Relevant keywords such as “targeted mothers of parental alienation” and “targeted mother of parental alienation and child relationship,” and “well-being of targeted mothers of parental alienation” were identified. These meticulously chosen terms laid the groundwork for extensive exploration within academic databases such as Google Scholar and ProQuest. Following the initial searches, which yielded pertinent articles

about parental alienation, a further refinement of search terms was conducted by considering related concepts, such as “child adjustment”, and “high-conflict separation”.

Despite my extensive efforts, the literature searches did not yield many specific studies focusing on the lived experiences of targeted mothers or their well-being and relationships with their child/ren and other family members. This result aligns with and reflects the research gaps identified in the introductory chapter (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019), on which I formulated my research questions. To supplement my search strategy, I employed backward citation tracking, examining the reference lists of relevant articles for additional insights. Subsequently, I evaluated the identified sources for their relevance and quality, resulting in the selection of key articles, books and other scholarly works. These selected sources were then organized using a citation management tool to facilitate tracking and annotation, following methodologies outlined by Bakkalbasi et al. (2006). In the final step, I analyzed and synthesized the literature found, considering the identified research questions as elucidated by Ramdhani et al. (2014).

A Systemic Understanding of Parental Alienation

Adopting a systemic perspective in the exploration of parental alienation entails an examination of the ongoing debates surrounding this intricate subject. Parental alienation sparks significant discussions among various stakeholders, including legal professionals, mental health experts, and advocates. A central argument surrounds the criteria for its identification and diagnosis, highlighting the need for clearer and universal guidelines to distinguish it from other factors affecting parent-child relationship, such as in cases of domestic violence (Miller & Manzer, 2021). For the scope of this research study, I focus on Bennett et al.’s (2010) definition.

According to Bernet et al. (2010) parental alienation is considered a type of child abuse, a process which strains the targeted parent-child relationship, and exerts long-term psychological, and social/relational implications on alienated children. In brief, the process involves one parent utilizing maneuvering strategies to gradually instill animosity in the children towards the other parent. The tactics employed include undermining the targeted parents' authority and intentionally provoking loyalty conflicts within the children. I reflected that by exploiting the children's emotions and vulnerabilities, the alienating fathers can shape the children's thoughts, constructing a distorted reality that aligns with their own agenda. Eventually, the alienated children internalize and adopt the alienating fathers' negative perspectives towards the targeted mothers. Hence, addressing the maladaptive family dynamics is crucial to protect the children's psychological health and to ensure a healthy parent-child relationship (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019).

This disrupted targeted mother-child relationship may be further influenced by societal norms, legal structures, and interventions by mental health professionals. Therefore, parental alienation involves an interaction between the alienating fathers, the targeted mothers, the alienated children, and the wider social context, contributing to its perpetuation or resolution (Bernet et al., 2010). The presence of parental alienation is impacted by various factors, including individual vulnerabilities, personality characteristics, past experiences, family dynamics, and cultural influences (Lorandos et al., 2013). High-conflict divorces and co-parenting dynamics can create an environment which can be conducive to the development and continuation of parental alienation (Cox et al., 2001), even for generations to come (Rybicki, 2001).

Within the systemic perspective, maladaptive interactional patterns can be observed in the context of separation involving parental alienation. Triangulation is a prevalent pattern,

where the alienating parents involve the children, and sometimes even the lawyer and court, in their conflicts with the targeted parents. This compels the children to monitor their behaviour and restrict their expression regarding the targeted parents (Bernet et al., 2010). The presence of an enmeshed relationship between the alienating fathers and the children, characterized by blurred boundaries and emotional fusion, is another significant factor in cases of parental alienation, contributing to the hostility towards the targeted parents (Garber, 2011).

Parentification can arise when the alienating parents depend on the children to fulfil supportive needs typically fulfilled by an adult (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019). This imposes a heavy burden on the children, disrupting their normal development, and subjecting them to excessive stress and responsibility. It compromises the children's sense of identity and autonomy, thereby negatively impacting their well-being. In this context, targeted mothers can feel significant angst and helplessness in addressing this form of child abuse (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019).

The Mother-Child Relationship

In a parental alienation case, prior to the separation between the targeted mothers and their ex-husbands, and the onset of parental alienation, the mother-child relationship would have been typically characterized by a nurturing relationship. This bond is crucial for the children's emotional and psychological development, since it fosters a sense of security, and it serves as a foundation for the children to form healthy relationships (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). During and after separation, the alienating fathers seek to undermine the children's attachment with the targeted parents as a form of revenge against the other parents, for instance by making derogatory remarks or false accusations, or by manipulating the visitation schedule. Targeted mothers often express a desire to be part of their children's life, and they

often hope that one day they will be reunited again with their children. They might feel that they have lost their parental role (Vassiliou & Cartwright, 2001), and might attempt to shield their children from parental conflicts, but this often results in placing their children in a more vulnerable position in front of the alienating parents (Godbout & Parent, 2012).

The consequences of parental alienation go beyond the immediate parent-child relationship, as alienated children may vehemently deny that their thoughts and emotions are being manipulated by the alienating parents. In some cases, they might not express guilt for siding with the alienating parents or for harming the targeted parents (Tavares et al., 2021). This denial and alignment with the alienating parents' perspective, and the children's idealisation of the alienating parents, because of alienation, harms the parent-child relationship, creating distance and conflict between them (Fidler & Bala, 2010).

Addressing and resolving the denial experienced by alienated children poses a significant challenge, primarily because their perceptions are often distorted by the influence of the alienating parents (Gardner et al., 2006). This distortion is a direct result of the coercive tactics employed by the alienating parents, which can cloud the children's judgment and prevent them from accurately perceiving the reality of their situation. Overcoming this denial requires sensitive intervention aimed at helping the children recognize and process the manipulation they have been subjected to, while also providing them with the support and reassurance needed to rebuild their relationship with the targeted parents (Gardner et al., 2006).

The loss of parental relationship tends to impact the children's well-being, since it not only deprives the children of a vital source of emotional support, but also undermines their sense of identity and belonging, and self-esteem (McCartan, 2022). This can contribute to

feelings of confusion, guilt, abandonment, and a lack of trust in others, which can significantly impact the children's psychological and emotional development (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). Parental alienation exacerbates existing parental animosity and conflicts, further complicating the co-parenting dynamic and impeding the children's ability to adjust to the new family dynamics (Baker & Darnall, 2006).

Hence, the complexity of the separation process is further heightened by the presence of parental alienation, necessitating interventions that extend beyond traditional therapeutic approaches. Legal measures, such as penalties, may need to be implemented to address the targeted mother-child relationship and the underlying dynamics of alienation (Johnston et al., 2005). These interventions aim to mitigate the adverse consequences of parental alienation on parent-child relationships and overall family dynamics, ultimately striving to promote the children's best interest and well-being (Johnston & Kelly, 2004).

The Targeted Mothers and Extended Family

Parental alienation may have far-reaching consequences that extend well beyond the confines of the immediate parent-child relationship. The alienating behaviours and manipulative strategies employed by the alienating fathers, can create a divisive atmosphere within the extended family network. These tactics may influence or coerce relatives such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents into taking sides, aligning with the alienating parents, and perpetuating the dynamics of alienation (Shunmugam, 2022). The alienating parents may deliberately obstruct the targeted parents' communication with the children's extended family members (Harman et al., 2018).

This manipulation serves as a means of exerting control and isolating the children from their broader support network (Harman et al., 2018). These relationships with extended

family members are crucial for the children's sense of belonging and overall welfare (Buehler, 2020). The absence of connections with extended family members deprives the targeted parents and their children of nurturing experiences. These relationships often provide emotional support, guidance, and a sense of belonging that are integral to the children's development and well-being. The loss of these connections further exacerbates the emotional strain and sense of loneliness experienced by the targeted parents and their children due to parental alienation (Rowlands, 2019).

The alienating fathers might spread negative narratives and false information about the targeted mothers to their own extended family, causing close relatives to also distance themselves, to question the targeted mothers' character and abilities as parents, and to further harm the mother-child relationship. This phenomenon is known as third-party alienation, and it can make the targeted parents feel cut off from their own support system, especially their relationship with their parents and siblings (Kelly & Johnston, 2001). This severed connection, particularly from their own extended family, can be particularly devastating for the targeted parents, since it adds another layer of abandonment, loss, grief, and social exclusion (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019). The absence of these familial connections can deprive the targeted parents and their children of valuable resources, such as emotional and financial support, that extended family members often provide during challenging times (Rowlands, 2019).

Conversely, extended family members often hold a significant role in the dynamics involved in parental alienation. Acknowledging the unfairness of the situation, they may choose to support the targeted mothers and alienated children, even if this opposes the wishes of alienating fathers. Their recognition of the injustice serves as a beacon of support, offering a lifeline of understanding and encouragement to both the targeted mothers and their children

(Harman et al., 2018). By offering unwavering support, extended family members act as a counterforce against the negative consequences of alienation, fostering an environment of acceptance, and belonging (Harman et al., 2018).

The extended family members' support can therefore mitigate the psychological and emotional toll inflicted on targeted mothers by alienation, providing a sense of reassurance to those affected (Johnston et al., 2009). They often extend their assistance beyond emotional support, offering practical help such as providing childcare or assisting with legal matters. This eases the burden on the targeted mothers and facilitates their ability to navigate the challenges posed by alienation. They can serve as witnesses or advocates in legal proceedings, offering crucial testimony or support when legal interventions become necessary (Baker, 2005).

Parental Alienation and the Targeted Mothers' Well-being

The lasting consequences of parental alienation on the targeted mothers' well-being can be significant. Being subjected to the alienating parents' ongoing abusive behaviours, the children's constant denigration and rejection, in the context of the alienating parents' manipulation, and the loss of a meaningful relationship with their children, lead to grief and significant psychological distress (Baker, 2005). They often mourn the moments which they anticipated sharing with their children, such as birthdays, holidays, graduations, and other significant life events (McCartan, 2022). Targeted parents might seek to be emotionally resilient and to use appropriate coping mechanisms, such as by educating themselves on parental alienation, seeking social support and by being stoic (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). They may also experience decreased self-confidence and self-worth, and feel melancholic, angry, and helpless (Baker, 2005), which can lead to mental health disorders such as PTSD and depression (Bernet et al, 2010). The loss of the mother's nurturing and caregiving role

with their child/ren can also profoundly disrupt the targeted mothers' sense of identity, leaving them feeling a deep sense of emptiness, purposelessness, and isolation (Bennett, 2021).

The targeted mothers may face challenges in establishing or maintaining social relationships, due to the demands of coping with the ongoing alienation process, and the lack of empathy due to the stigma associated with parental alienation, which can further damage the targeted parents' psychological and emotional well-being (Harman et al, 2018). The chronic stress and emotional upheaval associated with the alienation process can, in turn, impact their physical well-being (Harman et al, 2018). Targeted parents report frequent headaches, fatigue, gastrointestinal problems, a compromised immune function, sleep disturbances due to constant worry and rumination, and high levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, which can have adverse consequences on the body over time, potentially impacting their overall quality of life (Harman et al., 2018).

Therapeutic and Legal Interventions

Given the complex nature of parental alienation, it becomes evident that addressing this issue necessitates a collaborative approach between mental health and legal professionals (Brannon, 2021). This collaboration is pivotal in devising comprehensive strategies that effectively address the complexities of parental alienation and ensure the well-being of all parties involved (Templer et al., 2017). Mental health professionals are at the forefront of advocating for therapeutic interventions tailored to the unique needs of families affected by parental alienation. These interventions often encompass specialized forms of family therapy, psychoeducation, and counselling aimed at both parents and children. Through these therapeutic modalities, families are provided with the tools and resources necessary to navigate the intricate dynamics of parental alienation (Templer et al., 2017).

Therapeutic approaches serve a multifaceted purpose in the context of parental alienation. They not only assist family members in comprehending the complexities of the situation, but also aid in restoring the targeted parents' sense of self and facilitating the healing process. By fostering compassion among family members, these interventions work towards promoting effective co-parenting, healthy communication patterns, boundaries, and relationships (Fidler & Bala, 2010). They aim to minimize the likelihood of further alienation, by addressing underlying issues and fostering a supportive family environment (Clawar & Rivlin, 2013).

Among the different therapeutic programs, reunification therapy has sparked debates regarding its overall effectiveness, particularly in cases of severe parental alienation. Key issues include the optimal timing for interventions, the role of the alienating parents, the potential harm to alienated children if therapy is not well-managed, the need for specialized therapist training, the appropriateness of voluntary versus court-ordered participation, and its integration with legal processes (Mercer, 2022). Extended family members can also be supported to create opportunities to increase their involvement in the targeted parents' and their alienated children's lives. This not only helps mitigate the adverse effects of alienation, but also contributes to rebuilding lost relationships and enhancing the functioning of the entire family unit (Fidler & Bala, 2010).

It is imperative for the court to take immediate action to investigate and address allegations of parental alienation to support children in rebuilding their relationship with the targeted mothers. This proactive approach is essential for mitigating the adverse effects of parental alienation and ensuring the well-being of the children involved (Verrocchio et al., 2018). One effective strategy that the court can employ is the imposition of sanctions on non-compliant parents who engage in alienating behaviours. Such sanctions may take the form of

finances, community work, or financial compensation to the targeted parents for any losses incurred due to being denied access to their children (Verrocchio et al., 2018). By holding non-compliant parents responsible for their actions, the court sends a clear message that parental alienation will not be accepted thereby emphasizing the importance of maintaining meaningful relationships between children and their targeted parents (Johnston et al., 2009). Brannon (2021) found that in cases where parental alienation persists despite sanctions, custody, or residency alterations in favour of the targeted parents, along with specialised family therapy, are crucial to protect the children's best interests, and to rebuild the children's relationship with the targeted parents in a supportive environment.

Nevertheless, the choice of therapeutic and legal interventions needs to be tailored to the severity of the alienation and the specific circumstances of each case. Research suggests that a systemic approach, wherein mental health practitioners collaborate with all family members and legal professionals involved, can lead to positive changes in the relationship between the targeted parents and their children (Gardner et al., 2006). By addressing parental alienation holistically and fostering collaboration between various stakeholders, such as mental health and legal professionals, positive outcomes - such as a stronger bond and a sense of resilience - can be achieved for both the targeted parents and their children (Gardner et al., 2006).

Self-Reflexivity of the Researcher

This review of literature aimed at delving into the lived experiences of targeted mothers in the context of parental alienation, I have gained a profound understanding of the intricate realities surrounding this topic. One particularly insightful revelation is the recognition that the relationship between targeted parents, especially between mothers and their alienated children, are frequently described as having been healthy before the

occurrence of separation and parental alienation. This recognition aligns with the findings of Bernet et al. (2010), which emphasize that the once-positive relationships between parents and their children can be disrupted by exploitative tactics employed by the alienating parents.

However, my exploration did not stop there; it extended to an additional perspective as I have learned that pre-existing issues or shortcomings on the part of the targeted mother, may also contribute to children refusing contact. The work of Miller and Manzer (2021) supports this perspective, suggesting that factors such as perceived injustice by the children can play a role in the alienation process. This dual perspective underscores the complexity of parental alienation, indicating that it may not be solely attributed to the actions of the alienating parent, but can also involve intricate dynamics within the parent-child relationship before the alienation. This new insight influenced my approach to this research study. It fostered in me a sense of openness and curiosity, encouraging me to also look into the contextual factors, such as the children's experiences with the targeted mothers, contributing to this social reality.

Conclusion

This literature review demonstrated the necessity for more local research on targeted mothers experiencing parental alienation, particularly given the limited number of studies in Malta; Brannon (2021) examined domestic court interventions in parental alienation cases, Marmara's (2021) survey investigated the public's understanding of parental alienation, its prevalence and risk, the likelihood for seeking support and the preferred source of support, and the Faculty for Social Well-being (2022) interviewed local professionals and adult children who experienced parental alienation during childhood.

I intend to expand the local body of knowledge on parental alienation by specifically focusing on the targeted mother-child relationship, the targeted mothers' well-being and their relationship with extended family members. Insights gained from this research endeavour may have the potential to inform and guide mental health professionals and legal practitioners, in the development of support interventions and legal frameworks that effectively address the targeted mothers' specific needs in the Maltese context. This can foster healing, and the restoration of healthy parent-child relationships (Fidler & Bala, 2010). The next chapter will present a review of the methodology used for this research study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will present a comprehensive overview of the research process employed in this study. It will focus on the research questions, the rationale behind adopting a qualitative approach and an IPA research methodology, the recruitment criteria for participants, and the interview process. The scope of this chapter will be to establish the research study's credibility and validity by demonstrating the steps taken in data collection and analysis, ensuring the research study's trustworthiness and rigor, and addressing the researcher's reflexivity and the ethical implications of the study.

Research Questions

The main research question driving this study was: "What is the lived experience of targeted mothers of parental alienation in Malta?"

To provide a more comprehensive understanding, other research questions included:

- a. "How does parental alienation affect the targeted mothers' emotional and physical well-being?"
- b. "How does parental alienation affect the targeted mothers' relationship with their child/ren and other family members?"

Rationale for Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies have their own distinct strengths and principles (Ochs et al., 2020). I found that a qualitative methodology was better suited to investigate my research questions, given that it involves a systematic inquiry into the meanings people attribute to their experiences, shaping their actions (Ochs et al., 2020). Qualitative research also has the advantage of not being constrained by current knowledge in

the field under investigation, which is essential for exploring the targeted mothers' lived experiences of parental alienation - a gap in current literature (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019).

Upon evaluating various qualitative research methodologies, including thematic analysis and grounded theory, it became evident that a phenomenological research method was the most suitable for addressing my research questions. While thematic analysis and grounded theory have their merits - the former emphasizing patterns emerging across participants, and the latter focusing on generating a tentative theory related to the research topic - IPA stood out for its explicit focus in capturing the transformative "essence" of the experience under investigation (Dallos & Vetere, 2005). Considering the research gap in relation to the topic under investigation, a phenomenological exploration of these experiences is needed before a tentative theory can be developed.

Research Method and the Underlying Philosophical Tenets

The philosophical underpinnings of IPA - phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography - inherently resonate with the research aims, which seek to elucidate the targeted mothers' lived experiences of parental alienation in Malta. Phenomenology facilitates a deep exploration of the mothers' lived experience, with the aim of capturing its "essence" (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009, p. 402), for instance concerning the impact of parental alienation on their well-being and relationships.

The concept of "double hermeneutics" present in IPA was imperative in the dialogical process of interpretation which occurred between the participants and myself, as it fostered a richer understanding of the mothers' lived experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2007). Moreover, the idiographic approach parallels the study's focus on individual narratives and unique experiences, ensuring a comprehensive portrayal of the targeted mothers' encounters. Consequently, this research, firmly anchored in the philosophical framework of IPA, stands

poised to provide a profound and insightful exploration of the targeted mothers' world, grappling as they are with parental alienation, by capturing the essence of their experiences, whilst valuing their individual stories within a hermeneutic context.

Research Participants, Sampling Procedure, and the Recruitment Process

Qualitative research generally employs purposive sampling to select participants who are knowledgeable or experienced with the topic under investigation (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This type of sample was chosen since IPA aims to target a “more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant” (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 56). Consequently, IPA researchers typically strive for homogeneity within the sample, focusing on a small group of individuals who are experiencing the phenomenon. The sample size for such studies usually ranges from six to ten participants (Morse, 2000; Smith et al., 2009). The eligibility criteria for participation included: being a mother over the age of eighteen years, whose child/ren consistently refuse/s contact with their mother due to her male ex-partner/husband's behaviour, and who has minimal to no contact with her child/ren, since ending the relationship with her ex-partner/husband (Baker & Darnall, 2007).

Prior to starting the interviews, I thought of utilizing the “Rowlands Parental Alienation Scale” (RPAS), as a measurement tool to assess parental alienation in divorced or separated families, to determine if the prospective participants qualify as severe cases of parental alienation (Rowlands, 2019). Unfortunately, I could not utilize this tool since I only obtained the author's permission after I had already started my data collection. Therefore, all participants self-identify as targeted mothers.

To support me in accessing the sample, the recruitment process was started by MAFT-SP and MCP who acted as gatekeepers, by communicating with systemic family therapists and psychologists respectively, to identify potential participants, and to provide

them with the information sheet to contact me if they were interested to participate in my research study (Appendix D and E). Further to this, Faculty Research Ethics Committee's (FREC) permission was sought to use social media to recruit participants. Some participants also informed other targeted mothers about the study, and they contacted me expressing their desire to take part in the study. The table below (Table 1) presents information about the mothers who participated in this study. To maintain anonymity, names and other identifiable details have been altered.

Table 1*Description of Targeted Mothers*

Name	Age	Alienated Child/ren's Age	Current Contact with Severely Alienated Child/ren	Other Less/Non-Alienated Children
Doris	40-50	15-20 (M)	No contact for about 6 years	10-15 (M), 10-15 (F)
Maria	40-50	15-20 (M)	No contact for about 3 years	N/A
Sara	50-60	20-30 (F)	No contact for about 2 years	10-15 (M), 15-20 (M), 15-20 (M)
Lucy	50-60	20-25 (F), 25-30 (F)	No contact for about 2 years	N/A
Mariah	20-30	0-5 (M)	2/3 times per week for 4 hours	N/A
Karen	40-50	15-20 (F), 15-20 (F)	No contact for about 3 years	N/A
Kelly	30-40	0-5 (F), 5-10 (M)	Contact once per week (3/4 hours)	10-15 (F), 0-5 (M)
Mikela	50-60	10-15 (M)	Contact once per week (2 hours)	N/A
Hayley	50-60	25-30 (M), 25-30 (M)	No contact for about 4 years	N/A

(M= Male, F= Female)

Data Collection Method

Following the recommendations of Smith et al. (2009), this study utilised semi-structured interviews as its method for data collection. This data collection method encourages participants to share detailed accounts of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009), ensuring the emergence of rich and valuable data (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The semi-structured format provided a balanced approach, combining preset questions with the flexibility to delve into participants' individual experiences and reflections (Creswell, 2007). This allowed for a conversational interaction between myself as the researcher and the participants, empowering them to share their stories in their own words and at their own pace. The inherent flexibility also enabled me to probe deeper into areas of interest or ambiguity, enhancing the depth and complexity of the collected data (Creswell, 2007).

The Interview Guide

Before conducting the interviews, an interview guide (see Appendix F) was prepared. The interview questions adhered to the standards of IPA, employing open-ended inquiries, and maintaining a non-directive and flexible interviewing approach (Smith et al., 2009). In fact, during the interviews I adapted the questions, based on the participants' responses, and further explored interesting themes that emerged through their answers. This approach facilitated a co-created dialogue concerning what was significant to the participants, since they are the "experiential expert(s)" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 58). The questions' formulation was informed by insights gathered from the literature review, and from the work of Smith et al. (2009). Particularly, they were generally structured to begin with "what" and "how," and to progressively transition from general (for example: "how would you describe your current relationship with your child/ren?"), to more specific inquiries (for example: "how has the relationship between you and your child/ren changed over time, before and after your

relationship with your ex-partner/husband ended or after the separation?") (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 62). This approach allowed for capturing the participants' general perspectives, whilst also considering their specific concerns (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Pilot Study

Before starting the interview process, I conducted a pilot interview with one of my participants. The main scope of this pilot interview was to assess the suitability and validity of the questions presented in the interview schedule. Additionally, I aimed to determine the approximate time needed to carry out the interview, and to gather feedback on how to enhance the questions (Smith et al., 2009). I then transcribed the pilot interview and had a meeting with my supervisor. During this meeting, it was agreed that since only minor adjustments were made to the interview guide, and since the data collected during the pilot interview was deemed to be sufficiently insightful, it was decided that this interview could be included as part of the main study.

Conducting the Interviews

After obtaining consent from the self-identified interviewees to participate in the study, I collaborated with them to arrange an appropriate date, time, and location for the interviews. They were informed that the interview guide would be sent to them via email prior to the interview. This allowed the participants to familiarise themselves with the questions in advance and to consider their eventual responses. It also provided them with the opportunity to seek clarification or ask questions related to the study while starting to establish rapport (Smith et al., 2009).

Since this is an emotionally-laden research study, it was imperative to prioritize the participants' well-being. I sought to ensure this by adopting a conversationalist approach whilst conducting the interviews, fostering an atmosphere of safety and equal partnership,

and by being curious and non-judgemental. I encouraged my participants to ask questions, and elaborated on their research inquiries. Recognizing the nuanced nature of parental alienation allowed me to appreciate that there is no one singular narrative that encapsulates the diverse range of experiences within this complex phenomenon. This realization empowered me to transcend mere descriptions of the participants' experiences and to explore the intricacies of the targeted mothers' coping mechanisms, strengths and challenges in greater depth. This open mindset not only enriched the quality of my research findings but also deepened my appreciation for the resilience and strength exhibited by targeted mothers in the face of adversity.

In the end, I encouraged the participants to provide additional comments, whilst expressing my gratitude for their participation. To further safeguard their emotional well-being, I also concluded each session with a debriefing, providing participants with a list of free local mental health services (see Appendix A), for them to access professional support, in case they experienced intense emotions during the interview.

Data Analysis

After completing the interviews, I ensured the reliability of my findings by promptly transcribing each recorded interview. To gain a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences, I read each transcript multiple times. During the data analysis process, I aimed to set aside my biases and to approach and interpret the data from the participants' perspectives (Lyons & Coyle, 2007).

In my initial reading, I aimed to grasp a broad and comprehensive understanding of the collected data. During the second reading, I took notes and wrote memos alongside the participants' accounts, using their own words to give them a "voice" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 116). In the third reading, I identified themes emerging from my notes and comments. These

themes represented the “essential qualities” of the interviewees’ lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12). I followed this process for the nine interviews which I conducted.

During data analysis, I carefully examined the participants’ understandings of their lived experiences, searching for similarities and differences. I aimed to find connections and common themes among their responses, arranging them into a hierarchy of superordinate and subordinate themes based on their meaning (Smith et al., 2009). I made sure not to rush into forming hierarchies too quickly, following the rule of horizontalization, and staying focused on the data obtained (Creswell, 2007).

IPA recognizes the “dynamic relationship between the part and the whole”, which required me to move back and forth between different perspectives (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28). This process was not strictly sequential but involved continuously navigating various viewpoints (Smith et al., 2009). To present the findings I prepared a summary table (see Chapter 4) displaying the superordinate themes, along with their subordinate themes and relevant quotations drawn from the transcribed interviews. Afterwards, in the discussion chapter, I presented the themes in a narrative form and contextualized them in relation to existing literature (Smith et al., 2009).

Methods of Verification: Trustworthiness and Rigour

Ensuring trustworthiness and rigour is of utmost importance in qualitative research, and it involves several key criteria, including credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). To establish credibility, I opted for the well-established approach of IPA. I also included an excerpt from an interview transcript (see Appendix G) to provide transparency, and to allow readers to evaluate the data collected. Regular meetings with my supervisor further supported me to gain different perspectives, and to challenge any preconceived notions about the participants’ experiences. Acknowledging

that my research experience is limited, I drew on my background in various helping roles, such as a social welfare professional, to better understand the targeted mothers' experiences.

The second criterion for evaluation in qualitative research is dependability, which pertains to the consistency of data collection, interpretation, and reporting of results. I ensured clarity and coherence in data collection by maintaining an audit trail and seeking the participants' feedback, to safeguard accuracy and validity (Shenton, 2004). The third criterion that ensures trustworthiness and rigor is transferability. I achieved this through detailed descriptions, staying close to the participants' realities, and searching for in-depth interpretation of the data. This approach encourages readers to draw connections between their own experiences and the study's results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Finally, the fourth quality to ensure trustworthiness and rigor is confirmability, defined as "the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). This requires the researcher to "ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). To achieve this, I maintained a curious mindset throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Additionally, respondent validation was conducted after each interview (Shenton, 2004).

Reflexivity

It is important to acknowledge how my position as the researcher might have impacted the data collection and analysis processes, particularly in the context of IPA where the researcher's role in interpreting the data is significant (Smith et al., 2009). Embracing a constructionist epistemology, I recognized that knowledge is shaped by our understandings, and therefore I actively engaged in an interaction between myself and the participants during data collection, allowing meaning to emerge from these exchanges (Smith et al., 2009).

Being personally influenced by parental alienation, and a trainee systemic family therapist, I constantly reflected on how my own experiences might have impacted my interactions with the participants and my interpretations of their experiences. I acknowledge that my experiences might have unintentionally overshadowed other perspectives, potentially limiting the possible conclusions that could have emerged in this study. To mitigate the influence of my biases on the interviewing process, I consciously sought to practice bracketing: setting aside my preconceptions and biases to remain open and to keep the participants' experiences at the focus of my research (Smith et al., 2009).

To address potential biases, I also sought to continue using the safe space provided in my personal therapy and clinical supervision sessions, to address any resonances that might arise during my research journey, and which might impact my neutrality and curiosity as a researcher. I regularly discussed my position and reflections with my supervisor, seeking deeper insights, whilst remaining mindful of my views and biases. This commitment encouraged me to remain attentive and loyal to the meaning the participants attached to their experiences, striving to take a both-and stance, to faithfully represent their voices throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were employed and observed throughout all my research journey. Before I started my research study, I submitted my proposal and put forward my submission for ethical clearance to the FREC (see Appendix C). To avoid any misunderstanding or misconceptions among prospective participants, I sent each one an information letter (see Appendix A) and a consent form (see Appendix B), for their review if they chose to participate in my research. The information sheet detailed the aims and scope of my research study and the data collection process. The participants were informed that the interview will

be recorded, and that verbatim extracts from the interviews would be included in my dissertation.

Moreover, participation was entirely voluntary, allowing participants to freely choose not to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with and to withdraw from the study at any point. Confidentiality stresses the importance of not disclosing the participants' identity or any other identifiable information. For this purpose, the participants' names were changed to pseudonyms, and any information which could have given away their identity was not presented (Smith et al., 2009). This is especially important in the local context, given that Malta is a small country. The interview recordings and transcripts were safely stored in a password-protected laptop, and the participants were assured that these will be destroyed once my grade was obtained. I did not include participants whom I knew beforehand to avoid any issues which could arise due to dual relationships.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology undertaken in this study, including an examination of the theoretical foundations of IPA, the investigation of research questions, the methods of data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and aspects of reflexivity. The subsequent chapter will present the findings.

Chapter 4 Findings

Introduction

This chapter will outline the main findings which emerged from the interviews with the nine targeted mothers. Table 2 showcases the six superordinate themes and their corresponding subthemes extracted from the participants' direct quotations. The quotations have been translated into English for clarity and ease of understanding, while the original Maltese versions are included in Appendix H.

Presentation of Participants

All participants were assigned pseudonyms. They were Maltese women ranging in age from twenty-two to sixty years old, residing in various regions across Malta. These mothers had limited (between two and twelve hours per week) or no contact at all with their alienated child/ren, whose ages range from three to twenty-six years old. The mothers were in relationships with their ex-partners/husbands for periods ranging from one and a half years to twenty-seven years, and they have ended this relationship/separated two to eighteen years ago. Some participants had other children (besides the alienated children) who either lived with them or eventually returned to live with them after experiencing parental alienation. A few of the mothers had children who were not alienated, due to being stepsiblings to the alienated children. A descriptive table of the targeted mothers' characteristics can be found in Table 1 in the methodology chapter.

Table 2*Presentation of Themes*

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
Experiencing parental alienation	• Experiencing different abuses and leaving the relationship/marriage • Never did it cross my mind (that I was going to be alienated from my child/ren) • My children were “fed” and coerced to abuse me • Involving others to harm me and my children • A form of isolation • Parental alienation...runs in families
When the most important thing is stolen from you	• You are broken... • Physically suffering along the years
If you don't get used to it, you'll face consequences	• Taking care of oneself and helping others • My faith in God saved me • Time for myself and being strong
Effects on severely alienated, less and non-alienated children	• Following the alienating fathers' footsteps • The children are broken • Physically affected by the abuse • Their children impacted differently
Parental alienation impacts targeted mothers' relationships	• Perpetual grief, multiple losses, and their alienated children • Relationship with other family members
Needing more understanding and support	• Experiences around support and the need for change • Are you a good mother?

Theme 1 Experiencing Parental Alienation

All participants described aspects characterizing their lived experiences of parental alienation. Their stories usually started with experiences of multiple abuses before deciding to leave the relationship for their own and their child/ren's safety. They then endured their child/ren's abuse, often after being coerced by their ex-partners/husbands. The participants

recounted how their ex-partners/husbands involved others to harm their relationship with their child/ren. The mothers said that they and their child/ren have become isolated, even from their extended family, and they expressed their concern that failure to address parental alienation promptly would perpetuate it for generations.

Experiencing Different Abuses and Leaving the Relationship/Marriage

The targeted mothers said that they had suffered from various abuses whilst living with their ex-partners/husbands, including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and financial abuses. For instance, Doris voiced:

He told me that I am a chicken. He told me that I have to stay inside. You need to clean and cook for us. Do you know what a slave is? I could only go out to the balcony. Imagine what I had to go through, plus the beating up, lack of finances, threats, sexual abuses. I don't want him to touch me and he touches me...I could not even go out with the children...I told him that the children are not chickens, they need to go out, and when I put on their clothes to go out, he takes off the children's shoes so they have to stay at home (Doris, lines 467-472).

These abuses prompted the mothers, like Kelly, to reach out for help (from the police, social workers, lawyers) for their own and their children's safety, and to leave the abusive relationship:

There was a lot of abuse going on, and the final incident happened when he threatened to kill me with the gun. Then the police advised me to not stay in the relationship, since I refused to leave him. They cautioned me: "Today we saved you, but next time we won't" (Kelly, lines 19-22).

Hayley, like some other participants, also experienced infidelity: “He was going out with other women! Then once I caught him!” (Hayley, lines 312-313).

Lastly, all the targeted mothers described that when they decided to leave the relationship or separate, the alienation started or worsened, as a revenge against them. Karen explained, “The alienation started when I wanted to separate, my husband wanted to punish me, by taking my children” (Karen, lines 4-5).

Never Did It Cross My Mind (That I Was Going to Be Alienated from My Children)

The participants never thought that their ex-partners/husbands were alienating their child/ren against them:

My son injured himself with a butter knife. I asked him, “Why did you do this?” He said, “Because I’m stressed”. I asked him, “Stressed?” This shows that I was not aware of what was happening with my son Mike (Maria, lines 125-128).

In all nine cases, the alienating fathers were never involved in childrearing prior to the separation or relationship ending. Karen, like some other mothers, described how their ex-partners/husbands were more focused on work than on their family:

I was always taking care of the children. My husband is a businessman, so I was always with them from morning to evening, summer and winter, and my husband never had leave, not even sick leave, imagine. Including Sundays, he was never at home (Karen, lines 12-16).

After their relationship ended, the participants noted that their ex-partners/ husbands’ behaviour changed, specifically in their role as fathers. All the mothers believed that this

eventually led their child/ren to idealize their fathers and engage in black-and-white thinking, “Suddenly he became father of the year! He wanted to take them to school himself! They started to idealize him. For them their father does everything well, and everything I do is wrong” (Hayley, lines 326-328).

The targeted mothers added that it was also very difficult for them to realize the abuse immediately, given that they had a good relationship with their child/ren, and since it was being done behind their back, when their child/ren were alone with their alienating fathers. For example Maria claimed, “I had a very good relationship with my son and all of a sudden, the lights went out and I was left in the dark” (Maria, lines 303-304).

Sara realised something was amiss with her son through a text message sent by one of her son’s friends:

I was shocked...My son’s friend Paul, relayed a message that my son had sent him...And this message said, “I want to end my life, and I will do whatever is needed. Thank you for being my friend during the past years” (Sara, lines 413-417).

My Children Were “Fed” and Coerced to Abuse Me

All the participants said that their ex-partners/husbands brainwashed and manipulated their child/ren by presenting “evidence” to falsely accuse them of wrongdoings. For instance, Sara was accused by her ex-husband of engaging in pornography, “He had shown my children the photos that my second ex-partner had sent him, of myself naked. To tell them...look what your mother does on the internet! And then my daughter stopped talking to me” (Sara, lines 208-210).

The participants believed that their ex-partners/husbands also distorted reality and taught their child/ren how to lie. In Karen’s case, her ex-husband convinced one of her

daughters to deny that he had pushed her down the stairs, and instead to put the blame on her mother:

My daughter told me, “It’s not true that dad made you fall down the stairs”. She told me that “You (the mother) were going to fall”. He managed to put into my children’s heads what they needed to say in case that they were asked. He prepared them (Karen, lines 371-374).

Karen and some other participants, noted that their ex-partners/husbands repeatedly undermined their authority in front of the child/ren, a tactic which continued after leaving the relationship. She stated, “If I tell Leona that her break time is up, go and continue the homework because otherwise we won’t finish it on time, he used to say, “Leave her alone!” Instead of telling her to listen to her mother” (Karen, lines 463-465).

They added that their ex-partners/husbands also coerced their child/ren to disobey and abuse them by teaching them to use derogatory language such as “it,” “she,” or “mad,” when referring to their mothers. Hayley outlined, “He came to tell me that we have to say “it” when we refer to you with him...” (Hayley, line 20).

The alienated children were sometimes also rewarded for mistreating their mothers, receiving attention, gestures, material items, and money/promises of inheritance. Doris recalled, “My daughter was hitting me with all her strength, here, with her feet on my hip, and she was hitting me..as a four-year old. And the father from behind my back started doing the okay sign to her” (Doris, lines 335-338).

Involving Others to Harm Me and My Children

All mothers mentioned that the alienating fathers sought to “recruit” others to falsely accuse them, in an effort to take their child/ren away, thereby seeking to harm both the

mothers and their child/ren in the process. These individuals included family members from both the alienating fathers' and the targeted mothers' sides, educators from the child/ren's schools, professionals such as lawyers, police officers, social workers, and psychologists, religious figures, as well as the alienating fathers' friends and colleagues. Sara claimed that "there were friendships that were lost, because he manipulated them... and they turned against me and accused me of being a "bad" mother, who was involved in prostitution" (Sara, lines 973-975). Whilst Karen added that "the head of school was called as a witness during the separation proceedings, she witnessed against me. She started saying things he had told her, and she doesn't even know me" (Karen, lines 105-106).

In instances where professionals were involved, the targeted mothers lost their trust and even questioned the professionals' knowledge and practice in parental alienation cases. This happened to Maria and Karen, when they were asked to attend for therapy together with their ex-husbands:

They want to give us therapy, to me, to Mike, and to his father at the same time. They want me to somehow communicate with his father. I'm against it, how can this even be possible? I want to receive therapeutic support to connect with Mike, but it's out of the question for me to face his father (Maria, lines 665-671).

A Form of Isolation

All mothers experienced isolation/distancing from their own child/ren. For some mothers, like Lucy, this happened progressively, "I started to notice that the children were taking their clothes little by little from home, until eventually, they stopped coming home, but they stayed with their father" (Lucy, lines 200-203). Sara also added, "I would always find his things missing...Luke was absent-minded. Once I found his pillow case under the stairs,

filled with a lot of his favourite things. I eventually realized, after the children left, that my ex-husband was instructing them to pack and go to live with him” (Sara, lines 196-198).

For other mothers, this isolation/distancing happened suddenly. For instance, Maria’s ex-husband planned to take her son without her knowledge, by instructing him to escape from home:

And my son was running more than me, and at one point I couldn’t see him anymore. I called him on his phone, and he didn’t want to answer... I gave his number to the police and in twenty minutes the police called me back and told me he was in his father’s car... (Maria, lines 142-147).

In Mariah’s situation, her son was taken from her through a court decree due to her ex-partner’s false allegations, “Three police cars arrived and arrested me at my son’s school. They presented a court decree which indicated that I could no longer communicate with my son” (Mariah, lines 41-43).

Lucy, like the other participants, described parental alienation as a system of isolation, experienced by them, their child/ren, and all the extended family, “Parental alienation is a form of isolation. And who will be isolated? The children, the extended family, and I, because we are being prevented to see all our extended family” (Lucy, lines 332-334).

Parental Alienation...Runs in Families

Lucy and Sara, like some others mothers, described parental alienation as an abuse that needs to be addressed immediately, otherwise it continues impacting the alienated children, and perpetuates itself in families, from generation to generation. Lucy stated, “The cycle continues from generation to generation...My ex-husband passed away but I’m sorry to say that my children became bullies like their father” (Lucy, lines 566-568). Sara elaborated:

This is intergenerational...So Emily's (her alienated daughter) grandmother was alienated, and alienated her son (her ex-husband), her son in turn alienated his daughter Emily... no amount of therapy will fix her now. She will do the same thing to her husband too (Sara, lines 1166-1174).

Theme 2 When the Most Important Thing is Stolen from You

The participants described that their lived experience have impacted them so profoundly that it had influenced their emotional, psychological, and physical well-being, and the interplay among these three aspects.

You Are Broken...

For these mothers, the reality of being unable to maintain a relationship with their child/ren—due to their contact being limited to just a few hours per week or having no contact at all—proved to be psychologically and emotionally debilitating. Hayley explained, “My relationship with my children is zero...This experience breaks you. It's insidious, something that breaks you...” (Hayley, lines 381-618).

Four mothers even developed psychological issues, which in turn impacted their physical well-being, and they needed to seek professional support. In Mikela's case, she felt intense anxiety, which also led to physical symptoms such as chest discomfort and forgetfulness:

I feel immense anxiety. There's always this feeling in my chest. I don't feel well; I became forgetful and that is not usual for me. I was with my mother, and I was not focused...I went to the toilet, and fell on my back. This is what is happening to me. I'm taking too many pills for my anxiety (Mikela, lines 291-299).

Some participants were impacted so much by parental alienation, that they wished to die, or considered committing suicide:

The first summer that I started not seeing my children, I was literally suicidal. I remember, I used to ask God to take me. I used to tell Him when I go to sleep, I don't want to wake up, the most important thing is not to suffer when I die. Because suffering is immense... (Lucy, lines 534-537).

And I was going crazy; I was screaming, screaming on the ground, throwing myself on the ground. It was a very bad moment, it was scary; if I didn't have my little son with me, I think I would have definitely jumped off somewhere (Sara, lines 243-246).

Physically Suffering Along the Years

The participants described suffering from physical issues over the years due to undergoing prolonged periods of stress. For instance, Lucy said that she “started suffering from hypothyroidism, hair loss...” (Lucy, line 534). Similarly, Maria described her physical issues in the context of parental alienation:

I suffered physically for years. Eventually this led to significant issues with my eyes. All were stress-related. The eye ducts became clogged, likely due to stress, as three times a year I have to talk to a lawyer to address court issues (Maria, lines 578-582).

Theme 3 If You Don't Get Used to It, You'll Face Consequences

The participants mentioned that they had to find various ways to accept and cope with the situation, since otherwise, like Maria said, it becomes unbearable, “If you don't get used to the situation, like I was in the beginning, you will feel very sick. I had no purpose in my life, that's how you start to reason. You have to get used to it” (Maria, lines 820-823).

Taking Care of Oneself and Helping Others

Lucy and Hayley, like the other mothers, have found ways to help themselves and others who are also going through parental alienation, by adopting a proactive approach. Lucy said, “I go to therapy...and I do research on the subject” (Lucy, lines 626-627), whilst Hayley stated:

Today I find peace of mind by helping others, because I write a lot on Quora (an online platform of questions and answers), and I tell every victim I see who is unsure whether to leave, to leave the abusive relationship, because for me to leave was the most difficult thing to do (Hayley, lines 760-763).

My Faith in God Saved Me

Some targeted mothers described how their faith helped them cope with their lived experiences. Their faith provided them with a sense of hope for reconciliation with their child/ren, and resilience in the face of adversity. For instance, Doris claimed, “I don’t know... Only God can do miracles” (Doris, lines 577-578), whilst Hayley emphasized, “If it weren’t for God, I wouldn’t be here. Human strength is very limited, to deal with this every day... I am telling you, without God in my life, I will be dead. You have to be really strong” (Hayley, lines 440-443).

Time for Myself and Being Strong

The participants emphasized the need to prioritise one’s self-care amidst the challenges of combating parental alienation and that, despite moments of exhaustion and the urge to give up in the face of relentless adversity, they persevered for the sake of their child/ren’s welfare. Doris described, “I try to find some balance between my children and my

life, because I need some time for myself too...I need some time for myself. I finally learned this” (Doris, lines 790-794), whilst Mariah accentuated:

Sometimes I feel like I need to stop fighting. Because you get to a point where you can't take it anymore; but then I think about my little one, so I keep fighting, but it's not easy. We cannot give up because it is in vain. Because children need a parent who fights for them, and not one who gives up (Mariah, lines 179-182).

Lastly, like some other participants, Doris also mentioned personal strengths which supported her, including being positive, and courageous, “I've also always been a fighter... because I'm used to being very independent...I am a positive person and I look forward to life” (Doris, lines 863-864).

Theme 4 Effects on Severely Alienated, Less and Non-Alienated Children

The targeted mothers' children, particularly those who were severely alienated, tended to follow their alienating fathers' example, and suffered from emotional and physical abuses/effects on their well-being. In contrast, the alienated children who had some contact with their mothers, still tended to show affection and a longing for time and a relationship with their mothers, despite being impacted by the alienation. In their quest to speak about their lived experiences, the mothers also spoke about other children; children who reconciled with them, and children who were not alienated, but who were also impacted by this abuse.

Following the Alienating Fathers' Footsteps

The participants described how their children's behaviour changed towards them due to their ex-partner/husband's abusive behaviour, by modelling on and teaming up with their alienating fathers to abuse them, in some cases, even without needing their fathers to coerce

them. Doris shared, “My elder son beats me up, insulting me because of my foot disability... like his father did” (Doris, lines 475-476), and Karen added:

I observed significant changes in my children when they had contact with me. Since they were used to seeing their father treat me in a certain way, they automatically began to treat me in the same way. I refer to this as modeling behaviour. Once, my daughters voluntarily joined him (after her ex-husband and daughters hit her with pillows) to take a video of me screaming as evidence that I am mentally unwell (Karen, lines 27-32).

The Children are Broken

The participants underscored the emotionally damaging effects of parental alienation, especially on the child/ren involved. Hayley insisted, “They are broken, broken, like me. I was afraid to go home. Do you think they are not in the same situation?” (Hayley, lines 572-573). Meanwhile Doris stressed, “I think he’s angry at the things his father told him about me, things that aren’t true” (Doris, lines 591-592). Sara said sorrowfully, “My son was in a very bad state. Then he told me that he had swallowed many of the pills that the psychiatrist had given him for his treatment” (Sara, lines 432-434).

Physically Affected by the Abuse

The alienated children, like their mothers, also suffered from physical abuses, and psychological issues (such as addiction to video games and depression) due to their alienating fathers, which influenced their physical well-being. Kelly recounted, “Her father burned my daughter, inside a tub with boiling water. Her legs are still marked today. I don’t know if it’s an accident, but she ended up in the Burns Unit” (Kelly, lines 25-26). Doris also explained,

“My son is always inside the house playing video games; what meaning does he have in his life? He became depressed and obese because he doesn’t move” (Doris, lines 659-661).

Their Children Impacted Differently

The mothers, like Karen, observed differences amongst their severely alienated children, despite being siblings, in how parental alienation impacted them:

The elder daughter is the golden child, he (the alienating father) is everything to her, for her he is a god. The other daughter is scapegoated, at least until some time ago, she was the scapegoat... The younger girl thinks and analyses things more, so she wasn’t so convinced of him initially (Karen, lines 695-700).

In contrast to the severely alienated children, Mariah’s and Mikela’s sons who still spend some time with their mothers (the less alienated), still showed signs of longing for their mothers’ presence and relationship, and attempted to show affectionate gestures, despite their shift in demeanour:

You can’t talk to him because he starts screaming and telling you to leave him...And I think his father also tells him things against me, because sometimes he answers back. He gets angry when he is with me because he doesn’t want to go with his father. He tells me that daddy is a monster...If I go to the kitchen, he must come with me. He’s feeling the loss...He tells his classmates that today he is not going to the club (after school programme) because he is going with mummy. He even sometimes says at school that he is not well, to come home (Mariah, lines 88-225).

He also tells me, “Mummy, I brought you something.” I ask him, “Can you give me the present?” Because he would like to give me gifts like he used to do before, but he can’t because of his father... Before he would joke, laugh, and pick on me, saying,

“Mummy, come and let’s hug each other.” Now he is far away from hugging me (Mikela, lines 344-347).

Two participants had other children (besides the severely alienated children) who, before reuniting with them, lived with their alienating fathers. These children reconciled with their mothers, due to different circumstances, for instance after a court’s decision. They explained that their children are still impacted by the alienation, even if now they have minimal or no contact with their fathers:

The eldest daughter is living with me, without any contact with her father. She’s freer to talk now than when she lived with her father, but the thoughts (related to the abuse) are still impacting her. I tell her to forget the bad things her father used to tell her about me and about her (Kelly, lines 414-418).

Some participants also have children (stepsiblings) who did not suffer directly from alienation, but who were still impacted by this abuse. Sara described that “he (her youngest son) was very young. He didn’t understand what happened. Before he used to see me happy. Before he had his siblings living with him, and then they left with their father. That’s why he got a dog” (Sara, lines 466-468), and Kelly said, “The youngest daughter asks me why did they leave? It’s hard to explain. It affects her that she is not with her other siblings, because she has no one to play with” (Kelly, lines 493-495).

Theme 5 Parental Alienation Impacts Targeted Mothers’ Relationships

The participants described their lived experience of parental alienation as involving a sense of perpetual grief and loss in their relationship with their child/ren. They added that parental alienation also impacted their relationship with other family members, both positively and negatively.

Perpetual Grief, Multiple Losses, and Their Alienated Child/ren

Some participants described that in parental alienation, grief can be compared to the loss of a child through death, except that there is more emotional suffering given that it is perpetual, since there is no resolution:

This is grief that has no end. It is worse than losing a child to death, because in the same way, you are not seeing them. These two children were the only children I had, they were my life. I never had jewels. My children were my jewels. This is hell. This is the worst punishment one can give to a parent. It is a huge punishment. There are no words that can describe this huge grief... as there is no resolution (Lucy, lines 433-438).

Specifically, the mothers who had no contact and relationship with their alienated child/ren, like Sara, expressed grief over missed/lost opportunities and milestones with their child/ren, and over the loss of precious time to bond with them, for instance as they entered adulthood, feeling denied the chance for their relationship with their child/ren to mature:

I remember looking forward to having a daughter and growing up with my daughter. Whoever posts photos on Facebook with their daughter makes me remember what was stolen from me and from her, so it's an ongoing reminder...I wasn't present when she had her period...pivot moments in a relationship between mother and daughter, buying her first bra, becoming a woman, or having her first boyfriend or putting on make-up...rites of passage leading to adulthood... Her wedding, her graduation, finding a job, interviews. I can't cherish any of this (Sara, lines 781-790).

He made me lose my time with them. I didn't have the opportunity to build a relationship as an adult with an adult, because before I was their caregiver, but he didn't give me the opportunity to be like a friend to them (Karen, lines 22-30).

The mothers who had limited contact with their child/ren shared the emotional burden and the sense of loss in their relationship with their child/ren, something that they experienced every time they hand over their child/ren to their ex-partners/husbands. Mariah expressed, "There were days where I even cried with him, when my mother and I had to tell him to go back with his father. It's not nice at all.. it's like a loss every time" (Mariah, lines 372-374).

Relationship with Other Family Members...

Some mothers described that they have become closer in their relationship with other family members during their parental alienation experience, whilst others suffered from further abuse and alienation from them, since they sided with the alienator. Karen stated, "I received help and love. I never expected to receive such great support from them, and we grew closer to each other" (Karen, line 31). In contrast, Lucy shared, "My children were advised by family members from my side, who sided with my ex-husband, not to talk to me and they were forced by the same family members to use the services of their father's lawyer... as if I had separated from my children, not from my ex-husband. These things are absurd. I have court cases with my children against me" (Lucy, lines 317-320).

Theme 6 Needing More Understanding and Support

The participants described their experiences concerning support, as generally too limited. The mothers explained that their ex-partners/husbands' false accusations led to unfair judgements and to their need to proof their childrearing abilities. They also felt that society

judges them harshly, mainly due to their gender. Consequently, they proposed some suggestions to address this issue.

Experiences Around Support and the Need for Change

All the mothers recalled experiences where they received support from the people around them, either because these had a good relationship with the targeted mothers prior to the alienation, or because the ex-partners/husbands simply did not seek or manage to influence them. This support took the form of moral, emotional, social, and material/financial support. Karen highlighted, “Thanks to God I always had a good relationship with my parents, because in them I found moral, even financial support” (Karen, lines 720-721), and Doris added, “I used to feel very comfortable with the second social worker of the shelter. My ex-husband couldn’t influence her, so she understood me a lot” (Doris, lines 830-832).

Nonetheless, the targeted mothers explained that throughout their lived experiences, support was generally found to be lacking, given that it was not received from individuals whom they expected to provide them with support, or because when the support was received, it was not what they mostly needed:

I only have the social worker, my friend, her mother, my partner. My mother and my siblings don’t talk to me, nor does my grandmother. I have to forget all kinds of support from my family, even though one expects support from their family (Kelly, lines 503-505).

My parents try to help me, but I don’t have much support in my life. My psychiatrist tells me I don’t have emotional support in my daily life... While my parents provide me with food, they don’t offer the emotional support I need (Mikela, lines 359-363).

Hayley was the only participant who felt that she received “no support from anywhere or anyone, neither from the police, nor from the court, nor from psychologists” (Hayley, lines 14-15).

Maria, Lucy, and Hayley seemed to summarize the mothers’ general wishes when it comes to support and services which they wished to receive from professionals, and the participants’ need for justice. Maria said, “I wish that things improve, that if it is found that he caused parental alienation, that there are criminal consequences. Because for me this is abuse!” (Maria, lines 791-793). The other two mothers elaborated:

There needs to be support groups...there needs to be people trained in the subject and I think I would have benefited from group counselling, where you listen to parents who are going through it... sending children to therapy even when there is a normal separation because the risk of parental alienation increases (Lucy, lines 650-664).

I would like children to be given the right to a psychologist, parents cannot speak to the psychologist. They can’t in any way influence them, they have to get to know the children, get to know them directly, not from what the parents say... and one has to be specialized in this sector, because you have to build the experience (Hayley, lines 782-799).

Are You a Good Mother?

All of the participants were falsely accused by their ex-partners/husbands of not being good mothers. Kelly recalled, “Their father used to lie. He kept saying that I was beating them, maltreating them, that I don’t feed them” (Kelly, lines 429-430), whilst Mikela claimed, “My ex-husband used to call me crazy. He invented false things about me, such as claiming that I showed pornography to my son” (Mikela, lines 46-47).

Therefore, in their quest for their child/ren to return under their care, the participants had to prove that they were good mothers for their child/ren. This even came across in the interview when they wanted to show me evidence:

So if you want, I can start showing you photos of my relationship with my son Mike, on Instagram...you will see my son, very young. We had a very good relationship..I also keep and show these photos as proof of our relationship (Maria, lines 2-5).

Do you want to hear the recording? I have nothing to hide. You need to keep everything and I used to make the social workers listen and I kept telling them what happened but they didn't listen and understand me (Karen, lines 65-68).

Four targeted mothers felt harshly judged by society in general, for having limited or no contact with their child/ren. The reasons included that parental alienation in women is not commonly heard of, due to gender stereotypes (which place higher expectations on mothers than fathers) and because of lack of awareness/understanding that alienated children are brainwashed by the alienating parent. Doris voiced, "Maybe there are more men that are suffering from this and that's why people judge. But there are women as well" (Doris, lines 765-766), whilst Sara argued:

There are certain expectations...and women are judged very harshly. Women have high standards to meet, unlike men. For men it's okay if they are weaker dads, and take the children to eat junk food. If a mother gives her children junk food, what is she giving him to eat? So it's not easy, as a woman, to open up and say, I don't have my children anymore. Because automatically, the reasoning is that if the father took them from the mother...she must have done something. For men they don't say this as much as they say this for women (Sara, lines 330-342).

Nonethelss, despite being falsely accused of being “bad” mothers by their ex-partners/husbands, they still chose to continue mothering their child/ren as best they could from a distance:

She had her birthday, the younger one, I brought her a card. I called the school, but my daughter didn’t want to come to talk to me...I had to leave the card with the caretaker...he told me that she was happy, and that she started smiling when she opened the card (Karen, lines 599-608).

The headmaster informed my ex-husband that a boy who was supposed to come to the school didn’t show up, and that he brought a new uniform and left it here. He asked him, “Do you want a new uniform?”, and his father agreed to take it. That’s how I tricked him, because since that uniform was too small for my son, I didn’t want him to wear it (Hayley, lines 307-310).

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the superordinate themes and their corresponding subthemes as they emerged from the interviews with the targeted mothers. The participants recounted enduring abuses from their ex-partners/husbands, which persisted even after the relationship ended, and which affected them, their children, and the relationship between them, and with their extended family. In the next chapter, the salient findings which emerged from the participants’ interviews will sequentially be discussed in light of current literature.

Chapter 5 Discussion

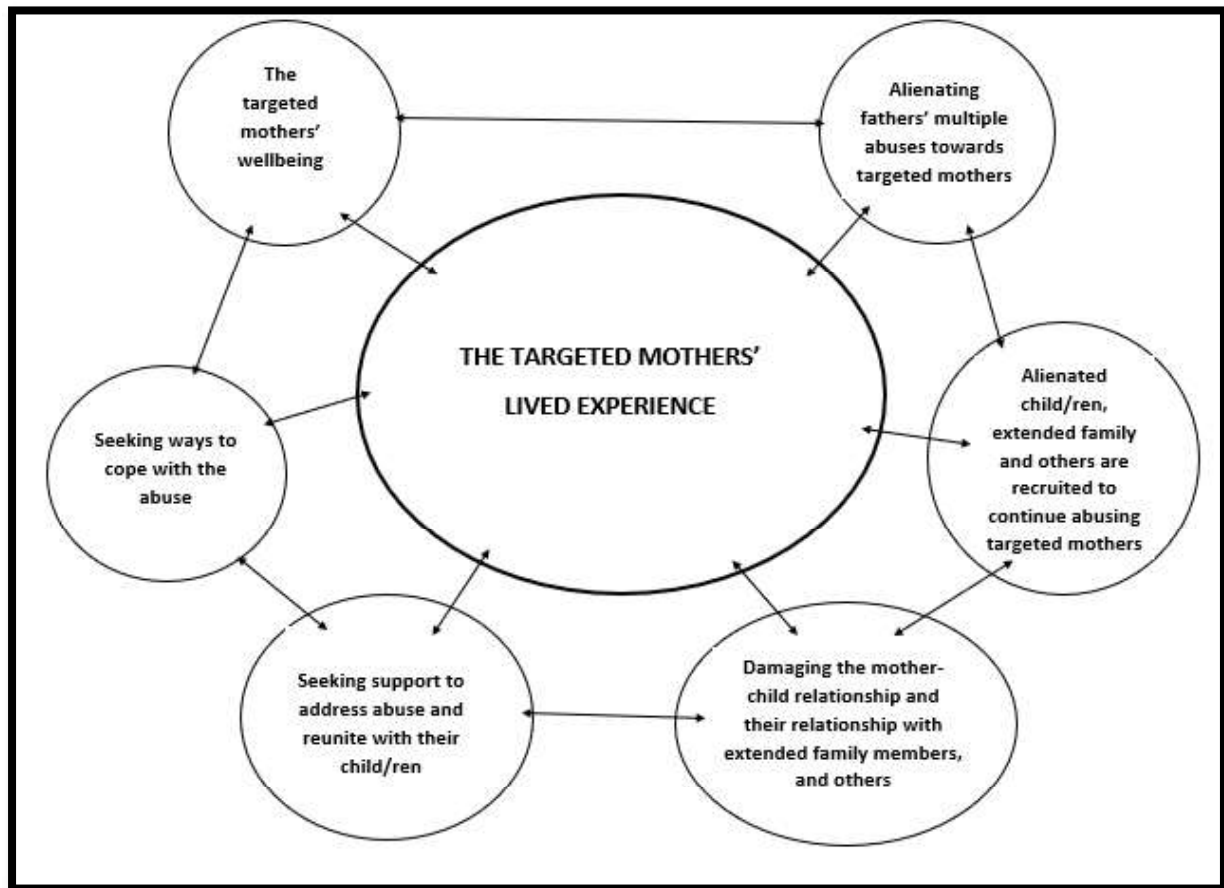
Introduction

This study explored the targeted mothers' lived experience of parental alienation by seeking to understand how it impacted their relationship with their child/ren and other family members, as well as their emotional and physical well-being. This chapter discusses the most significant findings that emerged from the interviews with the targeted mothers, considering the existing literature.

To arrive to the most salient aspects which characterise the targeted mothers' lived experience, I reviewed in detail the themes presented in the findings chapter and sought to develop a cohesive narrative that encapsulated the participants' lived experiences, aligning them to the research questions. The most salient findings revealed that the targeted mothers experienced multiple abuses from their ex-partners/husbands, who went so far as to "recruit" the alienated children, extended family, and others, to abuse them, and damage the mothers' relationship with them. The participants' lived experiences of parental alienation impacted their well-being, but they sought to address this abuse and to reunite with their child/ren by seeking ways to cope and support from others. The figure below summarises the salient and interconnected aspects of the targeted mothers' lived experiences:

Figure 1

Salient and Interconnected Aspects of the Targeted Mothers' Lived Experiences



Alienation as a Perpetuation of the Abuse

All the targeted mothers interviewed in this study experienced parental alienation as a continuation of past abuses by their ex-partners/husbands. Research confirms that in cases of intimate partner violence (IPV), where control and manipulation are present, abusive behaviours often persist or escalate post-separation, potentially leading to the alienation of children from the targeted parents (Sharples et al., 2023). For instance, alienating parents may exploit custody arrangements or visitation rights to perpetuate abuse against the targeted parents (Rowlands et al., 2022). It is also well-documented that parental alienation starts, or

worsens, as a form of retaliation or vindictiveness by the alienating parents, in the context of the relationship breakdown (Poustie et al., 2018).

According to Baker and Darnall (2006), the targeted mothers' claim that their ex-partners/husbands abruptly started involving themselves in childrearing, such as in decisions regarding extracurricular activities, can be perceived as a form of manipulation. Through their involvement, their ex-partners/husbands sought to position themselves as superior or ideal parents, for instance by allowing the alienated child/ren unrestricted access to technology - actions that contradicted the targeted mothers' parenting approach. This manipulative tactic, as described by Warshak (2013), led the alienated children to often idealize their fathers, whilst undermining their mothers' parenting efforts, which created a rift in the targeted mothers' relationship with their child/ren's, with some children expressing a desire to leave their mothers to live with their fathers.

Coercing Children to Harm Targeted Mothers

The targeted mothers recounted instances where their ex-partners/husbands were not only abusive towards them in front of their child/ren, for instance by contradicting their parenting approach, but even manipulated their child/ren into harming their mothers physically or by using derogatory language, as a means of maintaining control, as stated by Rowlands et al. (2022). Research highlights the relationship between domestic violence and parental alienation, demonstrating that alienated children may adopt negative perceptions or false beliefs about the targeted parents, internalize and mimic the alienating parents' attitudes and actions, by aligning themselves with the alienating parents, and rejecting the targeted parents (Bernet et al., 2016; Warshak, 2013).

The contextual family therapy framework can be utilised as a theoretical lens through which the consequences of parental alienation on children can be understood (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 2013). Parental alienation often forces children to choose between their parents, causing internal conflicts and split loyalties within the family system. The participants described how their alienated children often struggled between being loyal towards their alienating fathers, who manipulated them, and their innate desire for a relationship with both parents. This inner conflict, as observed by the participants, can lead to emotional distress, confusion, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships (Baker, 2020). Research shows that alienated children may feel compelled to seek acceptance within the family system orchestrated by the alienating parent and may fear repercussions or rejection if they do not comply with the alienating parent's wishes to align against the targeted parent (Garber, 2011).

The targeted mothers also described that after coercing their child/ren to abuse them, their ex-partners/husbands extended their abusive behaviours, by validating their children's abusive conduct, by for instance, promising monetary compensation or inheritance, which further solidified the child/ren's allegiance and perpetuated the toxic bond of dependency and control between the alienating fathers and their child/ren (McCartan, 2022). They stated that their alienated child/ren eventually repeated abusive behaviours and statements previously demonstrated by their ex-partners/husbands towards them, without needing to rely on the alienating fathers' coercion.

Research demonstrates that alienated children's abusive behaviours and statements often exceed their cognitive capacity for their age, reflecting the alienating parents' abusive influence on their children's choice of vocabulary and behaviours towards the targeted parents. This shift in the alienating children's behaviour is notable considering that prior to the ending of the relationship between their parents, the alienated children had a good

relationship with the targeted parents (Baker, 2005). For instance, Doris's son started insulting her and her extended family, after mirroring his fathers' abusive behaviours. Such conduct serves as a poignant manifestation of the perceptual distortion experienced by alienated children, which compromises their emotional equilibrium, and leads to the children's profound psychological estrangement and deterioration of one of the most natural and innate relationships, their relationship with the targeted parent (Garber, 2011). Nonetheless, it is also important to acknowledge that the children's reluctance to engage with a parent may sometimes be attributed to the targeted parents' issues or limitations prior to the alienation, such as a lack of emotional availability, alongside the alienating parents' actions. This highlights the complex interplay within the parent-child relationship (Miller & Manzer, 2021).

Coercing Others to Harm Targeted Mothers

In line with research conducted by Gardner (1998), the targeted mothers' lived experience of parental alienation was that the alienating parents also "recruited" family members (from both sides of the family) and others, such as friends, lawyers, and psychosocial professionals, to falsely accuse them and harm their relationship with their child/ren. This phenomenon is known as third-party alienation, a phenomenon which typically amplifies the emotional manipulation experienced by targeted parents and exacerbates feelings of betrayal and isolation within the family dynamics, affecting the targeted parents, the alienated children, and potentially also their extended family and others (McCartan, 2022).

Linking third-party alienation to Boszormenyi-Nagy's (2013) contextual family therapy, split loyalties can also be experienced by extended family members, friends, and professionals, who become embroiled in the dynamics of parental alienation. They may feel

pressured to take sides or may unwittingly contribute to the alienating parents' agenda by supporting false accusations against the targeted parents. Consequently, the manipulation and recruitment of others by alienating parents, described by the participants, create a complex web of conflicting allegiances within the family system. This highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing these dynamics to promote healthy parent-child relationships and protect the well-being of all family members involved (Torun et al., 2022).

Alienation as an Experience of Ambiguous Loss

In the context of their lived experiences, the participants felt an ongoing sense of grief and loss, due to having limited or no contact with their child/ren. Their sense of uncertainty and unresolved grief aligns with Boss's (2010) ambiguous loss theory, which describes the experience of grief without closure or clear understanding of the loss. McCartan (2022) supports the notion that targeted parents experience profound grief and emotional distress because of the estrangement from their children. Echoing the concept of ambiguous loss (Boss, 2010), some participants described parental alienation as akin to experiencing grief comparable to the loss of a child through death, yet with added emotional suffering, due to its perpetual nature and lack of resolution.

Specifically, mothers who had no contact or relationship with their alienated child/ren expressed profound grief over special days which they wished but felt denied to celebrate with their child/ren, such as Christmas Day, Mothers' Day, and their own and their child/ren's birthdays. This aligns with parental alienation literature, which emphasizes the ongoing anguish felt by targeted parents as they navigate the loss of meaningful experiences with their children (McCartan, 2022). Additionally, the targeted mothers with limited contact with their child/ren, shared the emotional burden and sense of loss experienced each time they spend time with their child/ren, knowing that after only few hours, the child/ren would

leave to go with their ex-partners/husbands. This also resonates with findings in the literature, which highlight the emotional distress and sense of separation experienced by targeted parents during custodial exchanges and periods of limited contact with their children (Avalle et al., 2022; Clawar & Rivlin, 2013).

The targeted parents' sense of grief, loss, and uncertainty, as experienced by the participants in this research study, typically extends beyond the immediate parent-child relationship, since parental alienation can also disrupt the targeted parents' relationships with extended family members, leading to strained relationships with siblings, grandparents, and other relatives who may be influenced or manipulated by alienating parents (Warshak, 2010).

The Targeted Mothers' Relationship with Their Children

The observations of the targeted mothers revealed that their severely alienated children, despite being siblings, were impacted differently by parental alienation, which in turn impacted their relationship with their mothers. Research confirms that whilst some children may align closely with the alienating parents and adopt their narratives, others may exhibit resistance or ambivalence towards the manipulative tactics employed (Roseby & Johnston, 1997). For instance, in Hayley's case, her older son aligned completely with the alienating father against her, while her younger son realised at one point his father's manipulative tactics, ultimately also choosing his father's side. This variation in the response of alienated children within the same family shows the complexity of parental alienation and its effects on family dynamics (Avalle et al., 2022).

The targeted mothers who have minimal contact with their alienated children, contrary to those children with no contact with their mothers, claimed that their children still showed signs of longing for their company and love, despite their altered behaviour. This

difference in the alienated children's behaviour, as shown by their contact with the targeted mothers, has not been thoroughly explored or documented in the existing literature on parental alienation. This highlights the importance for professionals to seek to further comprehend the complexities of parental alienation within the dynamics of families they work with, whilst also understanding individual responses to trauma. This understanding is crucial to mitigate the effects of parental alienation and promote strong parent-child relationships (Kelly & Johnston, 2001).

When describing the impact of parental alienation on their children, the targeted mothers of children who eventually reunited with them, besides having alienated children with minimal to no contact with them, noted that the legacy of parental alienation continues to haunt their previously alienated children's perceptions and behaviours. In this context, research by Harman et al. (2018) discusses how the psychological impact of parental alienation in alienated children can persist long after reunification, leading to their ongoing challenges in developing strong attachments. Specifically, as reported by the participants, clinical observations suggest that children may still struggle with internalized beliefs or attitudes instilled by the alienating parents. This can hinder their ability to establish a healthy relationship with the targeted parents. The enduring consequences of parental alienation on alienated children highlight the need for specialized interventions, which address the complex dynamics involved in reunification, to promote healing within the family unit (Fidler & Bala, 2010).

While research primarily focuses on the direct consequences of parental alienation on alienated children, the literature also acknowledges that this abuse affects broader family dynamics, including stepsiblings. Children in blended families who have stepsiblings affected by parental alienation, may still experience indirect effects, as claimed by the targeted

mothers in this study. For instance, Kelly's and Sara's youngest children experienced a sense of loneliness and sadness after their stepsiblings left to live with their fathers. Baker (2020) claims that stepsiblings might also witness conflict, feel tensions within the family, and may grapple with loyalty conflicts, which can contribute to further feelings of stress and instability within the family unit.

The Targeted Mothers' Relationship with Their Extended Family

Parental alienation profoundly impacts the targeted mothers' relationships with extended family members (Harman et al., 2018), a reality which was also highlighted by the experiences shared by the participants. Some targeted mothers described experiencing newfound support from their extended family during their parental alienation ordeal, providing them with unexpected help. This positive outcome shows the potential for extended family members to play a crucial role in providing much-needed understanding and solidarity with targeted mothers while these are struggling to reunite and care for their children (Warshak, 2010).

For other participants, parental alienation exacerbated existing rifts within their extended family, leading to further abuse and alienation from relatives who sided with the alienating fathers. Some targeted mothers recounted instances where family members actively collaborated with the alienator, advising the children to cut off communication or even to actively work against the targeted mothers' interests. Research shows that such betrayal by family members intensifies the sense of isolation and betrayal experienced by targeted parents, compounding the emotional distress caused by their fractured relationship with their children (Poustie et al., 2018).

These divergent experiences show the various realities at play in the targeted mothers' relational repertoire with extended families affected by parental alienation. While some

relatives provided crucial support and validation to targeted mothers, others unwittingly contributed to the alienating fathers' agenda, perpetuating further abuse and isolation. Recognizing the significant impact of extended family dynamics on the targeted parents' well-being is essential for professionals to address parental alienation effectively (Johnston & Kelly, 2004).

As stated by some participants in this research study, the coercive tactics employed by alienating fathers by encouraging their children and extended family members to abuse the targeted mothers, warrant immediate action, since otherwise these abusive behaviours will continue impacting the targeted parents' and the alienated children's well-being (Vassiliou & Cartwright, 2001). Research by Bernet et al. (2010) indicates that children exposed to parental alienation tactics are at a high risk of developing various psychological and emotional issues, such as low self-worth, depression, and anxiety, and of having poor academic performance. As asserted by some targeted mothers, alienated children who grow up witnessing and participating in parental alienation, might perpetuate dysfunctional patterns learned during childhood, which can lead to the transmission of parental alienation for generations to come (Rybicki, 2001). Therefore, the need for timely intervention and comprehensive support for targeted parents and their children cannot be overstated, as failure to address parental alienation effectively may have profound and lasting effects on the well-being of individuals, families, and society in general.

The Targeted Mothers' Well-being

The participants described how their lived experiences profoundly impacted their emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. This aligns with research highlighting the comprehensive impact of parental alienation on targeted parents' overall health and well-being (Warshak, 2010). The inability to maintain a relationship with their child/ren due to

limited contact or complete estrangement, proved to be psychologically and emotionally debilitating, as evidenced by Hayley's account of feeling emotionally broken. Two participants threw significant light on the depths of despair experienced by individuals subjected to parental alienation, as they disclosed that they had even wished to die or considered committing suicide. This highlights the crucial need for timely mental health support and intervention in these cases (Harman et al., 2018).

The emotional toll of parental alienation often manifests itself in physical symptoms, exacerbating the distress experienced by targeted parents (Gardener, 1998). Lucy talked about instances where she experienced panic attacks, coupled with other physical manifestations such as chest pain, showing the profound impact of psychological distress on physical health. Research suggests that chronic stress associated with parental alienation can lead to a range of physical health issues, including immune system dysfunction, gastrointestinal disorders, and cardiovascular problems (Johnston & Kelly, 2004). The targeted mothers also reported experiencing long-term physical health issues, including sleep problems and hair loss, due to the chronic stress associated with navigating and coping with the trauma of parental alienation, as confirmed by research (McCartan, 2022).

A Sense of Helplessness

The targeted mothers interviewed experienced an overwhelming sense of helplessness as they navigated the complex dynamics of parental alienation. Although harbouring a constant hope for reunification with their children, they were confronted with relentless obstacles in their attempts to reconnect. For instance, all targeted mothers interviewed claimed that they faced daunting legal battles in their efforts to regain custody or to increase visitation hours. According to McCartan (2022) parents may encounter a lack of understanding of parental alienation within the legal system, and prolonged court

proceedings, all of which exacerbate their sense of emotional distress, frustration, and helplessness. Legal battles and ongoing efforts to maintain or re-establish contact with their children, as stated by the participants, typically pose significant financial burdens on targeted parents (Brannon, 2021). Research by Bala et al. (2010) suggests that targeted parents may struggle to afford legal representation, therapy sessions, or other necessary resources to navigate the complexities of parental alienation.

It was observed during the interviews that the targeted mothers' lived experiences often bear striking similarities to those of women who face domestic violence. Both groups encounter institutional and social barriers, experiencing feelings of being silenced, marginalized, and powerless (Harman et al., 2016). Women who have endured domestic violence often strive to have their voices heard, seeking justice and restoration of autonomy (Sturge-Apple et al., 2006). This was confirmed by the targeted mothers who participated in this qualitative research. Therefore, there is an urgent need for heightened awareness, empathy, and support for targeted mothers as they navigate the intricate challenges of parental alienation.

Seeking Support and the Need for Change

The participants in the study shared their lived experiences concerning support during their parental alienation ordeal, highlighting both the presence of supportive networks and significant gaps in available assistance. While some received moral, emotional, social, and even financial support from family members, friends and others, others found themselves lacking the support they desperately needed. Research shows that social support is crucial in mitigating the negative effects of stress and trauma, offering individuals resources and resilience to cope with challenging circumstances (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019).

The participants emphasized the urgent need for systemic changes to address the injustices they faced, including enhanced support services, which can include specialized counselling and group supports, psychological services offered specifically for alienated children, and legal consequences for perpetrators of parental alienation. Research indicates that targeted parents and their children often require specialized support to navigate the complexities of parental alienation and mitigate its harmful effects (Baker, 2020). Involving psychologists who can work directly with children in an unbiased manner is also essential for ensuring that the children's voices are heard, independently of parental influence (Johnston & Kelly, 2004). Legal repercussions for perpetrators of parental alienation are increasingly recognized as necessary to deter such behaviour and to hold individuals accountable for their actions (Johnston & Campbell, 1999).

The targeted mothers' lived experiences of seeking support in the context of parental alienation can also be understood through the lens of social constructionism. This approach emphasizes that social phenomena, including parental alienation, are socially constructed through discourse and interactions, and highlights the role of language and communication in shaping individuals' experiences and perceptions (Burr, 2015). In many cultures, traditional gender roles dictate that mothers bear primary caregiving responsibilities, and hence this might influence societal expectations regarding the mothers' ability to maintain close relationships with their children (Johnston & Campbell, 1999). In the context of societal attitudes towards mothers, targeted mothers may face disbelief or harsh judgements from legal and mental health professionals and others, who may downplay the significance of the abuse experienced by the targeted mothers or even attribute the blame for the breakdown of their relationship with their children to the mothers themselves (Baker & Darnall, 2006).

The reason is because professionals and others might expect mothers to fulfil the idealized role of the nurturing and ever-present mother (Harman et al., 2016). The participants in this study were all falsely accused by their ex-partners/husbands of being inadequate mothers. In their efforts to re-establish their relationship with their child/ren, these mothers had to present evidence to prove to mental health professionals, lawyers, and during court hearings, that they were indeed good mothers and that they always maintained a positive relationship with their child/ren. This lack of validation and support from professionals can exacerbate the distress experienced by targeted mothers (Torun et al., 2022).

Seeking Ways to Cope with the Abuse

The coping strategies described by the targeted mothers encompass both problem-focused and emotion-focused approaches, aligning with Lazarus and Folkman's work (1984) on stress and coping. The problem-focused coping strategies mentioned by the targeted mothers involve actively addressing specific and tangible aspects of parental alienation, such as seeking mediation services, navigating legal proceedings, and educating oneself about parental alienation. These strategies are also documented in the literature on this topic (Tavares et al., 2021). The participants' emotion-focused coping strategies, such as finding time for oneself and seeking therapy or counselling, aimed to manage their emotional distress associated with parental alienation. These strategies also align with the emotion-focused coping mechanisms described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which support individuals in regulating their emotional responses and in promoting emotional well-being in the face of stressors. Research indicates that these emotion-focused coping strategies in the context of parental alienation, can help targeted parents cope with feelings of anxiety and despair, ultimately fostering emotional resilience (Kelly & Johnston, 2001).

The targeted mothers also spoke about faith as a significant coping mechanism, further aligning with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) work. Faith serves as a source of comfort and strength, providing solace in the face of adversity. Existing studies support the therapeutic function of faith for targeted parents, highlighting its role in instilling hope for reconciliation with their estranged children and in bolstering their resilience as they navigate through the challenges of parental alienation (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019). Despite the challenges that the participants faced, they emphasized the importance of maintaining personal strengths, such as courage and positivity, which enabled them to persevere for the welfare of their children and to remain optimistic for their future (Clawar & Rivlin, 2013).

Conclusion

The next chapter will conclude this research study. It will encompass strengths and limitations, along with recommendations for future policy, practice, and research.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Introduction

Nine targeted mothers shared their lived experiences of parental alienation as the basis for an IPA study. This chapter will summarize the most significant findings, along with the study's strengths and limitations. Implications for policy and recommendations for future research will also be presented.

Summary of Salient Findings

In this study, the targeted mothers shared their experiences of enduring various forms of abuse before ultimately choosing to leave their marriage/relationship. They recounted that their child/ren mistreated them after they imitated and were coerced by their ex-partners/husbands to abuse them. Their ex-partners/husbands also involved others, who continued to harm the mother-child relationship, which demonstrated the systemic nature of parental alienation. The targeted mothers claimed that if not immediately addressed, this abuse can persist across generations. They also described an ongoing sense of sorrow and loss in their relationship with their child/ren, and that this abuse also influenced their relationship with other family members, emphasizing the systemic ripple effects of parental alienation beyond the immediate parent-child relationship.

The alienated children who had limited contact with the targeted mothers, still demonstrated affection and yearning for a relationship with their mothers, indicating the potential for positive changes in the mother-child relationship, if this is nurtured. The targeted mothers discussed other children who were impacted by parental alienation, including those who reconciled with them, and stepsiblings, further emphasising the systemic nature of this phenomenon. Despite employing various coping mechanisms, the participants found the experience unbearable, impacting them in different aspects of their well-being.

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

A major limitation of this study lies in its reliance on self-identification, as participants voluntarily chose to participate based on their own assessment of experiencing parental alienation. This approach can potentially introduce bias into the sample, since it limits the ability to objectively measure and classify participants' experiences. The researcher had sought permission to utilize the Rowlands' Scale, a standardized tool for assessing parental alienation; however, this permission was secured after the data collection process had been outlined. Parental alienation is a highly complex phenomenon with multifaceted dynamics, and while the study provides valuable insights into the targeted mothers' experiences in Malta, it underscores the need for further research to fully understand the factors contributing to parental alienation and its implications, particularly within the Maltese social and cultural context.

The study holds significant importance in shedding light on the targeted mothers' lived experiences, how these impact their relationship with their child/ren and extended family, and their well-being, addressing a research gap in local and international literature (Lee-Maturana et al., 2019). One notable strength of the study is its thorough examination of the phenomenon by studying a large and diverse sample, with participants residing in various regions of Malta, including the North, Central, and South areas; this ensured the representation of different sociocultural contexts. The study encompasses targeted mothers with children across a wide range of age brackets, providing a comprehensive understanding of parental alienation dynamics across various developmental stages, increasing the study's external validity.

Clinical Implications

Given the complex and sensitive nature of parental alienation, it is essential for therapists and other mental health professionals to have specialized training and expertise in this area to effectively support families (Warshak, 2015). Targeted mothers stress the importance of professionals possessing the requisite knowledge to avoid inadvertently exacerbating the situation. Without proper training and understanding, well-intentioned professionals may inadvertently contribute to further harm the parent-child relationship which is at risk (Harman et al., 2016).

By receiving specialized training, therapists and other mental health professionals can better recognize the signs of parental alienation, navigate the dynamics of family conflict, and implement evidence-based interventions. These interventions may include family therapy, individual therapy for the targeted parent and child, and reunification therapy aimed at healing, rebuilding, and promoting healthy parent-child relationships (Baker & Darnall, 2007).

Proposals for Policy

To address the insidious nature of parental alienation and prevent its harmful effects on targeted parents, their alienated children, and extended family members, it is imperative that family therapy becomes a standard intervention for all couples with children, who file for separation (Kelly & Johnston, 2001). Given that parental alienation often goes initially undetected and can escalate rapidly, timely intervention is crucial. Family therapy provides a structured and supportive environment for parents to address conflicts, improve communication, and develop healthy co-parenting strategies (Warshak, 2015). By equipping couples with the necessary skills and resources early in the separation process, family therapy can mitigate the risk of parental alienation and promote healthy parent-child relationships.

Integrating family therapy as a preventive measure underscores society's commitment to safeguarding children's well-being and reducing the prevalence of this form of child abuse (Baker & Darnall, 2007).

Recommendation for Future Research

Given that this topic is still under-researched locally, further research needs to be conducted to raise public awareness and to lead to a better understanding of this phenomenon among individuals and professionals impacted by or working with clients and families experiencing this abuse. Conducting a comparative analysis between targeted mothers and fathers, studying parental alienation in same-sex parents, as well as exploring the effects of parental alienation among alienated siblings and on extended family members, can elucidate a more holistic understanding and inform tailored interventions (McCartan, 2022). Moreover, a longitudinal study of the targeted parents' and alienated children's experiences of parental alienation over time, and across various life stages, can deepen the professionals' understanding of its long-term impacts (Bernet et al., 2010).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am filled with gratitude towards the participants for sharing their experiences of abuse and resilience. They have shown courage in coping, seeking support, and mothering their children from a distance, despite enduring losses and significant grief within the context of parental alienation. My hope, through this study, is to honour the participants' wishes to make a difference, particularly in giving these women a voice; "I believe that studies like this, can possibly lead to more awareness about the topic" (Maria, line, 700).

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Appendix

Appendix A: Information Sheet (English)

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Master in Family Therapy and Systemic Practice. I am presently conducting a research study for my thesis titled “Parental Alienation: The Lived Experience of Targeted Mothers”; this is being supervised by Ms Roberta Farrugia Debono. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to explore how parental alienation affects the targeted mothers’ emotional and physical well-being, and their relationship with their child/ren and other family members. Your participation in this study would help contribute to a better understanding of parental alienation in Malta amongst professionals working with families who are experiencing this phenomenon. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study. Your data will be pseudonymised which means that codes will be assigned to link your personal data to your identity, and only the researcher will have access to the codes and personal information which identify you. Your pseudonymised data will be stored securely and separately from my personal data in a locked filing cabinet, which only the researcher will have access to, until March 2025 or once the grade is obtained, after which the data will be completely destroyed. The overall findings of this study may be submitted for publication in a scientific journal or presented at scientific conferences. In accordance with the requirements of some scientific journals and organisations, the coded data (pseudonymised) may be shared with the other fellow researchers and in other related studies.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is pseudonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in pseudonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. While all efforts will be made to ensure that the question(s) that will be posed do not cause any psychological distress, participants who feel that they require support, can do so by contacting Richmond Foundation, Supportline 179 (24/7 access), Kellimni .com (24/7 access), Crisis Resolution Malta, Crisis intervention Mater Dei, and/or paid professionals listed with their contact details in the document attached to the consent form and information sheet.

Please note also that, your data shall be erased for as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is pseudonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives. The latter directly reflects the exemptions provided for in the GDPR Article 17(3) (d). All data collected will be destroyed when the study is completed by March 2025 or once the grade is obtained. Should

you wish to receive a copy of their audio-recording, transcript and any publications that emerge from this study, all data transfer will be secure. Any files sent via email will be password-protected and encrypted, and any physical copies will be handed in person on a data storage drive. Your transcript will then be available to my supervisor and, if needed, to my examiners.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail on **graziana.cauchi.09@um.edu.mt**; you can also contact my supervisor via email: **roberta.farrugia-debono@um.edu.mt**

Sincerely,

Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi
graziana.cauchi.09@um.edu.mt

Ms Roberta Farrugia Debono
roberta.farrugia-debono@um.edu.mt
79537698

FREE SUPPORT SERVICES

Dear Prospective Participant,

I hope this email finds you well.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation in this study. I appreciate your involvement and cooperation throughout this entire process.

I would like to remind you of the aims of this study; namely to explore how parental alienation affects the targeted mothers' emotional and physical well-being, and their relationship with their child/ren and other family members.

This study was not anticipated to cause distress and the interview questions were formatted in as sensitive a manner as possible. However, if your participation has led you to experience any distress or discomfort for whatever reason, then overleaf I have included some information about services that offer free and fee-paying professional support that you might find helpful.

Kindly do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

If you require any additional information or wish to report any concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact both myself, on **79091910** or my research supervisor on **79537698**.

Kind regards,

Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi

Name of student researcher: Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi

Course: Master in Family Therapy and Systemic Practice

Student's contact email: graziana.cauchi.09@um.edu.mt

Student's contact number: 79091910

Research supervisor: Ms Roberta Farrugia Debono

Supervisor's email: roberta.farrugia-debono@um.edu.mt

Supervisor's phone number: **79537698**

Title of Research Study: Parental Alienation: The Lived Experience of Targeted Mothers

FREE SERVICES

	Richmond Foundation info@richmond.org.mt +356 21 224580/ 21 482336/ 21 480045 Supports both individuals who are experiencing mental health problems as well as those around them. Apart from supporting individuals by offering therapeutic help, Richmond Foundation also guides individuals by teaching the necessary skills to live and work independently. Their services include support groups, assisted living solutions, educational programmes, as well as counselling services.
Supportline 179 (24/7 access) This is Malta's national helpline acting to provide support, information about local social welfare and other agencies, as well as a referral service to individuals who require support. It is also a national service to individuals facing difficult times or a crisis. Their primary mission is to provide immediate and unbiased help to whoever requires it.	
	Kellimni .com (24/7 access) http://kellimni.com/21244123/21335097 kellimni.com is an online support service in which trained staff and volunteers are available for support 24/7 via email, chat and smart messaging. This service is managed by SOS Malta.

Crisis Resolution Malta crisismalta@gmail.com/ +356 9933 9966

Offers immediate care. Crisis resolution 24/7. The team of volunteers which answer the phone are all professionals, and the consultation service is free.

Crisis intervention Mater Dei +356 2545 3950

Supports in various crisis situations related to mental health. Monday to Friday 7am – 5.30pm.

PAID PROFESSIONALS

Counsellors: Malta Association for the Counselling Profession (MACP)
www.macpmalta.org

Council for the Counselling Profession (CCP) ccp.msfc@gov.mt

Family Therapists: Malta Association of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (MAFT-SP) [<maft.systemicpractice@gmail.com>](mailto:maft.systemicpractice@gmail.com)

Psychologists: Malta Chamber of Psychologists mcp.org.mt

Malta Psychology Profession Board mppb.msfc@gov.mt

Malta Association of Psychiatrists: map.org.mt

Psychotherapists: www.facebook.com/MaltaAssociationForPsychotherapy

Appendiċi A: Ittra ta' Tagħrif (Maltese)

Għeżież Parteċipanti Prospettivi,

Jiena Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi, studenta fl-Università ta' Malta, u bhalissa qed insegwi l-Master in Family Therapy and Systemic Practice. Ir-riċerka għad-dissertazzjoni tiegħi jisimha: "Parental Alienation: The Lived Experience of Targeted Mothers"; it-tutor tiegħi hi Ms Roberta Farrugia Debono. B'din l-ittra nixtieq nistiedinkom tipparteċipaw fir-riċerka. Hawn taht issibu aktar informazzjoni fuq l-istudju li qed nagħmel u fuq xi jkun l-involvement tagħkom jekk tiddeċiedu li tiehu sehem.

L-għan tal-istudju hu li nesplora kif l-aljenazzjoni parentali taffettwa lill-ommijiet li jkunu qed iġarbuha, fiżikament u emozzjonalment, u kif taffettwahom fir-relazzjonijiet mat-tifel/tifla jew tfal tagħhom u ma' membri oħra tal-familja. Sehmkom jgħin biex ikun hawn iżjed għarfen dwar l-aljenazzjoni parentali f'Malta għall-professjonisti li jahdmu ma' familji li qed jesperjenzaw dan il-fenomeno. L-informazzjoni tagħkom se tkun psewdoanonimizzata li tfisser li l-kodiċi ser ikunu assenjati sabiex jgħaqqdu l-informazzjoni personali mal-identita' tagħkom. L-informazzjoni psewdoanonimizzata ser tkun miżmuma b'mod sigur u separat mill-informazzjoni personali tagħkom f'post imsakkar, li r-riċerkatriċi biss ikollha aċċess għalih, sa Marzu 2025 jew sakemm nirċievi l-marka, wara l-informazzjoni tigi kompletament meqruda. L-informazzjoni kollha li tingabar fir-riċerka tintuża biss għall-fini ta' dan l-istudju. Is-sejba ingenerali ta' dan l-istudju tista' tkun sottomessa għal publikazzjoni f'gurnal xjentifiku jew pprezentati f'konferenzi xjentifiċi. Skont ir-rekwiżiti ta' xi gurnali xjentifiċi u organizzazzjonijiet, l-informazzjoni kkodifikata (psewdoanonimizzata) tista' tkun maqsuma ma' riċerkaturi oħra u fi studji oħra relatati.

Il-parteċipazzjoni tagħkom f'dan l-istudju tkun għalkollox volontarja; fi kliem iehor, intom liberi li taċċettaw jew tirrifjutaw li tiehu sehem, minghajr ma tagħtu raġuni. Intom wkoll liberi li twaqqfu il-parteċipazzjoni tagħkom fl-istudju meta tixtiequ, minghajr ma jkollkom tagħtu spjegazzjoni u minghajr ebda riperkussjoni. Jekk tagħzlu li tirtiraw mir-riċerka, l-informazzjoni li tkun lahqet ittiedet fl-intervista miegħek tithassar dment li dan ikun teknikament possibbli (nghidu ahna, qabel ma tigi psewdoanonimizzata jew ippubblikata), u sakemm l-għanijiet tar-riċerka jkunu jistghu jintlahqu u ma jintlaqtux serjament.

Jekk tagħzlu li tipparteċipaw, jekk jogħġbokom innotaw li m'hemm l-ebda benefiċċju dirett għalikom. Minkejja li l-isforzi kollha ha jkunu fis-sehh sabiex jassiguraw li l-mistoqsijiet li jkunu mahluqa ma jikkawżaw xi tbatija psikoloġika, jekk thossu li għandkom bżonn support, tistghu tikkuntatjaw lil Richmond Foundation, Supportline 179 (24/7 access), Kellimni .com (24/7 access), Crisis Resolution Malta, Crisis intervention Mater Dei, u/jew professjonisti bi hlas, bid-dettalji tal-kuntatt tagħhom inkluż fid-dokument mhemuż mal-formula ta' kunsens u mal-ittra ta' tagħrif.

Jekk taqbel li tipparteċipa, tinalab li tattendi intervista ta' siegħa li ssir f'post u hin li jkun konvenjenti għalik. Waqt l-intervista, inti ha tkun mistoqsija numbru ta' mistoqsijiet fuq l-esperjenza tiegħek madwar l-aljenazzjoni parentali u l-intervista ha tkun irrekordjata (awdjo). Wara li l-intervista tkun saret, ir-riċerkatrici ha titranskrivi l-informazzjoni u tikkodifika r-riċerka halli tanalizza l-informazzjoni.

L-informazzjoni miġbura tkun psewdoanonimizzata halli r-riskju li tkun identifikata jkun minimu. Il-kunfidenzjalità hija important hafna u ha tkun rispettata. Infatti, it-traskrizzjonijiet u r-registrazzjonijiet ha jkunu miżmuma b'mod sigur b'*password* u msakkra, u jiena biss ikolli aċċess għalihom. Psewdo ismijiet ha jkunu utilizzati u informazzjoni li tista' tiżvela l-identita' tal-parteciċipanti mhix ha tkun inkuża. Meta d-dissertazzjoni tkun kompluta, ir-registrazzjonijiet u t-traskrizzjonijiet jiġu meqruda billi jithassru u jitqattgħu. Jekk jogħġbok innota wkoll li l-informazzjoni tiegħek ha tkun imħassra sakemm din tkun teknikament possibbli (per eżempju, qabel tkun psewdoanonimizzata jew ippublikata), sakemm li tħassar l-informazzjoni tkun impossibbli jew serjament taffetwa li jintlahqu l-oġġettivi tar-riċerka. Tal-aħħar direttament tirrifletti l-eżenzjonijiet pprovduti fil-GDPR Artiklu 17(3) (d). L-informazzjoni kollha tkun meqruda meta l-istudju jkun spiċċa, sa Marzu 2025 jew sakemm nirċievi l-marka. Jekk tkun tixtieq tirċievi kopja tal-registrazzjoni (awdjo), traskrizzjoni u xi publikazzjoni li johorġu minn dan l-istudju, l-informazzjoni kollha trasferita tkun sigura. Kwalunkwe dokumenti mibgħuta permezz ta' indirizz elettroniku ikun protett permezz ta' *password* u kkodifikata, u kwalunkwe kopji stampati ser ikunu mghoddija fuq data storage drive. It-traskrizzjoni tiegħek tkun imbagħad disponibbli għas-supervisur tiegħi u, jekk ikun hemm bżonn, lill-eżaminaturi tiegħi.

Qed ngħaddilek kopja ta' din l-ittra biex iżzommha bħala referenza.

Grazzi tal-hin u l-kunsiderazzjoni tiegħek. Jekk ikollok xi mistoqsija, tiddejjaqx tikkuntattjani fuq graziana.cauchi.05@um.edu.mt; tista' tikkuntattja wkoll lit-tutor tiegħi elettronikament fuq: roberta.farrugia-debono@um.edu.mt

Tislijiet,

Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi
graziana.cauchi.05@um.edu.mt

Ms Roberta Farrugia Debono
roberta.farrugia-debono@um.edu.mt
79537698

Servizzi ta Sapport B'XEJN

Għażież Partecipanti Prospettivi,

Nispera li tinsabu tajbin.

Nixtieq niehu din l-opportunita' sabiex niringrazzjakom tal-participazzjoni tagħkom f'dan l-istudju. Napprezza l-involvement u l-koperazzjoni tagħkom matul dan il-proċess kollu.

Nixtieq nfakkarkom dwar l-għanijiet ta' dan l-istudju; li huwa li jesplora kif l-aljenazzjoni parentali taffettwa lill-ommijiet fis-saħħa emozzjonali u psikologiku tagħhom, u fir-relazzjoni tagħhom mat-tifel/tifla/tfal tagħhom u membri oħra tal-familja.

Dan l-istudju ma kienx mistenni li jikkawża dwejjajq u l-mistoqsijiet tal-intervista kienu mfassla b'mod sensittiv sakemm hu possibbli. Madankollu, jekk il-participazzjoni tagħkom ikkawżat dwejjajq jew skumdità għal xi raġuni, jekk idawwru l-paġna għandkom issibu xi informazzjoni dwar servizzi li jiġu offruti b'xejn u sapport professjonali offrut bi ħlas li jaf issibu utli.

Jekk jogħġobkom tidejjqux tikkuntattjawni jekk għandkom xi mistoqsijiet.

Jekk tridu aktar informazzjoni jew jekk tixtiequ tirrapportaw xi tħassib dwar dan l-istudju, jekk jogħġobkom tidejjqux tikkuntattjawni fuq in-numru **79091910** jew lis-superviżur tal-riċerka tiegħi fuq **79537698**.

Nselli għalikom,

Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi

L-isem tal-istudenta riċerkatriċi: Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi

Kors: Master in Family Therapy and Systemic Practice

Indirizz elettroniku tal-istudenta: graziana.cauchi.09@um.edu.mt

Numru ta' kuntatt tal-istudent: 79091910

Superviżur tar-riċerka: Ms Roberta Farrugia Debono

Indirizz elettroniku tas-superviżur: roberta.farrugia-debono@um.edu.mt

Numru ta' kuntatt tas-superviżur: 79537698

Titlu ta' din ir-riċerka: Parental Alienation: The Lived Experience of Targeted Mothers

Servizzi ta' Sapport B'XEJN

	Richmond Foundation info@richmond.org.mt +356 21 224580/ 21 482336/ 21 480045 Tissapportja kemm individwi li qed jesperjenzaw problemi ta' saħħa mentali kif ukoll lil dawġ ta' madwarhom. Apparti li tissapportja individwi billi toffri għajnuna terapewtika, Richmond Foundation anki tigwida individwi billi tgħallimhom hiliet neċessarji sabiex jgħixu u jaħdmu indipendenti. Is-servizzi tagħhom jinkludu gruppi ta' sapport, soluzjonijiet ta' għejxien assistit, programmi edukattivi, kif ukoll servizzi ta' <i>counselling</i>.
Supportline 179 (24/7 access) Dan huwa l-<i>helpline</i> nazzjonali ta' Malta li joffri sapport, informazzjoni dwar il-harsien soċjali lokali u aġenziji oħra, kif ukoll iservi ta' servizz ta' riferiment għall-individwi li għandhom bżonn is-sapport. Huwa wkoll servizz nazzjonali għall-individwi li qed jaffaċċjaw żminijiet diffiċli jew ta' kriżi. L-għan primarju tagħhom huwa li jipprovdi għajnuna immedjata u imparzjali lil kull min jeħtieġ is-sapport.	
	Kellimni .com (24/7 access) http://kellimni.com/21244123/21335097 kellimni.com huwa servizz ta' sapport onlajn fejn staff u voluntiera mharrġa li huma disponibbli għas-sapport 24/7 permezz ta' indirizz elettroniku, <i>chat</i> u <i>smart messaging</i>. Dan is-servizz huwa mmanigġjat mill-SOS Malta.

Crisis Resolution Malta crisismalta@gmail.com/ +356 9933 9966

Joffri kura immedjata. Rizoluzjoni ta' Kriżi Crisis resolution 24/7. Tim ta' voluntiera li jirrispondu t-telefonati huma professjonisti, u s-servizz ta' konsultazzjoni jingħata bla ħlas.

Crisis intervention Mater Dei +356 2545 3950

Joffri għajnuna f'diversi sitwazzjonijiet ta' kriżi relatati mas-saħħa mentali.

Mit-Tnejn sal-Ġimgħa 7am – 5.30pm.

PROFESSIONISTI BI HLAS

Counsellors: Malta Association for the Counselling Profession (MACP)
www.macpmalta.org
 Council for the Counselling Profession (CCP) ccp.msfc@gov.mt

Family Therapists: Malta Association of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (MAFT-SP)
<maft.systemicpractice@gmail.com>

Psychologists: Malta Chamber of Psychologists mcp.org.mt
 Malta Psychology Profession Board mppb.msfc@gov.mt

Malta Association of Psychiatrists: map.org.mt

Psychotherapists: www.facebook.com/MaltaAssociationForPsychotherapy

Appendix B: Participant's Consent Form

Parental Alienation: The Lived Experience of Targeted Mothers

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is pseudonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in pseudonymised form.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in a semi-structured interview in which the researcher will ask questions to explore the lived experiences of targeted mothers of parental alienation in Malta. I am aware that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that my data will be pseudonymised which means that codes will be assigned to link my personal data to my identity, and only the researcher will have access to the codes and personal information which identify me. My pseudonymised data will be stored securely and separately from my personal data in a locked filing cabinet, which only the researcher will have access to, until March 2025 or once the grade is obtained, after which the data will be completely destroyed. I understand that the overall findings of this study may be submitted for publication in a scientific journal or presented at scientific conferences. In accordance with the requirements of some scientific journals and organisations, the coded data (pseudonymised) may be shared with the other fellow researchers and in other related studies.
5. I understand that while all efforts will be made to ensure that the question(s) that will be posed do not cause any psychological distress, if I feel that I require support, I can contact Richmond Foundation, Supportline 179 (24/7 access), Kellimni .com (24/7 access), Crisis Resolution

Malta, Crisis Intervention Mater Dei, and/or paid professionals listed with their contact details in the document attached to the consent form and information sheet.

6. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. I also understand that this research may benefit others by contributing to local research about this topic which can help professionals in their interventions when dealing with cases of parental alienation.
7. I understand that, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased for as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is pseudonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives. The latter directly reflects the exemptions provided for in the GDPR Article 17(3) (d).
8. I understand that if I wish to receive a copy of the audio-recording, transcript and any publications that emerge from this study, all data transfer will be secure. Any files sent via email will be password-protected and encrypted, and any physical copies will be handed in person on a data storage drive. My transcript will then be available to my supervisor and, if needed to my examiners.
9. I understand that all data collected will be erased after completion of the study by March 2025 or once the grade is obtained.
10. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
11. I am aware that, by marking the first-tick box below, I am giving my consent for the interview to be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I agree to the interview being audio recorded.
 - ☐ I do not agree to the interview being audio recorded.
-
12. I am aware that extracts from my interview may be reproduced in these outputs, using a pseudonym [a made-up name or code – e.g. respondent A]. The researcher will take all reasonable precautions to ensure that my identity is not revealed in the research outputs (including the dissertation), for instance by not including parts of the transcript which can identify me.

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I would like to review extracts of my interview transcript that the researcher would like to reproduce in research outputs before these are published.
 - ☐ I would not like to review my interview transcript extracts that the researcher would like to reproduce in research outputs before these are published.
13. I am aware that my data will be pseudonymised; i.e., my identity will not be noted on transcripts or notes from my interview, but instead, a code will be assigned. The codes that link my data to my identity (pseudonymised data) will be stored securely and separately from my personal data, in an encrypted file on the researcher's password-protected computer, and only the researcher will have access to this information. Any hard-copy materials will be placed in a locked cabinet/drawer. Any material that identifies me as a participant in this study will be stored securely. until March 2025 or once the grade is obtained, after which the data will be completely destroyed.
14. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.
15. If I feel that the interview has distressed me in any way, I may make use of the support services information that Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi will give me at the beginning of the interview. I am aware that this document comprises a list of free services. The document also includes fee-paying services which I understand I will have to pay for should I decide not to use free services.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi

graziana.cauchi.09@um.edu.mt

Ms Roberta Farrugia Debono

roberta.farrugia-debono@um.edu.mt

79537698

Appendiċi B: Formola tal-Kunsens tal-Parteċipanti

Parental Alienation: The Lived Experience of Targeted Mothers

Jiena, hawn taht iffirmata, nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi li niehu sehem fl-istudju ta' Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi. Din il-formola tal-kunsens tispjega t-termini tas-sehem tiegħi f'din ir-riċerka.

1. Inghatajt l-informazzjoni bil-miktub u/jew bil-fomm dwar l-iskop tar-riċerka; kelli l-opportunità nagħmel il-mistoqsijiet, u kull mistoqsija ngħatajt twegiba għaliha b'mod shih u sodisfacenti.
2. Nifhem ukoll li jiena libera li naċċetta li niehu sehem, jew li nirrifjuta, jew li nwaqqaf il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi meta nixtieq mingħajr ma nagħti spjegazzjoni jew mingħajr ma nigi penalizzata. Jekk nagħzel li nipparteċipa, jaf niddeċiedi li ma nwegibx kull mistoqsija li ssirli. F'każ li nagħzel li ma nkomplix niehu sehem fl-istudju, l-informazzjoni li tkun laħqet ingabret mingħandi tithassar dment li jkun teknikament possibbli (nghidu ahna, qabel ma tiġi psewdoanonimizzata jew ippubblikata), u sakemm l-għanijiet tar-riċerka jkunu jistgħu jintlaħqu u ma jintlaqtux serjament.
3. Nifhem li ġejt mistiedna nipparteċipa għall-intervista semi-strutturali u l-persuna li qed tagħmel ir-riċerka se tistaqsini mistoqsijiet biex tesplora l-esperjenza ta' ommijiet li qed jesperjenzaw l-aljenazzjoni parentali f'Malta. Jiena konxja li l-intervista se ddum bejn wiehed u iehor siegħa. Nifhem li l-intervista se ssir f'post u f'hin li huma komdi għaliha.
4. Nifhem li l-informazzjoni tiegħi se tkun psewdoanonimizzata li tfisser li l-kodiċi ser ikunu assenjati sabiex jgħaqqdu l-informazzjoni personali mal-identità tiegħi. L-informazzjoni psewdoanonimizzata ser tkun miżmuma b'mod sigur u separat mill-informazzjoni personali tiegħi f'post imsakkar, li r-riċerkatriċi biss ikollha aċċess għalih, sa Marzu 2025 jew sakemm nircievi l-marka, wara l-informazzjoni tiġi kompletament meqruda. Nifhem li s-sejba ingenerali ta' dan l-istudju tista' tkun sottomessa għal publikazzjoni f'gurnal xjentifiku jew pprezentati f'konferenzi xjentifiċi. Skont ir-rekwiziti ta' xi gurnali xjentifiċi u organizzazzjonijiet, l-informazzjoni kkodifikata (pseudoanonimizzata) tista' tkun maqsuma ma' riċerkaturi oħra u fi studji oħra relatati.
5. Nifhem li minkejja l-isforzi kollha li ha jkunu fis-seħh sabiex jassiguraw li l-mistoqsijiet li jkunu mahluqa ma jikkawżawx xi tbatija psikoloġika, jekk inhoss li għandi bżonn support, nista' nikkuntatja lil Richmond Foundation, Supportline 179 (24/7 access), Kellimni .com (24/7 access), Crisis Resolution Malta, Crisis Intervention Mater Dei, u/jew professjonisti bi hlas, bid-dettalji tal-kuntatt tagħhom inkluż fid-dokument mhemuż mal-formola ta' kunsens u mal-ittra ta' tagħrif.
6. Nifhem li bil-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi f'dan l-istudju, m'hemm l-ebda benefiċċju dirett għaliha. Nifhem ukoll li din ir-riċerka jaf tkun ta' benefiċċju għal haddiehor billi tikkontribwixxi għar-riċerka lokali dwar dan is-sugġett li tista' tgħin professjonisti fix-xogħol tagħhom meta jiltaqgħu ma' każijiet ta' aljenazzjoni parentali.

7. Nifhem li, ghandi dritt naċċessa, nikkoreġi u, fejn hu applikabbli, nitlob li l-informazzjoni li tikkonċernani tithassar sakemm din tkun teknikament possibbli (per eżempju, qabel tkun psewdoanonimizzata jew ippublikata), sakemm it-thassir tal-informazzjoni tkun impossibbli jew serjament taffetwa li jintlahqu l-oġġettivi tar-riċerka. Tal-aħhar direttament tirrifletti l-eżenzjonijiet pprovduti fil-GDPR Artiklu 17(3) (d).
8. Nifhem li jekk nkun nixtieq nirċievi kopja tal-registrazzjoni (awdjo), traskrizzjoni u xi publikazzjoni li johorġu minn dan l-istudju, l-informazzjoni kollha trasferita tkun sigura. Kwalunkwe dokumenti mibghuta permezz ta' indirizz elettroniku ser ikun protett permezz ta' password u kkodifikata, u kwalunkwe kopji stampati ser ikunu mghoddija fuq data storage drive. It-traskrizzjoni tiegħi tkun imbagħad disponibbli għas-supervisur u, jekk ikun hemm bżonn, lill-eżaminaturi.
9. Nifhem li l-informazzjoni kollha migbura se tithassar f' Marzu 2025 jew meta nirċievi l-marka
10. Inghatajt kopja tal-ittra ta' tagħrif biex inżommha u nifhem li se ninghata wkoll kopja ta' din il-formola tal-kunsens.
11. Konxja li, jekk nimmarka l-ewwel kaxxa t'hawn taht, inkun qed nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi biex l-intervista tiġi rrekordjata bl-awdjo u maqluba f'kitba fl-istess waqt (traskrizzjoni).

IMMARKA BISS DAK LI JAPPLIKA

- ☐ Naqbel li l-intervista tiġi rrekordjata bl-awdjo.
- ☐ Ma naqbilx li l-intervista tiġi rrekordjata bl-awdjo.

12. Konxja li siltiet mill-intervista tiegħi jistghu jiġu riprodotti b'mod psewdonimu [isem ivvintat jew kodiċi - eż. parteċipant A]. Ir-riċerkatriċi ser tiehu kull prekawzjoni possibbli sabiex tassigura li l-identità tiegħi ma' tkunx rivelata fir-rizultati tar-riċerka (inkuża fid-dissertazzjoni), per eżempju billi ma tinkludix partijiet mit-traskrizzjoni li jidentifikawni.

IMMARKA BISS DAK LI JAPPLIKA

- ☐ Nixtieq nara siltiet mit-traskrizzjoni tal-intervista miegħi li r-riċerkatriċi se tirriproduċi fir-rizultati tar-riċerka qabel ma jiġu ppubblikati.
- ☐ Ma nixtieqx nara siltiet mit-traskrizzjoni tal-intervista miegħi li r-riċerkatriċi se tirriproduċi fir-rizultati tar-riċerka qabel ma jiġu ppubblikati.

13. Jiena konxja li l-informazzjoni tiegħi se tkun psewdonimizzata, jiġifieri l-identità tiegħi mhix se titniżżel fit-traskrizzjonijiet jew fin-noti tal-intervista, imma minflok, se niġi assenjata kodiċi. Il-kodiċijiet li jorbtu l-informazzjoni dwari mal-identità tiegħi (informazzjoni psewdoanonimizzata) se jinżammu b'mod sigur u separat mill-informazzjoni personali tiegħi, f'file kodifikat fuq il-kompjuter tar-riċerkatriċi, protetti b'password, u r-riċerkatriċi biss se jkollha aċċess għal din l-informazzjoni. Kwalunkwe materjal stampat se jitqiegħed f'armarju msakkar. Kwalunkwe materjal li jidentifikani

bhala parteċipanta f'dan l-istudju se jinżamm b'mod sigur sa Marzu 2025 jew sakemm nircievi l-marka, wara l-informazzjoni tiġi kompletament meqruda.

14. Konxja li l-identità tiegħi u d-dettalji personali tiegħi mhux se jiġu żvelati f'xi pubblikazzjoni, rapport jew preżentazzjoni li tista' toħroġ minn din ir-riċerka.
15. Jekk inhoss li l-intervista b'xi mod iddisturbani, nista' nirreferi għat-tagħrif dwar is-servizzi ta' appoġġ li Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi se tgħaddili fil-bidu tal-intervista. Naf li d-dokument bit-tagħrif jinkludi lista ta' servizzi bla ħlas. Id-dokument fih ukoll xi servizzi bil-ħlas, li jkolli nagħmlu minn buti f'każ li ma nagħzilx is-servizzi bla ħlas.

Qrajt u fhimt l-istqarrijiet t'hawn fuq, u naqbel li nipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju.

Isem il-parteċipanta: _____

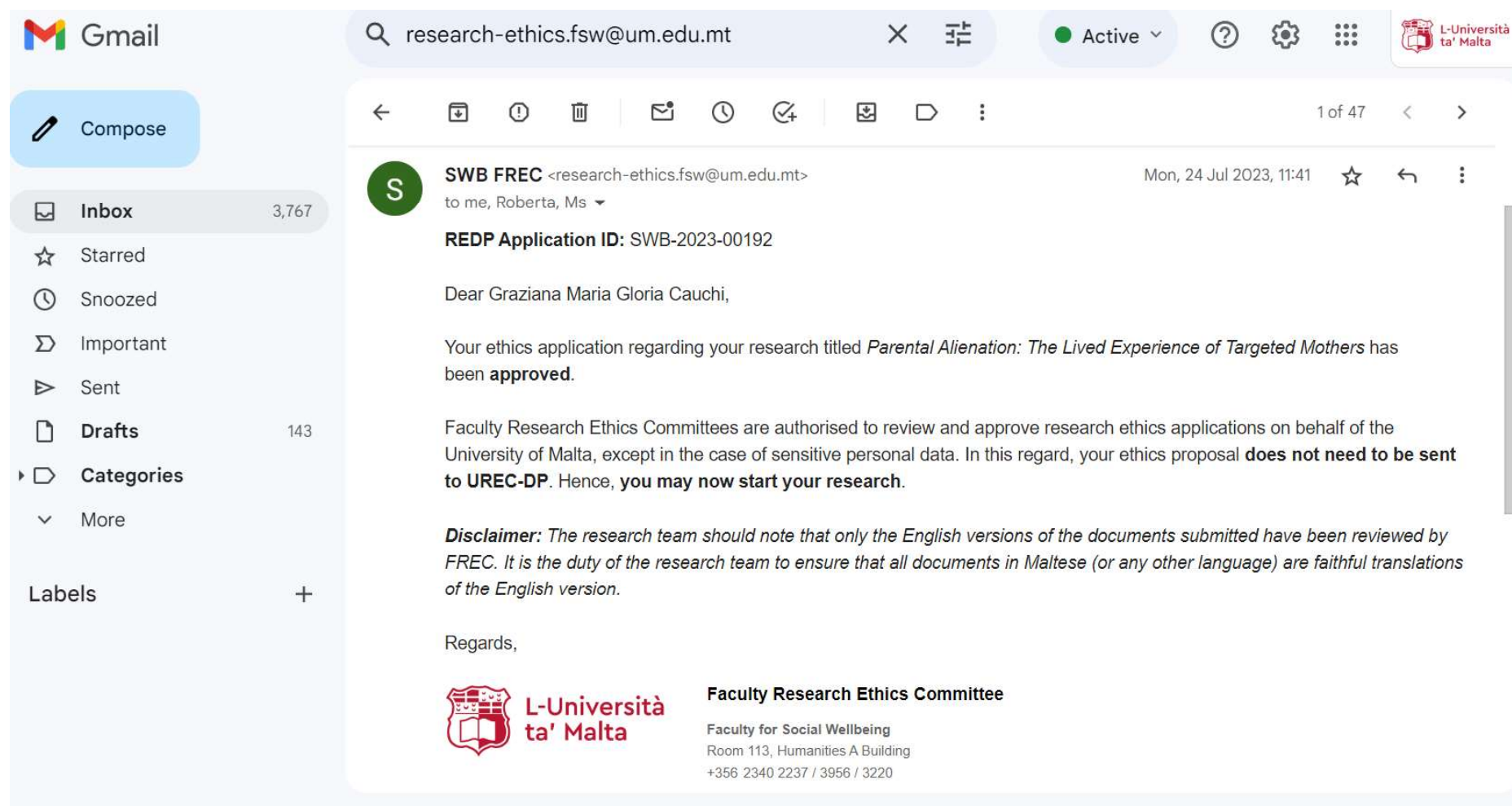
Firma: _____

Data: _____

Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi
graziana.cauchi.09@um.edu.mt

Ms Roberta Farrugia Debono
roberta.farrugia-debono@um.edu.mt
79537698

Appendix C: FREC Approval



The screenshot shows a Gmail interface. On the left is a sidebar with navigation options: Compose, Inbox (3,767), Starred, Snoozed, Important, Sent, Drafts (143), Categories, and Labels (+). The main area displays an email from 'SWB FREC <research-ethics.fsw@um.edu.mt>' to 'me, Roberta, Ms' dated 'Mon, 24 Jul 2023, 11:41'. The email subject is 'REDP Application ID: SWB-2023-00192'. The body text reads: 'Dear Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi, Your ethics application regarding your research titled *Parental Alienation: The Lived Experience of Targeted Mothers* has been **approved**. Faculty Research Ethics Committees are authorised to review and approve research ethics applications on behalf of the University of Malta, except in the case of sensitive personal data. In this regard, your ethics proposal **does not need to be sent to UREC-DP**. Hence, **you may now start your research**. ***Disclaimer:** The research team should note that only the English versions of the documents submitted have been reviewed by FREC. It is the duty of the research team to ensure that all documents in Maltese (or any other language) are faithful translations of the English version.* Regards,

At the bottom left is the L-Università ta' Malta logo. At the bottom right is the contact information for the Faculty Research Ethics Committee: 'Faculty for Social Wellbeing, Room 113, Humanities A Building, +356 2340 2237 / 3956 / 3220'.

Appendix D: Request for Permission to Act as Gatekeepers (MCP)

Dear MCP,

I am currently reading for a Master in Family Therapy and Systemic Practice at the University of Malta. As part of my course requirements, I am conducting a research study entitled, “Parental Alienation: The Lived Experience of Targeted Mothers” under the supervision of Ms Roberta Farrugia Debono. The aim of this study is to explore how parental alienation affects the targeted mothers’ emotional and physical well-being, and their relationship with their child/ren and other family members.

My intention is to interview six to eight targeted mothers of parental alienation who are over the age of eighteen years and whose child/ren have said that he/she/they does/ do not want to have contact with his/her/their mother and the mothers’ child access is very minimal, after ending their relationship with their male ex-partner or husband and ask them questions related to the theme of parental alienation. Data will be collected through a one-time semi-structured interview which will be audio-recorded and lasting for about an hour, and which will be held either face-to-face at a venue and time most convenient to them.

This study will hopefully contribute to the local body of literature around parental alienation.

I am querying if you would be willing to disseminate the information about my research, namely the information letter and the consent form, with all your members for their perusal so that they will be informed in a way as to recruit participants for the research once I have ethical clearance.

Kind Regards,

Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi

Gmail

graziana.cauchi.09@um.edu.mt

X⌵Active ? ⚙️☰L-Università ta' Malta

Compose

Inbox 3,678StarredSnoozedImportantSentDrafts 128CategoriesMore

Labels

Dear Ms. Cauchi,

Thank you for getting back to us, and congratulations on obtaining ethical approval.

Your participation request has been disseminated among our members via mailshot. They have been given information about the study that was written in the attached information letter, and your email address to contact you directly if interested to participate.

We wish you the best of luck on your research endeavor.

Kind regards,

—

Ms. Claire Bonello
Administrative Secretary
Malta Chamber of Psychologists

Email: info@mcp.org.mt

44 of many

Appendix E: Request for Permission to Act as Gatekeepers (MAFT)

Dear MAFT,

I am currently reading for a Master in Family Therapy and Systemic Practice at the University of Malta. As part of my course requirements, I am conducting a research study entitled, “Parental Alienation: The Lived Experience of Targeted Mothers” under the supervision of Ms Roberta Farrugia Debono. The aim of this study is to explore how parental alienation affects the targeted mothers’ emotional and physical well-being, and their relationship with their child/ren and other family members.

My intention is to interview six to eight targeted mothers of parental alienation who are over the age of eighteen years and whose child/ren have said that he/she/they does/ do not want to have contact with his/her/their mother and the mothers’ child access is very minimal, after ending their relationship with their male ex-partner or ex-husband and ask them questions related to the theme of parental alienation. Data will be collected through a one-time semi-structured interview which will be audio-recorded and lasting for about an hour, and which will be held either face-to-face at a venue and time most convenient to them.

This study will hopefully contribute to the local body of literature around parental alienation.

I am querying if you would be willing to disseminate the information about my research, namely the information letter and the consent form, with all your members for their perusal so that they will be informed in a way as to recruit participants for the research once I have ethical clearance.

Kind Regards,

Graziana Maria Gloria Cauchi



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Compose

Inbox

3,679

Starred

Snoozed

Important

Sent

Drafts

128

Categories

More

Labels



maft sp

<maft.systemicpractice@gmail.com>

Fri, 13 Oct 2023, 13:32

to me, Roberta

Dear Graziana,

Many thanks for forwarding the FREC approval, we will circulate the information among our members as promised.

Kind regards,

Frida



Grazia Maria Gloria Cauchi

<graziana.cauchi.09@um.edu.mt>

Sat, 14 Oct 2023, 15:32

to maft, Roberta

Dear Ms Mangion

Hope this email finds you well

Many thanks and good day.

Best regards

Graziana

43 of many

Appendix F: Interview Guide

Demographic questions:

1. Can you please introduce yourself?
2. How old are you?
3. How old is/are your child/ren?
4. How long was your marriage/partnership with your ex-husband or ex-partner?
5. How long have you been separated from your ex-husband or has your relationship ended with your ex-partner?
6. How long has it been since you last saw/communicated with your child/ren?

Questions related to the mothers' lived experiences:

1. What do you understand by the term "parental alienation"?
 - a. How did the alienation develop by time?
 - b. Were there any critical events during your parental alienation experience?
2. Can you describe your lived experience as a targeted mother of parental alienation?
3. How would you describe your current relationship with your child/ren?
4. How has the relationship between you and your child/ren changed over time, before and after your relationship with your ex-partner ended or after the separation?
5. How do you make sense of the changes (for instance limited contact) in your relationship with your child/ren over time?
6. Can you tell me about how you tried to re-establish contact with your child/ren and how did it go?
7. How do you perceive that parental alienation has impacted your emotional and physical well-being?

8. How do you think your child/ren feel about and were impacted by parental alienation, and how have you tried to address this?
9. How do you think that your understanding of how parental alienation is impacting your child/ren, has impacted you?
10. How has parental alienation affected your relationship with other family members, such as with your own parents or siblings?
11. Can you describe your experience of receiving support from professionals, family members, and others, in the context of your parental alienation experience?
12. What kind of support would you have needed from professionals, family members, and others, at different stages of your parental alienation experience?

Some examples of debriefing questions:

1. How did you feel during the interview?
2. Is there any question which you feel that you did not address well? If so, what would you like to add?
3. Any concluding remarks which you wish to make?

Appendiċi F: Mistoqsijiet Għall-Intervista

Mistoqsijiet Demografiċi:

1. Tista' tintroduċi lilek innifsek jekk jogħġbok?
2. Kemm għandek żmien?
3. Kemm għandu/ha/hom żmien it-tifel/tifla jew it-tfal tiegħek?
4. Kemm domt miżżewġa jew f' relazzjoni mal-ex-raġel jew mal-ex-partner tiegħek?
5. Kemm ilek li sseparajt minn mal-ex-raġel tiegħek jew tlaqt mir-relazzjoni mal-ex-partner tiegħek?
6. Kemm ilek ma tarahom/tikkomunika mat-tifel/tifla jew tfal tiegħek?

Mistoqsijiet dwar l-esperjenza tal-ommijiet:

1. X'tifhem bit-terminu "aljenazzjoni parentali"?
 - a. Kif l-aljenazzjoni żviluppat maż-żmien?
 - b. Kien hemm avvenimenti kritiċi waqt l-esperjenza tal-aljenazzjoni parentali?
2. Tista' tiddekrivi l-esperjenza tiegħek bħala omm li qed tgħaddi mill-aljenazzjoni parentali?
3. Kif tiddekrivi r-relazzjoni kurrenti tiegħek mat-tifel/tifla jew tfal tiegħek?
4. Kif inbidlet ir-relazzjoni bejnek u bejn it-tifel/tifla jew tfal tiegħek maż-żmien, qabel u wara li r-relazzjoni mal-ex-partner spiċċat jew wara s-separazzjoni?
5. Kif tagħmel sens mill-bidliet (pereżempju fil-kuntatt limitat) fir-relazzjoni tiegħek mat-tifel/tifla jew tfal tiegħek matul iż-żmien?
6. Tista' tgħidli fuq kif pruvajt terġa tistabilixxi kuntatt mat-tifel/tifla jew tfal tiegħek, u kif kienet din l-esperjenza?

7. Kif tahseb li l-aljenazzjoni parentali affettwat is-sahha emozzjonali u fizika tieghek?
8. X'tahseb li t-tifel/tifla jew it-tfal iħossu u kif kienu affettwati mill-aljenazzjoni parentali, u kif pruvjat tindirizzaha din?
9. Kif tahseb li l-mod ta' kif l-aljenazzjoni parentali taffettwa lit-tifel/tifla jew lit-tfal, taffettwa lilek?
10. Kif tahseb li l-aljenazzjoni parentali affettwat ir-relazzjoni tieghek ma' membri oħra tal-familja, bħal pereżemju mal-ġenituri tieghek jew ma' ħutek?
11. Tista' tiddekrivi l-esperjenza tieghek madwar sapport li tircievi minghand profesjonisti, membri tal-familja, u oħrajn, fil-kuntest tal-esperjenza tal-aljenazzjoni parentali tieghek?
12. X'tip ta' sapport kien ikollok bżonn minn profesjonisti, membri tal-familja, u oħrajn, fi stadji differenti tal-esperjenza tieghek madwar l-aljenazzjoni parentali?

Xi eżempju ta' mistoqsijiet li nista' naghlaq bihom:

1. Kif hassejtek waqt l-intervista?
2. Hemm xi mistoqsija li inti thoss li ma indirizzajtx sewwa? Jekk iva, x'tixtieq iżżid aktar?
3. Hemm xi kummenti oħra li tixtieq tagħmel?

Appendix G: Sample of Analysed Transcript

Emerging Themes	Line No.	Transcript	Notes
Change in targeted mother-children relationship (after separation) (L.417-419).	417	Hayley: Bdiet tinbidel r-relazzjoni tieghi mat-	Targeted mother-children relationship changed after separation (L. 417-419).
	418	tfal wara li sseparajna hux ghax kien qed ikun	
	419	wahdu magghom...	
Initially, unaware of PA (L. 420-421).	420	Jien ma nafx x'nhu jinghad, ma nafx x'nhu	She did not know that PA was taking place (L. 420-421).
	421	jinghad, ma nafx kif qed jittrattahom.	
After separation, her relationship with her children changed (L. 422-424).	422	Hemmhekk bdiet tinbidel jien ezatti kif bghena	Her relationship with her children changed-after separation (L. 422-424).
	423	d-dar sseparajna u tlaqna. Minn hemmhekk	
	424	bdiet tinbidel ir-relazzjoni tieghi mat-tfal.	Had a very close relationship with her children before separation and PA (L. 425).
Had a very close mother-children relationship (prior to separation and PA) (L. 425).	425	U mghandekx idea kemm konna close.	
	426	Mghandekx idea, ghax dan qatt ma kien ikun	Alienating father was not involved in childrearing before separation (L. 426-427).
	427	id-dar, allura dejjem jiena u huma. Jigifieri	
Alienating father uninvolved in parenting (prior to separation) (L. 426-427).	428	wara l-iskola mill-ewwel magghom ghax	
	429	dejjem kienet kmandament kienet, sajf u xitwa	She was very involved in her children's lives, and enjoyed spending her time with her children (L. 427-439).
	430	anka meta ma kienx ikollhom skola, naghmlu	
Mother Role-enjoying her role and very involved in her children's life (L. 427-439).	431	siegħa lezzjoni naqraw, naghtihom xi Maths, xi	
	432	ħaġa naghmlu. Meta nilagħbu sa mhux l-ewwel	
	433	darba kont nidhol ġol-gwardarobba, kont qisni	
	434	l-belha nidhol ġol-gwardarobba, naqbad il-	
	435	ħwejjeg kollha u nġattihom għal fuqi u	
	436	qegħdin noli nilagħbu noli d-dar. Jigifieri	
	437	nohodhom il-baħar hekk jigifieri jiena kont	
	438	qisni huma l-familja	

Ex-husband not involved in couple and family life (L. 438-441).	439	tieghi u jien kont kuntenta. Ghax meta ma ssibx	She was not happy in her marriage; her ex-husband never used to spend time with her and her children (L. 439-441).
	440	xorti mar-raġel tieghek, hu qatt ma jkun id-dar	
	441	hux qatt ma jrid iqatta' hin magħhom.	
Never crossed her mind that this would happen to her (L. 442-443).	442	Ghax ovvja jien ma kontx naf x'inhu lest	Never thought she would be alienated from her children (L. 442-443).
	443	għaliġa, ma kontx naf x'hemm lest għaliġa. Le	
	444	kelli relazzjoni vera tajba, speċjalment mal-	
Very good relationship with her children, prior to separation and PA (L. 444).	445	kbir. Ghax il-kbir kien matur hafna mhux bħaż-	She had a very good relationship with her children, particularly with her older son (L. 444-445).
	446	zghir. Kieku ma kienx għal Alla jiena minie x	
	447	hawn. Ghax is-saħħa tal-bniedem hija limitata	
Faith (coping mechanism)- to continue living, despite continued sufferance (L. 446-449).	448	hafna. U din hija, din hija xi haġa li trid tgħixha	Faith gave her the strength to keep going in life, since she viewed herself as too weak to manage to live through this (L. 446-449).
	449	kuljum, trid tgħixha kuljum. Jiena mort mill-v	
	450	għal va, u ma stajtx naċċetta. Ma bdejtx nifhem	
Difficult to understand and to believe (L. 449-452).	451	x'inhu jigrj dejjem ngħid dat-tfal kif jista' jkun	She could not understand and believe that her children's behaviour changed drastically, since they were giving her a hard time after separation (L. 449-455).
	452	minn żewġ angli qisni għandi żewġt ixjaten?	
	453	Niehu qatgħa x'hin narahom ghax ġejja kedda,	
Her children giving her a hard time due to PA (L. 453-455).	454	ma rridx ngħid hekk, ma rridx ngħid hekk jiena,	Ex-husband contradicting her with her children (L. 455-457).
	455	imma kont niehu kedda. Ahna kif nistgħu	
	456	nimxu 'l quddiem jekk inti il-hin kollu topponili	
Ex-husband contradicting her in front of her children (L. 455-457).	457	quddiem it-tfal? Għat-tfal l-abbuż li raw hafna	PA-form of child abuse (subtle, worse than the mother's experience of abuse in her marriage) (L. 457-460).
	458	aġar minni, hafna aġar minni, qed ngħidlek,	
	459	ghax dawn mhux jabbużaw billi iċapċaphielek,	
PA-form of child abuse, subtle and worse than what she experienced in marriage (L. 457-460).	460	imma tieghi kien bil-kliem iniggeż u	
		jpattihelhom jekk ma jobduhx.	

Appendix H: Original Transcript of Excerpts

English Translation	Original Transcript
He told me that I am a chicken. He told me that I have to stay inside. You need to clean and cook for us. Do you know what a slave is? I could only go out to the balcony. Imagine what I had to go through plus the beating up, lack of finances, threats, sexual abuses. I don't want him to touch me and he touches me...I could not even go out with the children...I told him that the children are not chickens, they need to go out, and when I put on their clothes to go out, he takes off the children's shoes so they have to stay at home (Doris, lines 467-472).	Qalli li jiena tigieġa. Qalli li jien ikolli noqghod ġewwa. Inti trid tnaddaf u ssajjar ghalina. Inti taf x'inhul sir? Jien stajt nohroġ biss fil-gallarija. Immaġina minn xiex kelli nġhaddi, minbarra s-swat, nuqqas ta' flus, theddid, abbużi sesswali. Jien ma rridux imissni u hu jmissni...Lanqas biss kont nista' nohroġ bit-tfal... Jien għedtlu li t-tfal mhumie x tigieġ, għandhom bżonn johorġu, u meta nlibbishom biex nohroġhom, hu jneżżgħalhom iż-żraben biex nibqgħu ġewwa (Doris, linji 467-472).
There was a lot of abuse going on, and the final incident happened when he threatened to kill me with the gun. Then the police advised me to not stay in the relationship, since I refused to leave him. They cautioned me: "Today we saved you, but next time we won't" (Kelly, lines 19-22).	Kien hemm hafna abbuż għaddej, u l-aħħar incident gara meta kien heddidni li joqtolni bil-pistola. Imbagħad il-pulizija tawni parir biex naqta' r-relazzjoni, billi jien ma ridtx nitilqu. Il-pulizija wissewni: "Illum salvajniek, imma darb'ohra ma nsalvawkx" (Kelly, linji 19-22).

He was going out with other women! And then once I caught him! (Hayley, lines 312-313).	Hu kien qed johroġ ma' nisa ohra! U darba qbadtu! (Hayley, linji 312-313).
The alienation started when I wanted to separate, my husband wanted to punish me, by taking my children (Karen, lines 4-5).	L-aljenazzjoni bdiet meta ridt nissepara, ir-raġel tiegħi ried jikkastigani, billi hadli lil uliedi (Karen, linji 4-5).
My son injured himself with a butter knife. I asked him, "Why did you do this?" He said, "Because I'm stressed". I asked him, "Stressed?" This shows that I was not aware of what was happening with my son Mike (Maria, lines 125-128).	Ibni kien wegga' lilu nnifsu b'sikkina tal-butir. Jien staqsejtu, "Għaliex għamilt hekk?" Huwa qalli, "Għax jien stressjat". Ghedtlu, "Stressat?" Dan juri kemm jien ma kontx konxja ta' minn xiex kien għaddej ibni Mike (Maria, linji 125-128).
I was always taking care of the children. My husband is a businessman, so I was always with them from morning to evening, summer and winter, and my husband never had leave, not even sick leave, imagine. Including Sundays, he was never at home (Karen, lines 12-16).	Jien dejjem kont niehu hsiebhom it-tfal. Ir-raġel tiegħi huwa negozjant, għalhekk jiena kont inkun dejjem magħhom minn filghodu sa filghaxija, sajf u xitwa, u r-raġel tiegħi qatt ma kellu leave, l-ebda sick leave, immagina. Qatt ma kien ikun id-dar, lanqas nhar ta' Hadd (Karen, linji 12-16).
Suddenly he became father of the year! He wanted to take them to school himself! They started to idealize him. For them their father	F'daqqa waħda sar il-missier tas-sena! Ried jehodhom l-iskola hu stess! Bdew jidealizzawh. Għalihom missierhom jagħmel

does everything well, and everything I do is wrong (Hayley, lines 326-328).	kollox tajjeb, u jiena nagħmel kollox hazin (Hayley, linji 326-328).
I had a very good relationship with my son and all of a sudden, the lights went out and I was left in the dark (Maria, lines 303-304).	Kelli relazzjoni tajba ħafna ma' ibni u f'daqqa waħda, id-dwal intfew u jien bqajt fid-dlam (Maria, linji 303-304).
I was shocked...My son's friend Paul relayed a message that my son had sent him...And this message said, "I want to end my life, and I will do whatever is needed. Thank you for being my friend during the past years" (Sara, lines 413-417).	Kont ixxukkjata...Il-ħabib tat-tifel tiegħi Paul għaddieli messagg li kien baghatlu ibni...U f'dan il-messagg ibni qal, "Irrid intemm ħajti, u se nagħmel dak kollu li hemm bżonn. Grazzi talli kont ħabib tiegħi matul dawn is-snin" (Sara, lines 413-417).
He had shown my children the photos that my second ex-partner had sent him, of myself naked. To tell them...look what your mother does on the internet! And then my daughter stopped talking to me (Sara, lines 208-210).	Huwa kien wera lil uliedi r-ritratti li t-tieni eks sieheb tiegħi kien bagħtlu, ritratti tiegħi nnifsi għarwiena. Biex jgħidilhom...ara x'qed tagħmel ommkom fuq l- <i>internet</i> ! U mbagħad binti ma baqghetx tkellimni (Sara, linji 208-210).
My daughter told me, "It's not true that dad made you fall down the stairs". She told me that "You (the mother) were going to fall". He managed to put in my children's heads what they needed to say in case that they were asked. He prepared them (Karen, lines 371-374).	Binti qaltli, "Mhux veru li l-papà waqqgħek it-taraġ". Qaltli li "Inti (l-omm) kont se taqa". Innexxhielu jdaħħal f'moħħ uliedi dak li jkollhom jgħidu f'każ li jistaqsuhom. Ippreparahom (Karen, linji 371-374).

If I tell Leona that her break time is up, go and continue the homework because otherwise we won't finish it on time, he used to say, "Leave her alone!" Instead of telling her to listen to her mother (Karen, lines 463-465).	Jekk ngħid lil Leona l-hin tiegħek li tiehu brejk spiċċa, mur u kompli l-<i>homework</i> ghax inkella ma nlestux fil-hin, kien jgħid, "Hallieha kwieta!" Minflok jgħidilha biex tisma' minn ommha (Karen, linji 463-465).
He came to tell me that we have to say "it" when we refer to you with him... (Hayley, line 20).	Ġie jgħidli li rridu ngħidu "it" meta nirreferu għalik miegħu...(Hayley, linja 20).
My daughter was hitting me with all her strength, here, with her feet on my hip, and she was hitting me..as a four-year old. And the father from behind my back started doing the okay sign to her (Doris, lines 335-338).	Binti kienet qed ittini bis-saħħa kollha tagħha, hawn, b'saqajha ma' ġenbi, u ttini...taf inti tifla ta' erba' snin. U l-missier minn wara dahri beda jagħmlilha s-sinjal ta' okay (Doris, linji 335-338).
There were friendships that were lost, because he manipulated them... and they turned against me and accused me of being a "bad" mother, who was involved in prostitution (Sara, lines 973-975).	Kien hemm hbiberiji li spiċċaw, għax influwenzahom... u l-hbieb daru kontriġa u akkużawni li kont omm "ħażina", li kienet involuta fil-prostituzzjoni (Sara, linji 973-975).
The head of school was called as a witness during the separation proceedings, she witnessed against me. She started saying things he had told her, and she doesn't even know me (Karen, lines 105-106).	Il-kap tal-iskola ssejthet biex tixhed matul il-proċess tas-separazzjoni, xehdet kontriġa. Bdiet tgħid affarijiet li kien qalilha hu, u din lili lanqas biss tafni (Karen, linji 105-106).

They want to give us therapy, to me, to Mike, and to his father at the same time. They want me to somehow communicate with his father. I'm against it, how can this even be possible? I want to receive therapeutic support to connect with Mike, but it's out of the question for me to face his father (Maria, lines 665-671).	Iridu jaghtuni terapija, lili, lil Mike, u lil missieru fl-istess hin. Iriduni li b'xi mod nikkomunika ma' missieru. Jien kontriha din, kif jista' qatt ikun possibbli dan? Irrid nirċievi sapport terapewtiku biex nikkonnettja ma' Mike, imma żgur mhemmx ċans għaliya li naffaċċja lil missieru (Maria, lines 665-671).
I started to notice that the children were taking their clothes little by little from home, until eventually they stopped coming home, but they stayed with their father (Lucy, lines 200-203).	Jien bdejt ninnota li t-tfal kienu qegħdin jiehdu hwejjighom ftit ftit mid-dar, sakemm eventwalment ma baqghux jiġu iżjed id-dar, imma baqghu ma' missierhom (Lucy, lines 200-203).
I would always find his things missing...Luke was absent-minded. Once I found his pillow case under the stairs, filled with a lot of his favourite things. I eventually realized, after the children left, that my ex-husband was instructing them to pack up and go to live with him (Sara, lines 196-198).	Dejjem kont insib l-affarijiet tiegħu neqsin...imma Luke kien jinsa. Darba sibt l-investa tal-imhadda tiegħu taht it-taraġ, mimlija b'ħafna mill-affarijiet favoriti tiegħu. Jiena eventwalment irrealizzajt, wara li t-tfal telqu, li l-eks żewġi kien qed jgħidilhom biex jippakkjaw kollox u jmorru jgħixu miegħu (Sara, linji 196-198).
And my son was running more than me, and at one point I couldn't see him anymore. I called him on his phone, and he didn't want	U ibni kien qed jiġri aktar minni, u f'hin minnhom ma stajt narah aktar. Ċempiltu fuq il-mowbajl, u ma riedx iwieġeb. Tajt in-

to answer. I gave his number to the police and in twenty minutes the police called me back and told me he was in his father's car...(Maria, lines 142-147).	numru tieghu lill-pulizija u f'ghoxrin minuta l-pulizija ċempluli lura u qaluli li kien fil-karozza ta' missieru... (Maria, linji 142-147).
Three police cars arrived and arrested me at my son's school. They presented a court decree which indicated that I could no longer communicate with my son (Mariah, lines 41-43).	Tliet karozzi tal-pulizija ġew u arrestawni fl-iskola ta' ibni. Huma wrewni d-digriet mill-qorti li ma nistax nikkomunika aktar ma' ibni (Mariah, linji 41-43).
Parental alienation is a form of isolation. And who will be isolated? The children, the extended family, and I, because we are being prevented to see all our extended family (Lucy, lines 332-334).	L-aljenazzjoni tal-ġenituri hija forma ta' iżolament. U min se jkun iżolat? It-tfal, il-familja estiża, u jiena, għax qed niġu mċaħħda milli naraw il-familja estiża kollha tagħna (Lucy, linji 332-334).
The cycle continues from generation to generation...My ex-husband passed away but I'm sorry to say that my children became bullies like their father (Lucy, lines 566-568).	Iċ-ċiklu jkompli għaddej minn generazzjoni għal ohra...L-eks raġel tiegħi halliena imma jiddispjaċini ngħid li wliedi saru bulijiet bħal missierhom (Lucy, linji 566-568).
This is intergenerational...So Emily's (her alienated daughter) grandmother was alienated, and alienated her son (her ex-husband), her son in turn alienated his daughter Emily... no amount of therapy will	Din hija interġenerazzjonali...Mela n-nanna ta' Emily (bintha aljenata) kienet aljenata, u aljenat lil binha (l-eks raġel), binha min-naħa tiegħu aljena lil bintu Emily... l-ebda ammont ta' terapija mhu se tirroranġa s-sitwazzjoni

fix her now. She will do the same thing to her husband too (Sara, lines 1166-1174).	taghha. Hija se taghmel l-istess haġa lil żewġha wkoll (Sara, linji 1166-1174).
My relationship with my children is zero. This experience breaks you. It's insidious, something that breaks you... (Hayley, lines 381-618).	Ir-relazzjoni tiegħi ma' wliedi hija żero. Din l-esperjenza tkissrek. Hija insidjuża, xi haġa li tkissrek... (Hayley, 381-618).
I feel immense anxiety. There's always this feeling in my chest. I don't feel well; I became forgetful and that is not usual for me. I was with my mother, and I was not focused...I went to the toilet, and fell on my back. This is what is happening to me. I'm taking too many pills for my anxiety (Mikela, lines 291-299).	Inhoss ansjetà kbira. Dejjem inhoss dik ix-xi haġa f' sidri. Ma nħossnix tajjeb; sirt ninsa u qatt ma kont hekk qabel. Kont hdejn ommi u ma kontx iffukata...mort it-toilet, u waqajt għal dahri. Dan hu li qed jiġrili. Niehu wisq pilloli għall-ansjetà li għandi (Mikela, linji 291-299).
The first summer that I started not seeing my children, I was literally suicidal. I remember, I used to ask God to take me. I used to tell Him when I go to sleep, I don't want to wake up, the most important thing is not to suffer when I die. Because suffering is immense... (Lucy, lines 534-537).	L-ewwel sajf li bdejt ma narax lil uliedi, kont litteralment suwiċidali. Niftakar, kont nitlob lil Alla biex jehodni. Kont nghid Lilu, meta mmur norqod ma rridx inqum, l-iktar haġa importanti hi li ma nbatix meta mmut. Għax it-tbatija hija immensa...(Lucy, linji 534-537).
And I was going crazy; I was screaming, screaming on the ground, throwing myself on the ground. It was a very bad moment, it	U kont se niġġennen; kont qed inwerżaq, inwerżaq mal-art, nintefa' mal-art. Kien mument hażin hafna, kien tal-biża'; li kieku

was scary; if I didn't have my little son with me, I think I would have definitely jumped off somewhere (Sara, lines 243-246).	ma kellix lil ibni ż-żghir mieghi, nahseb li kont naqbez minn xi mkien żgur (Sara, linji 243-246).
I started suffering from hypothyroidism, hair loss...(Lucy, line 534).	Bdejt inbati minn <i>thyroid</i> baxxa, xaghri beda jehfiefli...(Lucy, line 534).
I suffered physically for years. Eventually this led to significant issues with my eyes. All were stress-related. The eye ducts became clogged, likely due to stress, as three times a year I have to talk to a lawyer to address court issues (Maria, lines 578-582).	Batejt fiżikament għal snin shaħ. Eventwalment spicċajt kelli problemi kbar f'għajnejja. Kien kollu relatat mal-istress. Il-kanali tad-dmugħ thammgu, għax kont inkun hađt xi kedda, għax tliet darbiet fis-sena jkolli nitkellem ma' avukat biex niddiskuti kwistjonijiet tal-qorti (Maria, lines 578-582).
If you don't get used to the situation, like I was in the beginning, you will feel very sick. I had no purpose in my life, that's how you start to reason. You have to get used to it (Maria, lines 820-823).	Jekk ma tidrax is-sitwazzjoni, bħalma kont jiena fil-bidu, tispicċa hażin. Ma kontx inhossni sewwa. Ma kelli l-ebda skop f'hađti, hekk tibda tirraġuna. Trid tidra tgħix f'din is-sitwazzjoni (Maria, lines 820-823).
I go to therapy...and I do research on the subject (Lucy, lines 626-627).	Immur għat-terapija...u nagħmel riċerka dwar is-suġġett (Lucy, linji 626-627).
Today I find peace of mind by helping others, because I write a lot on Quora (an online platform of questions and answers), and I tell every victim I see who is unsure whether to leave, to leave the abusive	Illum insib is-serħan tal-moħħ billi ngħin lill-oħrajn, għax nikteb hafna fuq Quora (pjattaforma virtwali b'mistoqsijiet u tweġibiet), u ngħid kull vittma li nara li mhix ċerta jekk titlaqx jew le, biex titlaq ir-

relationship, because for me to leave was the most difficult thing to do (Hayley, lines 760-763).	relazzjoni abbużiva, ghax ghalija li nitlaq kienet l-aktar haġa diffiċli biex nagħmel (Hayley, linji 760-763).
I don't know... Only God can do miracles (Doris, lines 577-578).	Ma nafx...Alla biss jista' jagħmel il-mirakli (Doris, linji 577-578).
If it weren't for God, I wouldn't be here. Human strength is very limited, to deal with this every day... I am telling you, without God in my life, I will be dead. You have to be really strong (Hayley, lines 440-443).	Kieku ma kienx għal Alla jien mhux hawn. Is-saħħa tal-bniedem hija limitata hafna, li wiehed irid jgħix biha kuljum...Qed ngħidlek, kieku ma kienx għal Alla f'haġti, jiena mejta. Trid tkun tassew b'saħħtek (Hayley, linji 440-443).
I try to find some balance between my children and my life, because I need some time for myself too...I need some time for myself. I finally learned this (Doris, lines 790-794).	Nipprova nsib bilanċ bejn it-tfal u haġti, ghax għandi bżonn ftit hin għalija wkoll...Għandi bżonn ftit hin għalija nnifsi. Fl-aħħar tghallimtha din (Doris, linji 790-794).
Sometimes I feel like I need to stop fighting. Because you get to a point where you can't take it anymore; but then I think about my little one, so I keep fighting, but it's not easy. We cannot give up because it is in vain. Because children need a parent who fights for them, and not one who gives up (Mariah, lines 179-182).	Xi drabi nħoss li għandi bżonn nieqaf niġġieled. Ghax tasal f'punt fejn ma tkunx tista' tiflaħ aktar; imma mbagħad naħseb fiċ-ċkejken tiegħi, u għalhekk inkompli niġġieled, imma mhux faċli. Ma nistgħux naqtgħu qalbna u nċedu ghax inutli. Ghax itfal għandhom bżonn ġenitur li jiġġieled

	ghalihom, u mhux wiehed li jċedi (Mariah, linji 179-182).
I've always been a fighter... because I'm used to being very independent...I am a positive person and I look forward to life (Doris, lines 863-864).	Dejjem kont ġellieda ... għax imdorrija nkun indipendenti hafna...Jien persuna pożittiva u nħares 'l quddiem fil-ħajja (Doris, 863-864).
My elder son beats me up, insulting me because of my foot disability... like his father did (Doris, lines 475-476).	Ibni l-kbir isawwatni, u jinsulentani minħabba d-dizabilità li għandi f' sieqi... bħalma kien jagħmel missieru (Doris, lines 475-476).
I observed significant changes in my children when they had contact with me. Since they were used to seeing their father treat me in a certain way, they automatically began to treat me in the same way. I refer to this as modeling behaviour. Once, my daughters voluntarily joined him (after her ex-husband and daughters hit her with pillows) to take a video of me screaming as evidence that I am mentally unwell (Karen, lines 27-32).	Rajt hafna bidliet fit-tfal meta dawn kellhom kuntatt miegħi. Peress li kienu jaraw lil missierhom jittrattani b'ċertu mod, awtomatikament bdew jittrattawni bħalma kien iġib ruħu miegħi. Din insejhlha <i>modelling behaviour</i> . Darba, uliedi b'mod voluntarju ingħaqdu miegħu (wara li l-eks raġel u uliedha tawha daqqiet bl-imħadded) biex jiehdu filmat tiegħi nwerżaq bħala evidenza li jiena marida mentalment (Karen, linji 27-32).
They are broken, broken, like me. I was afraid to go home. Do you think they are not in the same situation? (Hayley, lines 572-573).	Huma mkissra, mkissra, bħali. Kont nibża' mmur id-dar. Taħseb li mħumiex fl-istess sitwazzjoni? (Hayley, linji 572-573).

I think he's angry at the things his father told him about me, things that aren't true (Doris, lines 591-592).	Nahseb li hu rrabjat għall-affarijiet li qallu missieru dwari, affarijiet li mhumieħ veri (Doris, linji 591-592).
My son was in a very bad state. Then he told me that he had swallowed many of the pills that the psychiatrist had given him for his treatment (Sara, lines 432-434).	Ibni kien fi stat hażin hafna. Imbagħad qalli li kien bela' hafna mill-pilloli li l-psikjatra kien tah għall-kura tiegħu (Sara, linji 432-434).
Her father burned my daughter, inside a tub with boiling water. Her legs are still marked today. I don't know if it's an accident, but she ended up in the Burns Unit (Kelly, lines 25-26).	Missierha ħaraq lil binti, ġewwa banju bl-ilma jagħli. Saqajha għadhom imtebbgħin sa llum. Ma nafx jekk kinitx xi haġa aċċidentali, imma spiċċat il- <i>Burns Unit</i> (Kelly, linji 25-26).
My son is always inside the house playing video games; what meaning does he have in his life? He became depressed and obese because he doesn't move (Doris, lines 659-661).	Ibni dejjem ġewwa d-dar jilgħab il- <i>video games</i> ; xi skop għandu f'haġtu? Sar imdejjaq u rabba ħxuna żejda, għax ma jiċċaqlaqx (Doris, linji 659-661).
The elder daughter is the golden child, he (the alienating father) is everything to her, for her he is a god. The other daughter is scapegoated; at least until some time ago she was the scapegoat. The younger girl thinks and analyses things more, so she wasn't so	It-tifla l-kbira hija <i>the golden child</i> , huwa (missierha li jaljena) kollox għaliha, għaliha huwa alla. L-oħra hija l-vittma u teħel f'kollox hi, allanqas hekk kienet sa ffit ilu. It-tifla ż-żgħira taħseb u tanalizza aktar l-affarijiet, għalhekk ma kinitx konvinta

convinced of him initially (Karen, lines 695-700).	daqstant minnu fil-bidu (Karen, linji 695-700).
You can't talk to him because he starts screaming and telling you to leave him...And I think his father also tells him things against me, because sometimes he answers back. He gets angry when he is with me because he doesn't want to go with his father. He tells me that daddy is a monster...If I go to the kitchen, he must come with me. He's feeling the loss...He tells his classmates that today he is not going to the club (after school programme) because he is going with mummy. He even sometimes says at school that he is not well, to come home (Mariah, lines 88-225).	Ma tistax tkellmu ghax jibda jwerzaq u jghidlek biex thallih...U nahseb li missieru jghidlu wkoll affarijiet kontrija, ghax kultant jirrispondi. Jirrabja meta jkun mieghi ghax ma jridx imur ma' missieru. Jghidli li l-papà huwa mostru...Jekk immur fil-kċina, irid jiġi mieghi. Qed iħoss it-telfa... Lil shabu tal-klassi jghidilhom li illum mhux sejjer il-klabb (programm ta' wara l-iskola) ghax sejjer mal-mama. Anke l-iskola ġieli jghid li ma jiflahx, biex jiġi d-dar (Mariah, linji 88-225).
He also tells me, "Mummy, I brought you something." I ask him, "Can you give me the present?" Because he would like to give me gifts like he used to do before, but he can't because of his father... Before he would joke, laugh, and pick on me, saying, "Mummy, come and let's hug each other."	Huwa wkoll jghidli, "Mummy, xtrajtlek xi haġa". Nghidlu, "Tista' tagħtihuli r-rigal?" Ghax jixtieq jixtrili rigali bħalma kien jagħmel qabel, imma ma jistax minhabba missieru...Qabel kien jiċċajta, kien jidhak, u jaqbad mieghi, jghidli, "Mummy ejja, ejja nghanqu lil xulxin". Issa huwa 'l bogħod milli jghannaqni (Mikela, linji 344-347).

Now he is far away from hugging me (Mikela, lines 344-347).	
The eldest daughter is living with me, without any contact with her father. She's freer to talk now than when she lived with her father, but the thoughts (related to the abuse) are still impacting her. I tell her to forget the bad things her father used to tell her about me and about her (Kelly, lines 414-418).	It-tifla l-kbira qed tghix mieghi, minghajr ebda kuntatt ma' missierha. Hija aktar hielsa biex titkellem issa li giet lura minghand missierha, iżda l-hsibijiet (relatati mal-abbuż) ghadhom jaffetwawha. Nghidilha biex tinsa l-affarijiet hżiena li missierha kien jghidilha fuqi u fuqha (Kelly, linji 414-418).
He (her youngest son) was very young. He didn't understand what happened. Before he used to see me happy. Before he had his siblings living with him, and then they left with their father. That's why he got a dog (Sara, lines 466-468).	Hu (l-iżghar iben) kien żgħir hafna. Ma fehemx x'gara. Qabel kien jarani kuntenta. Qabel kellu lil hutu jghixu mieghu, u mbagħad telqu ma' missierhom. Huwa ghalhekk ghandu l-kelb (Sara, linji 466-468).
The youngest daughter asks me why did they leave? It's hard to explain. It affects her that she is not with her other siblings, because she has no one to play with (Kelly, lines 493-495).	L-iżghar tifla tistaqsini ghaliex telqu? Huwa diffiċli biex tispjega. Taffettwaha li mhix ma' hutha l-oħra, ghax m'ghandhiex ma' min tilghab (Kelly, linji 493-495).
This is grief that has no end. It is worse than losing a child to death, because in the same way, you are not seeing them. These two	Dan huwa wġiħ ta' qalb li m'ghandux tmiem. Huwa aghar milli meta titlef tifel minhabba l-mewt, ghax bl-istess mod ma

children were the only children I had, they were my life. I never had jewels. My children were my jewels. This is hell. This is the worst punishment one can give to a parent. It is a huge punishment. There are no words that can describe this huge grief... as there is no resolution (Lucy, lines 433-438).	tkunx qed tarahom. Dawn iż-żewġt itfal kienu l-uniċi tfal li kelli, kienu ħajti. Qatt ma kelli ġawhar. Uliedi kienu l-ġawhar tiegħi. Dan ta' issa huwa infern. Din hija l-aġħar piena li wiehed jista' jagħti lil ġenitur. Hija kastig kbir. M'hemm l-ebda kliem li jista' jiddeskrivi dan in-niket kbir... peress li m'hemmx soluzzjoni (Lucy, linji 433-438).
I remember looking forward to having a daughter and growing up my daughter. Whoever posts photos on Facebook with their daughter makes me remember what was stolen from me and from her, so it's an ongoing reminder...I wasn't present when she had her period...pivot moments in a relationship between mother and daughter, buying her first bra, becoming a woman, or having her first boyfriend or putting on make-up...rites of passage leading to adulthood... Her wedding, her graduation, finding a job, interviews. I can't cherish any of this (Sara, lines 781-790).	Niftakar li kont qed nistenna bil-herqa li jkolli tifla, u li nixjeh ma' binti. Min ipoġġi ritratti fuq facebook ma' binthom iġegħelni niftakar dak li nsteraq minghandi u minghandha, għalhekk hija tifikira kontinwa...Ma kontx preżenti meta kellha l-<i>period</i>...mument i importanti fir-relazzjoni bejn omm u bint, meta xtrat l-ewwel <i>bra</i> tagħha, saret mara, jew kellha l-ewwel għarus tagħha jew meta bdiet tuża l-<i>make-up</i>...ritwali li jimmarkaw l-mogħdija miż-żgħożija għall-età adulta... It-tieg tagħha, il-gradwazzjoni tagħha, issib impjieg, intervisti biex issib xogħol. Ma nista' ngħożż xejn minn dan kollu (Sara, linji 781-790).

He made me lose my time with them. I didn't have the opportunity to build a relationship as an adult with an adult, because before I was their caregiver, but he didn't give me the opportunity to be like a friend to them (Karen, lines 22-30).	Hu tellifli l-hin tieghi magħhom. Ma kellix l-opportunità li nibni r-relazzjoni tieghi ta' adulta ma' adulti,ghax qabel kont il-<i>caregiver</i> tagħhom, imma ma tanix l-opportunità li nkun bhal habiba tagħhom (Karen, linji 22-30).
There were days where I even cried with him, when my mother and I had to tell him to go back with his father. It's not nice at all...it's like a loss every time (Mariah, lines 372-374).	Kien hemm granet fejn anke bkejt miegħu, meta ommi u jien ġejna biex nġhidulu jmur lura għand missieru. Mhu sabiħ xejn...huwa bhal telfa kull darba (Mariah, linji 372-374).
I received help and love. I never expected to receive this great support from them, and we grew closer to each other (Karen, line 31).	Irċivejt għajjnuna u mhabba. Qatt ma stennejt li nirċievi dan l-appoġġ kbir mingħandhom, u sirna eqreb ta' xulxin (Karen, linja 31).
My children were advised by family members from my side, who sided with my ex-husband, not to talk to me and they were forced by the same family members to use the services of their father's lawyer... as if I had separated from my children, not from my ex-husband. These things are absurd. I have court cases with my children against me (Lucy, lines 317-320).	Uliedi ngħataw parir minn membri tal-familja min-naħa tieghi, li kienu jzomm mal-eks żewġi, biex ma jkellmunix u kienu mġieghla minn dawn l-istess membri tal-familja biex jinqdew bl-avukat ta' missierhom... bhallikieku sseparajt minn ma' wliedi, mhux mill-eks raġel tieghi. Dawn l-affarijiet huma assurdi. Għandi kawżi fil-qorti ma' wliedi kontriġa (Lucy, linji 317-320).

Thanks to God I always had a good relationship with my parents, because in them I found moral, even financial support (Karen, lines 720-721).	Ghall-grazzja t'Alla dejjem kelli relazzjoni tajba mal-ġenituri tiegħi, għax fihom sibt appoġġ morali, u anke finanzjarju (Karen, linji 720-721).
I used to feel very comfortable with the second social worker of the shelter. My ex-husband couldn't influence her, so she understood me a lot (Doris, lines 830-832).	Kont inhossni komda hafna mat-tieni <i>social worker</i> tax-xelter. L-eks raġel tiegħi ma setax jinfluwenzaha, allura hija fhemitni hafna (Doris, linji 830-832).
I only have the social worker, my friend, her mother, my partner. My mother and my siblings don't talk to me, nor does my grandmother. I have to forget all kinds of support from my family, even though one expects support from their family (Kelly, lines 503-505).	Ghandi biss is- <i>social worker</i> , haġiba tiegħi, ommha, il-partner tiegħi. Ommi u huti ma jkellmunix, lanqas nannti. Kelli ninsa kull tip ta' appoġġ mill-familja tiegħi, anki jekk wiehed jistenna appoġġ mill-familja tiegħu (Kelly, linji 503-505).
My parents try to help me, but I don't have much support in my life. My psychiatrist tells me I don't have emotional support in my daily life...While my parents provide me with food, they don't offer the emotional support I need (Mikela, lines 359-363).	Il-ġenituri tiegħi jippruvaw jgħinuni, imma m'għandix hafna sappport f'hajti. Il-psikjatra tiegħi jgħidli li m'għandix sappport emozzjonali fil-hajja ta' kuljum...Il-ġenituri tiegħi jagħtuni l-ikel, imma fejn jidhol sappport emozzjonali ma jissapportjawnix (Mikela, linji 359-363).

I found no support, from anywhere and from anyone, neither from the police, nor from the court, nor from psychologists (Hayley, lines 14-15).	Ma sibt l-ebda appogg, minn imkien u minn hadd, la mill-pulizija, u la mill-qorti, lanqas minn psikologi (Hayley, lines 14-15).
I wish that things improve, that if it is found that he caused parental alienation, that there are criminal consequences. Because for me this is abuse! (Maria, lines 791-793).	Nixtieq li l-affarijiet jitjiebu, li jekk jinstab li kkawża aljenazzjoni, ikun hemm konsegwenzi kriminali. Ghax ghalija dan huwa abbuż! (Maria, linji 791-793).
There needs to be support groups...there needs to be people trained in the subject and I think I would have benefited from group counseling, where you listen to parents who are going through it... sending children to therapy even when there is a normal separation because the risk of parental alienation increases (Lucy, lines 650-664).	Ghandu jkun hemm gruppi ta' support... jehtieg li jkun hemm nies imharrga fis-suggett u nahseb li kont nibbenefika minn <i>group counselling</i>, fejn tisma' lill-ġenituri li jkunu għaddejjin minnha... li t-tfal jintbagħtu għat-terapija anke meta jkun hemm separazzjoni normali ghax jiżdied ir-riskju ta' aljenazzjoni parentali (Lucy, linji 650-664).
I would like children to be given the right to a psychologist, parents cannot speak to the psychologist. They can't in any way influence them, they have to get to know the children, get to know them directly, not from what the parents say... and one has to be specialized in this sector, because you have	Nixtieq li t-tfal jingħataw id-dritt għal <i>psychologist</i>, il-ġenituri ma jistgħux ikellmu lis-<i>psychologist</i>. Ma jistgħu bl-ebda mod jinfluwenzawhom, jridu jsiru jafu lit-tfal, isiru jafhom direttament, mhux minn dak li jgħidu l-ġenituri...u wiehed irid ikun speċjalizzat f'dan is-settur, ghax trid tibni l-esperjenza (Hayley, linji 782-799).

to build the experience (Hayley, lines 782-799).	
Their father used to lie. He kept saying that I was beating them, maltreating them, that I don't feed them (Kelly, lines 429-430).	Missierhom kien jigdeb. Kien qed jghid li kont qed insawwathom, nittrattahom ħazin, li ma nitmagħhomx (Kelly, lines 429-430).
My ex-husband used to call me crazy. He invented false things about me, such as claiming that I showed pornography to my son (Mikela, lines 46-47).	L-eks raġel tiegħi kien jghidli miġnuna. Kien ivvinta affarijiet li mhux minnhom dwari, bhal li jiena urejt l-pornografija lil ibni (Mikela, linji 46-47).
So if you want, I can start showing you photos of my relationship with my son Mike, on Instagram...you will see my son, very young. We had a very good relationship..I also keep and show these photos as proof of our relationship (Maria, lines 2-5).	Mela jekk trid, nista' nibda nurik ritratti tar-relazzjoni tiegħi ma' ibni Mike, fuq Instagram... tara lil ibni zghir hafna. Kellna relazzjoni tajba hafna..Inzomm u nuri wkoll dawn ir-ritratti bhala prova tar-relazzjoni tagħna (Maria, linji 2-5).
Do you want to hear the recording? I have nothing to hide. You need to keep everything and I used to make the social workers listen and I kept telling them what happened but they didn't listen and understand me (Karen, lines 65-68).	Trid tisma' r-recording? M'ghandi xejn x'naħbi. Trid iżzomm kollox u kont ingieghel lis-social workers jisimghu u qed nghidilhom x'gara imma ma semghunix u ma fehmunix (Karen, linji 65-68).
Maybe there are more men that are suffering from this and that's why people judge. But	Forsi hemm aktar irġiel li qed ibatu minn din u għalhekk in-nies jiġġudikaw. Imma hemm nisa wkoll (Doris, linji 765-766).

there are women as well (Doris, lines 765-766).	
There are certain expectations...and women are judged very harshly. Women have high standards to meet, unlike men. For men it's okay if they are weaker dads, and take the children to eat junk food. If a mother gives her children junk food, what is she giving him to eat? So it's not easy, as a woman to open up and say, I don't have my children anymore. Because automatically, the reasoning is that if the father took them from the mother...she must have done something. For men they don't say this as much as they say this for women (Sara, lines 330-342).	Hemm ċerti aspettattivi... u n-nisa huma ġġudikati b'mod aħrax ħafna. In-nisa għandhom standards għoljin li jridu jilhq, differenti mill-irġiel. Għall-irġiel huwa okay jekk huma missirijiet aktar dgħajfa, u jieħdu lit-tfal biex jieklu l-<i>junk food</i>. Jekk omm tagħti lil uliedha <i>junk food</i>, x'qed tagħtih jiekol? Għalhekk mhux faċli, bhala mara li tiftah qalbha u tghid, m'għadx għandi lill-uliedi. Għax awtomatikament, ir-raġunament hu li jekk hađhom minghand l-omm... żgur li għamlet xi ħaġa. Għall-irġiel ma jghidux dan daqskemm jghiduh għan-nisa (Sara, linji 330-342).
She had her birthday, the younger one, I brought her a card. I called the school, but my daughter didn't want to come to talk to me...I had to leave the card with the caretaker...he told me that she was happy, and that she started smiling when she opened the card (Karen, lines 599-608).	Kellha għeluq sninha, iż-żgħira, xtrajtilha <i>card</i>. Ċempilt l-iskola, imma binti ma riditx tiġi tkellimni...Kelli nħalli l-<i>card</i> mal-<i>caretaker</i>...qalli li kienet ferħana, u li bdiet titbissem meta fethet il-<i>card</i> (Karen, linji 599-608).

The headmaster informed my ex-husband that a boy who was supposed to come to the school didn't show up, and that he brought a new uniform and left it here. He asked him, "Do you want a new uniform?", and his father agreed to take it. That's how I tricked him, because since that uniform was too small for my son, I didn't want him to wear it (Hayley, lines 307-310).	Is-surmast qal lill-eks raġel tiegħi li kien hemm tifel li kien se jiġi l-iskola, u mbagħad ma ġiex, u li xtara uniformi ġdida, u ħallieha hawn. Qallu, "Taċċetta uniformi ġdida?", u missieru aċċetta biex johodha. Hekk qarraqt bih, għax dik l-uniformi kienet żghira wisq għal ibni, u jien ma ridtux jilbisha (Hayley, linji 307-310).
I believe that studies like this, can possibly lead to more awareness about the topic (Maria, line 700).	Nemmen li studji bħal dan, jistgħu possibilment iwasslu għal aktar għarfien fuq dan is-sugġett (Maria, linja 700).