



CHILD CUSTODY OUTCOMES

in cases involving **parental alienation**
and **abuse allegations** in U.S. family courts



COURTS ARE SKEPTICAL of accusations of paternal abuse; this disbelief increases when alienation is cross-claimed

- In simple abuse cases mothers reporting abusive fathers are believed less than half the time on average (41%) — and even less when alleging child abuse (CPA 29%; CSA 15%)
- When fathers respond to abuse claims with an alienation cross-claim, only 23% of mothers are believed (DV 37%; CPA 18% CSA 2%); courts almost never believe child sexualabuse claims (1/51)
- Independent research has found that **50-75% of child sexual abuse allegations in the custody context are believed to be likely valid**, and less than 14% are considered intentionally false



Mothers alleging abuse experience a **LOSS OF CUSTODY**

- In simple abuse cases, 25% of mothers who allege fathers' abuse lose custody — when fathers cross-claim alienation this increases to close to 50%
- 73% of mothers lose custody when the courts believe the mother is an alienator —sometimes even when courts acknowledge the father has abused the mother or children



Court-appointed experts **EXACERBATE GENDER BIAS**

- Court-appointed experts — such as a custody evaluator or Guardian ad Litem (GAL) — are associated with even greater gender bias in outcomes



Alienation defenses are associated with **GENDER BIAS**

- When fathers cross-claim alienation, courts are four-times more likely to disbelieve mothers' allegations of child abuse
- Mothers accused of alienation have twice the odds of losing custody compared to fathers accused of alienation
- In cases where one parent accused the other of abuse and the other cross-claimed alienation, mothers alleging abuse lost custody 50% (81/163) of the time; only 29% (5/17) of fathers in the same position lost custody (this difference is not statistically significant)

MAJOR OUTCOMES

- **Overall, courts only believe mothers' abuse claims 39% of the time**
- **Courts reject mothers' abuse claims far more often when alienation is cross-claimed**
- **When facing accusations of alienation, mothers' custody losses are nearly twice as likely**
- **Credited alienation trumps credited abuse 43% of the time**

READ THE STUDY

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