

## Digital Age And Family Dynamics: The Role Of Social Networks In Facilitating Parental Alienation

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### Abstract:

This article investigates the interaction between the digital age and family dynamics, focusing specifically on the role of social networks in facilitating parental alienation. Using an interdisciplinary methodology based on a literature review, which includes perspectives from Family Law, Digital Law, psychology and education, the study analyzes the changes in family relationships in the digital context. Furthermore, the results show that social networks exacerbate parental alienation, adversely affecting children's emotional development and well-being. In this context, there is a need for specific methods to detect parental alienation in digital environments, as well as the importance of public policies aimed at combating it. Finally, we conclude that there is an urgent need for intervention and prevention strategies adapted to the digital context, which is the only way to protect and maintain harmony in family relationships in the digital age.

**Key Word:** Parental Alienation. Social Networks. Family dynamics. Digital Age. Psycho-emotional intervention.

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### I. Introduction

In contemporary times, the intersection between family dynamics and the digital age has aroused growing interest and concern, especially with regard to the influence of social networks in the context of parental alienation. According to recent studies (Duque; Abreu, 2021), the transition to the virtual world has expanded the boundaries of human relationships, providing new means of communication and interaction, as well as introducing unprecedented challenges, such as the manifestation of parental alienation on digital platforms.

With this in mind, the aim of this study is to contribute new perspectives on the phenomenon of alienation in the contemporary world by examining how social networks, as a virtual space for interaction, have been used to facilitate this phenomenon. This work, therefore, will address not only the concept and historical evolution of parental alienation, but will focus on analyzing the mechanisms used in social networks to perpetuate situations of parental alienation.

Thus, the questions that will guide this study are: How have social networks become fertile ground for perpetuating parental alienation? What are the impacts and experiences of children exposed to this phenomenon? What are the methods and indicators for identifying parental alienation on social media? And finally, what interventions and strategies can be adopted to prevent and combat this phenomenon in digital spaces?

It is clear that such research is very important, because social networks are used by people of all ages and therefore affect family dynamics and the relationship between parents and children. Even because they are characterized by high personal exposure, social networks have increasingly had a direct impact on the emotional state of children and their respective parents.

It should also be noted that in order to achieve the objectives set, a methodology based on a broad and in-depth literature review will be adopted, which includes an interdisciplinary qualitative approach, incorporating, for example, contributions from renowned jurists specializing in Family Law and Digital Law, such as Maria Helena Diniz (2023) and Rolf Madaleno (2018), as well as authors specializing in the intersection between Law and Technology, such as Eduardo Magrani (2021). In addition, the perspectives of eminent authors in the field of education and psychology will be integrated, including Howard Gardner (1985), Carol Dweck (1988) and Daniel Goleman (1999).

This approach will allow for a solid and comprehensive analysis of family dynamics in the digital age, with a focus on parental alienation facilitated by social networks. The aim is to provide a theoretical and practical

basis for professionals, parents and society in general, especially with regard to promoting a healthy and safe environment for children's development in the digital age.

## **II. Teleworking legislation in the home office modality**

Parental alienation, as defined in Law 12.318 of August 26, 2010, is a complex phenomenon that manifests itself in family dynamics, in which one of the parents, or authority figure, influences a child or adolescent to reject the other parent (BRASIL, 2010). This influence can occur through emotional or psychological manipulation or intentional distancing, and is common in post-divorce or separation contexts (MADALENO, 2018).

The term "parental alienation" was first coined by psychiatrist Richard Gardner in 1985. According to the author, parental alienation occurs when one of the parents, usually in custody disputes, manipulates the child into rejecting the other parent, causing symptoms that include extreme and unjustified fear, disrespect or hostility towards the alienated parent:

Among the various types of psychological disorders that can be caused by such litigation, there is one in particular that I am focusing on here. Although this syndrome certainly existed in the past, it is occurring with such increasing frequency at the moment that it deserves a special name. The term I prefer to use is parental alienation syndrome. I introduced this term to refer to a disorder in which children are obsessed with belittling and criticizing one of their parents - an unjustified and/or exaggerated denigration. The idea that such children are merely "brainwashed" is limited. The term brainwashing implies that one parent is systematically and consciously programming the child to denigrate the other. The concept of parental alienation syndrome includes the brainwashing component, but is much broader. It includes not only conscious, but also subconscious and unconscious factors within the parent that contribute to the alienation of the child. In addition (and this is extremely important), it includes factors that arise within the child themselves - independent of the parents' contributions - that contribute to the development of the syndrome. (GARDNER, 1985, p. 1)

Gardner also identified eight characteristic symptoms in the child, namely:

Campaign to defame the alienated parent; Frivolous and frivolous reasons for the child's depreciation of the parent; Lack of ambivalence in the child; The phenomenon of the independent thinker, categorical statements by the child that the decision to reject is theirs alone; Automatic support for the alienating parent in the parental conflict; Absence of a feeling of guilt on the part of the offspring regarding the cruelty and/or exploitation of the alienated parent; Enactments and phrases used by the child in repetition of the alienating parent; and Propagation of animosity with friends and relatives of the alienated parent. (SAMPAIO, 2019, p. 26)

Gardner then divided parental alienation into mild, moderate and severe levels, with different management recommendations for each level:

According to Gardner (2002d), there would be three levels of PA: mild, moderate and severe. In the mild type, the alienation is relatively superficial. The custodial parent would still allow and cooperate with visitation, but would be intermittently critical and unhappy with the non-custodial parent. In the moderate type, the alienation would be more sophisticated. The children would be more upset and disrespectful towards the non-custodial parent and the smear campaign would be almost continuous. In the last type, the severe type, visitation would be impossible because the child would be so hostile; hostile to the point of being physically violent towards the allegedly alienated parent. (DE ALCÂNTARA MENDES, 2019, p. 14)

Nevertheless, Gardner's proposals, especially on intervention for moderate and severe cases, including the transfer of custody to the alienated parent, fines, house arrest and incarceration, were harshly criticized for their punitive nature and for posing risks of abuse of power and violation of civil rights (Sottomayor, 2011). This led Gardner to revise his views over time, expressing less support for more aggressive management strategies (Waquim, 2015).

Furthermore, the scientific validity of Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS), defended by Gardner, has been widely questioned. According to psychologist Willian O'Donohue, PAS (or just PA, as the author prefers) has not been accepted by the majority of psychology experts, nor has it been fully introduced into legal systems other than Brazil:

With the exception of Brazil, all these cases show that countries tend to promote a "semi-recognition" of PA assumptions. In other words, countries recognize that there may be acts similar to what Gardner described as parental alienation, but they reject the existence of parental alienation syndrome for the purposes of creating laws and/or using it in cases of custody disputes after parental separation. It is worth remembering that the assumptions of PA have not been recognized by any professional class organization in the world to date (Willis; O'Donohue, 2018 apud De Alcântara Mendes, 2019, p. 20).

The American Psychological Association has even expressed concerns about the lack of data supporting the term SAP and how it is used (FERREIRA; ENZWEILER, 2014). In this same paradigm, Courts in England and Wales have rejected SAP, recommending that it not be used to consider child custody issues:

As already pointed out in the preamble to this article, very few countries have enshrined the use of SAP in law or made it more specific in their jurisprudence, either because of its lack of scientific credibility or because of the serious repercussions that its uncritical and malicious use can have on families and, above all, on children. So much so that the Courts of England and Wales, for example, have expressly rejected it, while the Canadian Department of Justice, after some initial enthusiasm and hesitation, has finally advised against its use. Medical-scientific and mental health societies throughout the civilized Western world, including the WHO - World Health Organization, the APA - American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association and the combative AEN - Asociación Española de Neuropsiquiatría, strongly condemn it (FERREIRA; ENZWEILER, 2014, p. 114).

Despite the international controversy, in Brazil it is a fact that SAP has been considered in several judgments, as well as being the subject of several multidisciplinary studies in the academic sphere in this country. In any case, it is crucial that the legal analysis of parental alienation takes into account the complexity of the phenomenon, assessing not only the obvious actions of alienation, but also the more subtle signs and underlying family dynamics that contribute to the gradual erosion of the parental bond.

That said, the approach should be holistic, taking into account the best interests of the child and the preservation of family harmony, thereby avoiding labels and simplistic diagnoses that can ignore the multifaceted reality of disputed family relationships.

### **Historical evolution: from the living room to digital screens**

Parental alienation, as a complex phenomenon in family dynamics, has its origins and evolution intrinsically linked to social and technological changes over time. As we have seen, in the 1980s, American psychiatrist Richard Gardner observed symptoms of parental alienation in children involved in divorce disputes, indicating that manipulation by parents caused fear or rejection of the other parent (GARDNER, 1985).

Furthermore, in the Brazilian context, with Law 12.318/2010, parental alienation gained a legal definition in the country, conceptualizing it as interference in the psychological formation of a child or adolescent so that they repudiate one of their parents (DINIZ, 2023). In fact, studies (CRUZ, 2012) point out that in Brazil, at least in the recent past, a culture prevailed where children were seen as the property of their parents, which exacerbated conflicts after marital separation:

The exercise of parental authority was a right of the parents and implied a relationship of subordination in which it was assumed that the determinations of the parents would be beneficial to the children due to their supremacy. Children were seen as the property of their parents, to whom they owed obedience and, once they reached adulthood, they had to contribute to a dignified life for their parents in old age. Of course, the parental relationship was eminently economic. Numerous offspring constituted a triple guarantee: manpower to continue the family business, a means of transferring and maintaining property in the same family and a guarantee for the parents of care in old age. (CRUZ, 2012, p. 5)

On the other hand, with the rise of digital technologies, parental alienation has transcended the physical space, finding in digital platforms a new field for spreading negative influences. Now, according to the teachings of Madaleno (2018), traditionally, parental alienation manifested itself within the family environment, such as in the "living rooms" of homes, where one of the parents negatively influenced the child's perception of the other parent. This type of emotional and psychological manipulation occurred mainly through direct, everyday interactions, and was a phenomenon more restricted to the family's inner circle.

However, with the advent and popularization of the internet, there has been a significant change in the dynamics of parental alienation (DUQUE; ABREU, 2021). Social media has become an open personal diary, where the dispute for children's loyalty, once confined to the domestic space, now extends to the virtual public space:

According to Bauman, "'being a celebrity' (that is, being constantly exposed to the public eye, with no need or right to private secrecy) is today the most widespread and popular model of success" (2011, p. 41). However, this exposure is not raw: people select the aspects they want to share on their virtual social networks, constructing an "after-image", i.e. reality doesn't matter. What matters is presenting a desirable image that provokes certain reactions from the public: admiration, envy or other emotions. In this context, it should be remembered that "it is common for friends and family to have contact with each other through social networks. However, the more precarious the direct communication between these people, the greater the chances of conflicts and/or misunderstandings developing" (ABREU, 2017a, p. 267). This identifies the phenomenon of deliberately constructing distorted images of the family arrangement as part of a process of parental alienation. This gives rise to what is known as digital parental alienation (DUQUE; ABREU, 2021, p. 33).

This transition notably amplifies the scope and effects of the phenomenon of parental alienation, transforming it into a public and global issue. After all, family interaction, which previously took place in a private environment, now unfolds on a digital stage where family conflicts are exposed and judged by an extensive and

diverse audience. This calls for professionals, parents and society in general to re-evaluate and adapt legal and social strategies to deal with parental alienation in the digital age.

### **III. Social networks: the new tools of parental alienation**

It is well known that social networks have transformed communication and human interaction, especially in the family context. They have therefore emerged as powerful tools for parental alienation (ARAÚJO, 2020), offering a favorable space for manipulation and distortion. This is because the speed with which information is shared on social networks and its wide dissemination makes untruths quickly known, increasing the complexity and, therefore, the scope of parental alienation (SILVA, 2023).

In this powerful virtual environment (LORENZO, 2015), parents can, for example, publish defamatory information, manipulate photographs and omit relevant communications. They can therefore create a scenario in which false environments and narratives are constructed, causing significant damage to family relationships and affecting children's perceptions of the defamed parent.

In addition, children are often deeply impacted by such acts (OTHON, 2021), after all, the process of parental alienation can lead children to experience severe psychological disorders, including poor school performance, conflicts in relationships with friends, mood swings, melancholy and low self-esteem:

Fonseca (2007) states that as a result of SAP, the child may start to show various symptoms. At a certain point, psychosomatic illnesses, anxiety, nervousness, depression and even aggression can be observed. In more serious cases, chronic depression, hostile behaviour, mental disorganization, identity disorders and even suicide can be observed. In later stages of development, the risks of triggering psychoactive substance abuse behavior become greater. According to Trindade (2007), conflicts can appear in children in the form of insecurity and fear, difficulties at school, isolation, low tolerance for frustration, irritability, enuresis, sadness, image or identity disorders, feelings of despair, guilt and split personalities. According to Féres-Carneiro (2007) another consequence of the Syndrome can be the imitation of the model of instructed behavior. This can be seen when one of the parents is seen as totally bad, as opposed to the one who has custody, who is seen as entirely good. The child is not only left with a dualistic view of their parents, but is also deprived of one of their parents as an identifying example (FONSECA, 2007; TRINDADE, 2007; FÉRES-CARNEIRO, 2007; APUD DE SOUZA CAMPOS; GONÇALVES, 2016).

It is therefore essential for parents, educators and professionals to be attentive to patterns of interaction on social networks and to be able to identify signs of manipulation and distortion. Preventive and educational strategies are needed to guide and protect children from these harmful behaviors, ensuring their psychological and emotional well-being in the digital environment.

#### **Virtual scars on children: the emotional and psychological effects on children**

Parental alienation, exacerbated by social networks, causes deep "virtual scars" on children's emotional and psychological well-being. These scars are invisible but long-lasting damages resulting from manipulation and distortion strategies employed by parents.

As already highlighted, in the digital environment, children are exposed to defamatory and distorted content about one of their parents, which can cause confusion, distress and emotional conflict. This type of exposure intensifies the emotional burden and contributes to an internal conflict that is detrimental to the child's emotional development. The alienating parent often uses the child as an instrument of retaliation against the other parent, which can result in painful psychological consequences, such as poor school performance, conflict in relationships with friends, mood swings, melancholy, low self-esteem and, in extreme cases, even depression (DE SOUZA CAMPOS; GONÇALVES, 2016).

In addition, as soon as the manipulation intensifies, the child may show doubts and disorientation, symptoms of Parental Alienation Syndrome. This includes a drop in self-esteem, increased aggression or sadness, impaired school performance, and even the development of depression, anxiety and panic disorder. In the medium term, these children run a higher risk of turning to alcohol and drugs in adolescence and, in the long term, they tend to have difficulties maintaining stable and happy emotional relationships:

The consequences of a child being alienated are countless, and can harm them in their development as a child, in their thoughts, in their education and especially in their relationships with other people, which in the future can harm them at work, at home and in romantic relationships. What's more, the alienated person can carry from childhood the worst feelings for a head still developing values and principles, such as hatred, distrust, depression, panic, anxiety that the alienator invents about one or both of their parents (SOARES, 2017, p. 4).

To mitigate the effects of these virtual scars, it is vital to adopt therapeutic approaches and psychological support. These strategies can help the child process and overcome the emotional and psychological damage caused by parental alienation, helping to rebuild self-esteem, manage emotions and rebuild family ties.

### **Virtual windows to pain: children's experiences in the online world**

Parental alienation mediated by social media creates "virtual windows" for negative emotional experiences for children, since digital platforms expose children to an emotionally charged environment (Martins, 2019). There, parental conflicts unfold publicly, virtual exposure that puts children in a vulnerable position, confronting them with information that damages their perception of and relationship with one of their parents.

Children face a confusing dichotomy in this scenario. On the one hand, they actively participate in social networks, and on the other, they are subjected to content that undermines the image of one of their parents. This constant exposure to defamatory and manipulative messages can result in feelings of confusion, insecurity and anxiety, affecting the child's healthy and stable development (DOS SANTOS, 2022).

Studies even indicate that the presence of discord in the family environment, as observed in online interactions, is associated with the etiology of emotional disorders in children and adolescents (COSTA, 2022). Marital conflict, especially those marked by adversity and violence, substantially affects children's emotional, cognitive and social development:

In the quest to legally uphold parents' right to educate, a law was created to transcribe spanking as an educational method to be used by parents, something that has generated a great deal of debate among professional educators, legislators and psychologists. Some consider that spanking is part of the educational process to be used by parents in their activities, while psychologists consider that aggression through spanking can have a profound impact on children's development. Corporal punishment as a way of punishing children's bad behavior is an ancient practice, and is generally accepted by society to this day. The issue is that often, in an attempt to "correct", many parents or guardians can commit excesses, exposing these children to serious risks to their physical and mental health, and possibly leading to the child's death. When they are beaten, the child's self-esteem is compromised, which can lead to image problems for the rest of their life. (OLIVEIRA, 2021, p. 43)

The online world therefore amplifies and makes public marital conflicts, profoundly impacting children's psychological and emotional well-being. To mitigate these harmful effects, it is crucial to implement intervention strategies, such as psychological therapy and support programs, helping children to process and overcome the negative impacts of these virtual experiences.

## **IV. Unmasking the online alienator: spotting the signs**

### **Portrait of the online alienator: psychological and behavioral profile**

The online alienator's behavior is a multifaceted phenomenon (FRANÇA, 2015), influenced by psychological, behavioral and contextual factors. Individuals with this profile tend to show traits of manipulation and distortion, negatively affecting the child's relationship with the targeted parent (DINIZ, 2023).

The psychological profile of the online alienator often includes narcissistic and manipulative characteristics (Gardner, 1985). The literature suggests a connection between narcissism and the tendency to distort the child's perception of the alienated parent:

One can see in the speech of the betrayed parents that there is a veiled bitterness that remains even after the divorce and the establishment of a new union. In addition, this bitterness is reminiscent of the figure of the excluded third party that FREUD (1914) points to as an infantile narcissistic wound from the time when the Oedipal Complex was passed through (FREUD 1914 apud GUILHERME et al., 2014).

Narcissism, in this context, is associated with a search for control and power, reflected in the desire to project an idealized image of oneself and the devaluation of the other parent (GONÇALVES, 2023, p. 16). Additionally, the presence of antisocial personality traits can be indicative of the online alienator's behavior (SANTOS, 2022). These individuals, in line with Gardner's (1985) pioneering studies, generally show a lack of empathy and disregard for the rights and feelings of the alienated parent, manipulating information to achieve personal goals without taking the child's well-being into account.

Stênico (2016) argues that a striking feature of online alienation is the need for control and domination. This, specifically in cases involving the family, often manifests itself through actions aimed at obstructing or damaging contact and communication between the child and the target parent, using digital platforms to facilitate this isolation (DUQUE; ABREU, 2021).

According to Denise Maria Perissini da Silva (2009), the alienator also usually projects an image of themselves as the ideal parent, seeking to win the sympathy and approval of others, often to the detriment of the targeted parent, which they do through biased narratives and posts that present themselves as victims or as the only responsible caregiver, contributing to the devaluation of the other parent:

The following are behaviors of the alienator: 1. refusing to pass on telephone calls to the children; 2. organizing various activities with the children during the period in which the other parent should normally be exercising visitation rights; 3. Introducing the new spouse or partner to the children as "their new mother" or "their new father"; 4. Intercepting the children's correspondence (by any means: internet, MSN, Orkut, torpedoes, letters, telegrams, phone calls, etc.); 5. Belittling and insulting the other parent in the presence of the children; 6. Refusing to inform the other parent about extra-curricular activities in which the children are involved; 7. Preventing the

other parent from exercising their right to visit; 8. "Forgetting" to notify the other parent of important appointments (dentists, doctors, psychologists); 9. Involving people close to them (mother, new spouse, etc.) in "brainwashing" the children; 10. Making important decisions about the children without consulting the other parent (choice of religion, school, etc.); etc. (SILVA, 2009, p. 55).

Therefore, the online alienator's behavioral dynamics are intricate and motivated by various psychological factors. These include the difficulty of coping with the separation, the desire for revenge, the need for excessive control and the quest to maintain power and influence over the family dynamic.

### **The digital magnifying glass: early detection methods**

Early detection of parental alienation in social networks is a complex process that requires specific methodological strategies to minimize its adverse impacts on children's psycho-emotional development.

The adoption of targeted approaches and appropriate analysis tools is fundamental to identifying behavioral indicators and patterns that signal the occurrence of this phenomenon:

The first step to safely identifying acts of parental alienation is for everyone involved to be accompanied by psychologists, a large qualified team, so as not to cause further damage and trauma, because the quicker parental alienation is identified, the better it will be to remedy it and not cause greater harm. (OLIVEIRA, 2022)

For cases of alienation in virtual environments. In this regard, Schwartz (2021) recommends rigorous monitoring of children's interactions on social media. This process requires a detailed understanding of the digital ecosystem and the ways in which children engage with it. A thorough analysis of children's posts, images, videos and digital interactions can reveal evidence of manipulation or distortion in the relationship with the target parent.

The author adds that it is crucial to identify abrupt changes in the behavior or language used by children on social media. Variations in interaction patterns, such as derogatory messages or expressions that indicate discomfort or confusion towards one of the parents, are indicative of potential parental alienation practices (SCHWARTZ, 2021, p. 227).

Observing communication patterns between the child and the targeted parent is another key element for early detection (DIAS, 2011). In this sense, the limitation or absence of online interactions, or the existence of artificial communication barriers established by the alienating parent, are significant signs of potential parental alienation:

In this communication system we can admit that there may be no coincidence between the content of the communication (message) emitted by the source of the communication and the message perceived by the recipient of the communication. This is due to barriers and obstacles to communication, making it difficult to understand the family process and sometimes contributing to instability and imbalance in the system. Communication is important between all family members, but it becomes even more important in the parent-child relationship because the main influence on the moral life of children is essentially exercised by parents, especially younger children (WEISSBOURD, 2010). These blockages can stem from the sender's and receiver's communication skills, in terms of the way they encode and decode messages, as well as their ability to reason about their content (DIAS, 2011, p. 151).

Therefore, the systematic and consistent collection of information is essential to identify behavioral trends over time. This continuous observation makes it possible to assess changes and patterns that may indicate the presence of online parental alienation strategies. In addition, collaboration between specialized professionals, such as psychologists, social workers and family law experts, is vital for effective assessment and detection of online parental alienation. The convergence of different perspectives and expertise can provide a more comprehensive and in-depth view of the behavior and its impact on children.

Finally, the implementation of educational programs aimed at guiding parents, educators and professionals about the signs and consequences of parental alienation mediated by social networks is fundamental for effective detection and intervention. By employing these strategies with sensitivity and discretion, the "digital magnifying glass" becomes a valuable tool in identifying patterns and signs of parental alienation online, allowing for the protection of the emotional and psychological well-being of the children involved.

## **V. Social Media Interventions and Prevention**

### **From connivance to contraction: the role of social networks in prevention**

Although social networks can be a stage for parental alienation, it is true that they can also be turned into platforms for prevention and intervention, applying strategies aimed at education, information and support.

According to Santos (2021), raising awareness is a crucial step in preventing problems in the online world. In the meantime, digital platforms can and should provide effective means of disseminating correct information, clarifying the negative impacts of parental alienation and offering educational resources to parents, educators and professionals (DE MOURA DANTAS et al., 2022). Algorithms and content detection tools, for example, can be developed to identify signs of parental alienation and target appropriate support resources (SILVA; LEONEL, 2023).

Oliveira (2017) argues that educational programs adapted to the digital environment, which promote resilience and communication skills between parents and children, are fundamental for the best development of children and adolescents. This is because these programs can include guidance on healthy communication and conflict management. In addition, online support communities for parents and children are effective alternatives for sharing experiences, advice and guidance, and are also an alternative for emotional and practical support (AMADO, 2014).

In addition, interprofessional collaboration is essential for developing effective prevention strategies (ARAÚJO; GALIMBERTTI, 2013). Joining forces between psychologists, social workers, legal experts and digital technology specialists can result in comprehensive programs that address the complexities of parental alienation on social media. Additionally, the creation of legal guidelines and public policies specific to the digital environment is fundamental to effectively combating parental alienation online, guaranteeing the well-being of children (NASCIMENTO, 2021).

To illustrate the practical application of these strategies, programs such as "Building Family Bridges", "High Road to Reunification", "Time to Put Kids First", "Multi-Modal Family Intervention (MMFI)", "Resetting the Family", "Child Impact Assessment Framework (CIAF)", "Turning Points For Families" and "Restoring Family Connections" have shown positive results in the treatment of parental alienation. These programs offer everything from reunification therapies to outpatient therapeutic interventions, demonstrating the effectiveness of diversified approaches in resolving family conflicts and promoting a healthy family environment (AVALLE, 2022).

In summary, the strategic use of social networks for prevention and intervention, combined with the development of effective support programs, can be decisive in combating parental alienation, guaranteeing healthy and safe development for children.

### **Virtual support networks: supporting victims and families**

In the world of parental alienation, exacerbated by the advent of social media, virtual support networks have emerged as fundamental pillars in providing comprehensive support to victims and their families. These platforms are not just spaces for interaction, but become safe and inclusive havens, facilitating the sharing of experiences, providing guidance and access to crucial resources.

According to AVALLE (2022), the role of these virtual support networks is multifaceted. They can function as specific support groups for individuals affected by parental alienation, encompassing not only the children, but also the parents and extended family members. Once participants find an understanding and welcoming environment, the search for guidance and mutual support help to reduce isolation and combat the stigma often associated with parental alienation.

Furthermore, specialized professionals, such as clinical psychologists, social workers and lawyers with expertise in family law, play a vital role in moderating and guiding these groups. Their presence ensures, according to Nascimento (2021), that the support offered is not only emotional, but also technical and legally grounded, guaranteeing the accuracy and usefulness of the information shared.

In this scenario, these networks offer more than just a space for conversation; they act as distribution centers for valuable information, after all, through them it is possible to disseminate details about available resources, such as family counseling services, mediation clinics and legal support centers (DE MOURA DANTAS et al., 2022).

Not only that, but these communities also function as platforms for raising awareness about legal rights, intervention options and effective strategies for dealing with parental alienation, becoming true educational centers (ARAÚJO; GALIMBERTTI, 2013). Furthermore, interaction in these groups can have a significant therapeutic impact. Offering a space for expressing emotions and sharing coping strategies contributes to the resilience and emotional well-being of those involved (AMADO, 2014).

On the other hand, the implementation of educational and informational programs in support networks broadens the understanding of parental alienation. Workshops, webinars and a variety of educational resources can be made available to guide families through the implications and ways of dealing with the effects of this phenomenon. These alternative virtual support networks represent more than simply a means of support; they are active instruments in promoting social change (MAGRANI, 2021).

In summary, virtual support networks represent a crucial advance in the battle against parental alienation, offering indispensable emotional, informational and practical support. They guarantee a welcoming and informative environment where victims and their families find not only guidance and understanding, but also a path to healing and strengthening the family ties affected by this complex and painful challenge.

## **VI. Final considerations**

This study investigated the interface between the digital age and family dynamics, with a particular focus on the role of social networks in facilitating parental alienation. Through a multidisciplinary approach, it was

possible to identify how digital platforms enhance this phenomenon, with significant repercussions on the family structure and the psycho-emotional development of the children involved.

The analysis showed that the online alienator has specific psychological and behavioral characteristics, which require early detection methods adapted to the digital context. This finding underlines the importance of digital analysis tools in identifying and managing parental alienation, highlighting the need for effective intervention and prevention policies.

Nevertheless, the study highlighted the relevance of virtual support networks as support and education mechanisms, as these platforms emerge as key resources for supporting victims of parental alienation, offering guidance, legal information and emotional support. These networks also play a crucial role in disseminating knowledge about the phenomenon, contributing to public awareness and the promotion of prevention strategies.

The need for public policies and legal interventions specific to the digital context has become evident, with the aim of effectively combating parental alienation online. The interdisciplinary approach of professionals in psychology, social work, family law and digital technology is imperative for the development of integrated strategies that guarantee the protection and healthy development of children.

Furthermore, this work contributes to the field of studies on family dynamics in the digital age, offering an in-depth understanding of the complexity of parental alienation mediated by social networks. That said, the results of this study provide a theoretical and practical framework for researchers, professionals and policymakers, with a view to improving the well-being of children and maintaining harmony in family relationships in the digital environment.

With the advance of digital technologies, research into the impact of technological innovations, such as augmented reality and artificial intelligence, on the dynamics of parental alienation becomes more than timely, as it would offer an innovative insight into family interactions in the digital future. At the same time, the evaluation of specific interventions and policies, as well as the analysis of their effectiveness, are fundamental to the development of effective strategies to prevent and combat parental alienation in the online environment.

Particular focus should be given to the experience of children, where research that allows them to express their perceptions and feelings directly can reveal important aspects about the subjective impact of parental alienation. In addition, studies that examine the psychosocial impacts of this practice on all parties involved - children, alienated and alienating parents - are essential for a complete understanding of the emotional and behavioral effects.

These suggested areas of research are essential for expanding academic knowledge in the field of parental alienation in the digital age and for improving intervention and prevention practices. It is therefore essential to carry out such studies in order to scientifically support approaches to this phenomenon, with a view to child well-being and harmony in family relationships in the digital context.

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