

MISINFORMATION REGARDING PARENTAL ALIENATION – 2015a

Article Containing Misinformation

Miguel Clemente & Dolores Padilla-Racero (2015). Are children susceptible to manipulation? The best interest of children and their testimony. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 51:101–107.

Abstract: In Richard Gardner’s proposed parental alienation syndrome, children reject contact with the noncustodial parent due to manipulation from the custodial parent. We investigated whether children are, in fact, easily manipulated, and how. Half of a sample of children ages 6 to 12 witnessed an incident of verbal aggression, while the other half did not. All were asked to report what happened. Half were then subjected to high pressure, stating that the aggressor would be their future teacher. Subjects were furthermore told that the perpetrator was either a good person or a bad person. After these two manipulations they reported again what they had witnessed. The results indicate that children rarely lie, and that although 40% of those who witnessed nothing created a false memory of an aggressive incident, this outcome was not influenced by the degree of pressure or positive or negative manipulation. We found no significant differences based on gender or age. We conclude that Gardner’s ideas about parental alienation syndrome, and in particular the ease of parental manipulation of children, were not empirically verified. We recommend that this concept not be used in the legal system.

Article Refuting Misinformation

William Bernet, Maria Christina Verrocchio, & Stanley Korosi (2015). Yes, children are susceptible to manipulation: Commentary on article by Clemente and Padilla-Racero. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 56:135–138

Abstract: The recently published article by Clemente and Padilla-Racero made incorrect statements regarding Richard Gardner and the mental condition that he identified, parental alienation syndrome. Clemente and Padilla-Racero conducted research on children and concluded, “Gardner’s ideas about parental alienation syndrome, and in particular the ease of parental manipulation of children, were not empirically verified.” When we reviewed the data from their own research, we arrived at the opposite conclusion, i.e., that over 40% of child subjects, age 6 to 12, were manipulated by adult suggestion to describe a non-event. We conclude that the data of Clemente and Padilla-Racero were consistent with Gardner’s theory that a parent can influence a child to make false statements about the other parent and to develop false beliefs and ultimately false memories of non-events. That article, which features misinformation and methodological flaws, should be withdrawn from publication.