Mental health and life satisfaction of parents living in an "intact" relationship with the other parent compared to parents who are separated and parents who are estranged from their child/children. A qualitative and a quantitative study.

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Summary:
[The study examines the effects of parent-child alienation on the mental health and life satisfaction of affected parents and compares them with parents from intact and separated families. Parent-child alienation often occurs in high-conflict separations, where children are often instrumentalised. Research shows that not only children, but also parents and other relatives, such as grandparents and siblings, are affected in the long term. It is assumed that at least five people are affected per case, which leads to an estimated total number of 100,000 people affected in Germany every year. Despite its high social relevance, the topic remains largely unexplored and is hardly taken into account politically. The results emphasise the need for a deeper understanding and targeted prevention and support measures].
Keywords: [child well-being, parental mental health, long-term consequences of parent-child alienation, life satisfaction]

Zusammenfassung:
[Die Studie untersucht die Auswirkungen von Eltern-Kind-Entfremdung auf die psychische Gesundheit und Lebenszufriedenheit betroffener Eltern und vergleicht diese mit Eltern aus intakten und getrennten Familien. Eltern-Kind-Entfremdung tritt häufig in hochkonflikthaften Trennungen auf, wobei Kinder oft instrumentalisiert werden. Die Forschung zeigt, dass nicht nur Kinder, sondern auch Eltern sowie weitere Angehörige, wie Großeltern und Geschwister, langfristig betroffen sind. Pro Fall wird von mindestens fünf Betroffenen ausgegangen, was zu einer geschätzten Gesamtzahl von 100.000 Betroffenen jährlich in Deutschland führt. Trotz der hohen gesellschaftlichen Relevanz bleibt das Thema weitgehend unerforscht und wird politisch kaum berücksichtigt. Die Ergebnisse unterstreichen die Notwendigkeit eines tieferen Verständnisses und gezielter Präventions- und Unterstützungsmaßnahmen].

Schlüsselwörter: [Kindeswohl, psychische Gesundheit von Eltern, langfristige Folgen von Eltern-Kind-Entfremdung, Lebenszufriedenheit]

1. Abstract

"So I was practically erased from the life of my child, our child". "It's an existential life crisis, it's an emotionally violent crime that has taken place when you no longer have access to your little (...) child from one day to the next. Yes, and that is the cruellest thing that can happen to you".

These quotes come from interviews with parents who have lost contact with their children following a separation. The statements illustrate the intense emotional pain and existential crisis that parents experience when they are denied a bond with their children. The loss they experience is often compared to a grieving process, as for many parents the child has been "erased" from their lives. The difficulty of finding understanding and support is particularly emphasised, as even friends and professionals who accompany the separation often have little insight into the suffering of the affected parents. The study conducted by Leuphana University in the winter semester 2023/24 investigates this topic further. It analyses the effects of parent-child estrangement on the mental health and life satisfaction of the parents affected and compares their life satisfaction with that of parents from intact and separated families. Both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys were used to record the emotional state of health.

Research shows that parent-child alienation predominantly occurs in high-conflict separations, with children often being used as an "instrument" of emotional conflict. The topic is still little researched in society, but initial studies, for example by Jorge Guerra González and Johanna Jungbauer, point to the long-term psychological and social consequences for the children and parents affected. The results emphasise the importance of a deeper understanding of the dynamics of parent-child alienation in order to develop targeted support services and preventative measures.

This further emphasises the social relevance of the issue. The study shows that in every case of parent-child alienation, it is not only the children who are permanently affected and sometimes deeply damaged, but also the parents. Grandparents, siblings, close friends or other family members may also be involved. It is therefore reasonable to assume that at least five people are affected per case of alienation. While the 2023 study cautiously assumed 20,000 estranged children per year in Germany, it is probably more realistic to speak of a total of 100,000 people affected per year. There is hardly any other area of society that affects so many people but is almost completely outside the focus of political efforts to solve the problem.

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3. Introduction and relevance of the topic

"So I don't think the relationship itself is broken. So feelings, but (...) but on the other hand, my child is gone, as if it had died. You can compare that, it's like grief (...). Permanently."

"So I was practically erased from the life of my child, our child"

"It's an existential life crisis, it's an emotionally violent crime that has taken place when you no longer have access to your little (...) child from one day to the next. Yes, and that's the cruellest thing that can happen to you"

"So I'm stunned that the mother, a friend of mine, said to me: "At least we can come to terms with it, but what you're experiencing is even worse." And this statement, that people who have lost their child say to me (...) that this is worse than losing a child through death. I had to think about that for a week."

(Quotes from conversations with affected parents, 2023)

The selected quotes come from conversations or interviews with parents who have lost contact with their biological children due to a separation situation and illustrate the enormous suffering that parents affected by parent-child estrangement[1] are exposed to. This situation is often difficult for outsiders to understand, both for relatives and friends, as well as for members of divorce-related professions, such as social workers or mediators. This leads to great despair for many of those affected, including a feeling of loneliness and helplessness. Parent-child estrangement mainly occurs in the context of highly conflictual separations and divorces,[2] and is a little-researched phenomenon in Germany. The effects and consequences of separations on children and parents, on the other hand, have been a multi-layered field of research for several years, encompassing legal, psychological, physiological and social dimensions. In Germany, 137,353 marriages were divorced in 2022, 69,626 of which involved underage children[3] (Statista, 2022). These figures do not include the separation of non-marital but cohabiting couples, so the numbers are probably much higher. A separation is always a complex challenge that both the partners and the children involved have to face. Statistics show that only 6.6% of divorces are filed by both partners, with 3.9% of spouses not agreeing to the application (Federal Statistical Office, 2022). It can be deduced from this that many

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[1] This paper and the associated study analyse the consequences for the parents concerned. The extent to which the phenomenon affects the children cannot be considered in the context of this work, as this would go beyond the scope of this study.

[2] In the course of this paper, separation is used synonymously with separation and divorce.

[3] In this study, only relationships with at least one minor child are considered.

separations are accompanied by emotional trauma on one or both sides. This can be problematic because

> Few parents manage to overcome their own hurts, hostilities and accusations after a separation or divorce in order to jointly assume the parental responsibility entrusted and imposed on them by the birth of their child (Katona, 2007, p.8).

Instead of working together to ensure that the children concerned suffer as little as possible, as a result of the separation, and finding new rules and opportunities for regular contact together, many parents use the children as an instrument to hurt the ex-partner. In some cases, this conscious (or unconscious) instrumentalisation of the children can lead to parent-child alienation. A study by the German Youth Institute shows that 20% of children from separated families no longer have contact with one parent. A study by Jorge Guerra González, who holds a doctorate in law , as well as being an economist, social scientist, and supports families in custody disputes, examines the "causes and long-term consequences of separation and alienation proceedings in childhood" (González, 2023, p.1). González focussed on the effects of parent-child alienation on the children concerned. Among other things, González (2024) emphasises that the deliberate alienation of children can be a form of abuse (Laufer, 2024). However, child alienation not only affects the children, but also the parents who are alienated from them. The present study, which was written in the winter semester 2023/24 at Leuphana University and entitled "Mental and physical health and quality of life of parents living in an "intact" relationship compared to parents who are separated and parents who have been alienated from their child/children. A quantitative and a qualitative study" is underway, looking at the effects of child alienation on parents' life satisfaction and mental and physical health. In order to do justice to the complex topic and to show a comprehensive picture of the effects of child alienation on the parents concerned, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were integrated into the study. The qualitative data was collected using a guided interview and the quantitative data using a questionnaire. A total of 82 mothers and fathers from intact, separated and estranged families were interviewed using the questionnaire and the guided interview in order to gain a comprehensive insight into the effects of different family constellations on the life satisfaction and mental and physical health of parents. Each of the six groups consisted of nine to fifteen respondents. The aim of this study is to create a more

comprehensive understanding of the topic through a combination of literature research, the interviews, the quantitative data and expert opinions, thereby helping to make the phenomenon of parent-child alienation more visible. Although the affected parents often suffer greatly from alienation, they often do not realise that they are affected by alienation and how they should and can deal with it. It is therefore difficult to get adequate help and support. In addition, the study is intended to help identify possible difficulties in the family support system with regard to parent-child alienation and thus contribute to the prevention of the phenomenon in the long term. This study first provides an insight into the current state of research, the research interest and the theoretical background of the research. The project plan is then presented in detail by describing and discussing the research question and objectives as well as the procedure and methodology. The results of the study are then analysed in terms of mental and physical health and life satisfaction. The gender aspect, the assessment of the family support system, reasons for remaining in a partnership and the consequences of estrangement are then presented separately. Finally, a conclusion is drawn and the limitations of the study conducted and which further aspects can and should be researched are considered. This project report is based on the above-mentioned study conducted by the seminar "From family law to child protection law - current developments, principles and limitations" by lecturer Jorge Guerra González. In addition, this report is primarily based on scientific work by González, the dissertation by Christian Unger on the subject of "Adults' retrospective view of the separation of their parents" (Unger, 2010, p. 1) and the study by Ester Theresia Katona on the subject of "Parental Alienation Syndrome" (Katona, 2007, p.1).

The following chapter deals with the research interest of this study.

4. Research interest, current discussion and theoretical background

4.1. Research interest

In our society, starting a family is a life goal for many people. Many people are looking for a partner with whom they can raise one or more children. After birth, a lifelong bond develops with the child. This happens through the "assumption of the

father and mother role in the various areas (protection, care, education, imparting values)" (Katona, 2007, p. 18), from which the father and mother identity develops. The parents give the child a part of their identity, their self-confidence and also a part of their self-esteem (Katona, 2007). In short, the bond between parents and children is a very intense and intimate relationship that develops over the course of a lifetime. However, our modern society is increasingly characterised by separation or divorce, partly due to increased individualism (Katona, 2007). The life situation of parents who experience separation or alienation from their children is usually not recognised by our population. Family structures and relationships are changing nowadays and are increasingly becoming a challenge for the physical and mental health of affected parents (Katona, 2007). Even close relatives or people involved in the divorce or separation process understand little about the pain associated with this separation.

Research and our population are only sparsely concerned with the topic of alienation, which is why there have only been a few studies to date that deal with the alienation of parents and children. A major study was conducted in 2018 by Johanna Jungbauer et al. to address the impact of mentally ill parents on their children's social lives. Jorge Guerra González's (2023) study on the causes and long-term consequences of separation and alienation experiences in childhood also aims to make this problem visible. The following study is a continuation of his work to break down the complex process of separation between parents and their children.

Based on the study by Jungbauer (2018), it can be assumed that the burden of depression or other mental illnesses of parents in childhood is a burden for the children themselves and can lead to alienation between parents and children. The mental illness of a parent often goes hand in hand with problems at the couple relationship level and can in many cases lead to separations, relationship breakdowns and consequently alienation from the child (Jungbauer et al., 2018). This family situation has consequences for the children and is reflected in restrictions and problems in their lives, their personality and their social relationships (Jungbauer et al., 2018).

Therefore, a comprehensive consideration of life situations, mental and physical health of our subjects in the study is also necessary, to integrate multidisciplinary approaches of their sociological and social perspectives. As research on alienation in our society is still in its infancy, further studies are needed to capture and understand the complex dynamics and impact of parent-child alienation on the affected family

members. This will enable support services and organisations in particular to respond more specifically to this phenomenon in our community and become more sustainable. The following study aims to provide a further perspective on the complexity of parent-child separation and could thus contribute to new thought processes and better visibility of this phenomenon in our community.

4.2.Topicality of the subject and current state of research

Today's society has changed. Whereas separation and divorce used to be a frowned upon topic and almost synonymous with social ostracism, today it has become a topic of everyday life. Many people know or have people close to them who have separated or are in the middle of a separation. Our society has become fast-paced. We consume information quickly and briefly on social media or want to get on the next train or bus as quickly as possible so as not to waste any time. The internet, our acquaintances, our jobs, and even our relationships, have to meet these challenges. It is therefore not surprising that our partnerships no longer have the status in our lives that they once did.

While divorce was still rare in the 1950s because the status of marriage was very different, the numbers have risen significantly in recent decades (Feldhaus et al., 2015). The factors behind this increase are manifold: the pluralisation of family lifestyles, acceptance of separation in society, changing role models, expectations of partnerships and individualism.

The consequences of this development not only affect the couples, but also their children. Studies show that children who experience parental separation are more likely to struggle with psychological stress. Long-term data shows, for example, that adolescent children of separated parents have higher levels of depression than their peers who grow up in intact families (Feldhaus et al., 2015). One particular factor that can lead to separation or alienation in families is the family climate. This has a major influence on the parent-child relationship, especially in the event of conflicts. Stress is another circumstance that can cause a poor family climate and promote negative emotions and behaviour (Feldhaus et al., 2015). In addition, the financial situation and any emerging difficulties, which can be exacerbated by the separation, can favour alienation (Walper et al., 2023). However, it is not only the current family situation that plays a role, but the childhood of each parent must also be taken into account.

The experiences and imprints in one's own childhood can influence the relationship skills and thus indirectly also the stability of partnerships (Feldhaus et al., 2015).

These realisations and the change in our concept of the family are leading to a modern understanding of the family. The traditional nuclear family is increasingly being replaced by alternative family forms, such as patchwork families, single-parent families or families with same-sex parents. This development is also reflected in research, which is increasingly focussing on the complex challenges arising from these new family constellations (Schier et al., 2015).

This generation is characterised by terms such as "mental health" and "family trauma" due to the many challenges of our modern age. In his 2015 article, Michael Nast dubbed this community "Generation Relationship Incapable" and thus accurately captures the mood of our time (Erdmann, 2016). The topic of relationships and how we will lead sustainable partnerships is not only a generational issue today, but will also be a growing process in the future.

4.3. Theoretical background - The phenomenon of parent-child alienation

The phenomenon of induced parent-child alienation is one of the most serious and drastic effects of separation that families can be confronted with in such a life situation (Von Boch-Galhau, 2018). As described in the introduction, it is a phenomenon that has existed for a long time, but scientific and social recognition of its significance, severity and complexity has only begun in recent years. The description of parental alienation has been in the psychiatric literature for over 60 years, but the exact name of the phenomenon can be found in the late 1980s and 1990s (von Boch-Galhau, 2018). Various researchers and their teams independently investigated children and parents from separating families who were estranged from one of the two parents for no rational reason. While Wallerstein and Kelly as well as Johnston and Roseby speak of a pathological orientation, refusal of contact and "programmed and brainwashed children" (von Boch-Galhau, 2018, p.3) in this context, the American child and adolescent psychiatrist Richard A. Gardner developed the term parental alienation syndrome and the associated model in 1985. The following chapter deals with the phenomenon of parent-child alienation in contrast to other forms of contact breakdown between parents and their children, mechanisms of parent-child alienation and Gardner's model of parental alienation

syndrome. Finally, an insight is given into the current discussion about the model and its inclusion in the international classification system ICD-10.

4.3.1. Delimitation and definition of the term

The term parent-child alienation describes a complex phenomenon in which a child rejects contact with a parent. Other terms used in this context are "the alienated child pathological alienation" or "parental alienation disorder" (von Boch-Galhau, 2018, p.3). The various technical terms used to describe this phenomenon illustrate the complexity and the different perspectives from which parent-child alienation can be viewed. In the case of parent-child estrangement, the child's parents are usually in a highly conflictual separation process, resulting in a conflict of loyalty for the child. According to Rand (1997), high-conflict separations are characterised by a high degree of hostility between the parents. In addition, in most cases the separation is protracted and intense, which can lead to a high level of stress for all family members involved (Katona, 2007). The hostility described is

> in secret or in public through ongoing legal proceedings, verbal or physical
> aggression towards the other parent and any deceptive manoeuvres or sabotage
> of contact. (Katona, 2007, p.28).

Through the personal involvement of the child in the parental conflict and the conscious or unconscious instrumentalisation by one parent, the child connects with one parental side and rejects the relationship with the other parent without presenting rational reasons (Lorandos et al., 2013). This is different from other contact breakdowns or other negative changes in the parent-child relationship. One parent plays an active role in the alienation by hindering contact between the child and the other parent. This can be done by making telephone contact more difficult or by not handing over letters, making manipulative (false) statements or postponing or cancelling contact (Katona, 2007). Family dynamics play a central role in the alienation process, as all family members are involved in this process, sometimes without being actively involved in the decision. Children in particular are very susceptible to manipulation by an adult, as they cannot reliably distinguish their own perceptions from the stories they are told (Katona, 2007). This makes it clear that parent-child alienation is also a form of emotional abuse (Andritzky, 2024).

The phenomenon of parent-child alienation must be strictly distinguished from cases in which the child rejects a parent due to violence, abuse or neglect. Even if the parent deliberately breaks off contact with their child or the child has never had contact with the parent, this is not considered parent-child alienation. The term should also be distinguished from cases in which one parent tries to negatively influence the relationship between the other parent and the child, but the child remains open and affectionate. The partner who consciously or unconsciously alienates the child from the other parent can be either the caring parent or the parent with rights of access. However, it is predominantly the caring parent who is the alienator. This can be either the father or the mother. To summarise, parent-child alienation is the systematic manipulation of the child by one parent, which causes an irrational rejection of the other parent. It differs from other forms of contact breakdown in the active role of the alienating parent, the effects on the child and on the parent affected by the alienation. The following chapter describes the characteristics of parent-child alienation in parents and children.

4.3.2. Causes and characteristics of parent-child alienation

Parent-child alienation is a multidimensional phenomenon that is characterised by various features on the part of the alienated parent and the child. The US developmental psychologist Dr Amy Baker has been researching the topic of parent-child alienation for many decades and has developed a 5-factor model based on this research, which is intended to help recognise parent-child alienation more quickly and reliably in practice and thus support professionals in supporting highly conflicted families. In the USA, this model is used in family court to differentiate induced parental alienation from other forms of child rejection. In order to be able to speak of induced parent-child alienation, all five factors must be fulfilled. The first factor is that the child must show rejecting behaviour towards one parent. It refuses contact or the relationship with the parent. The second factor is that there must have been a positive, sustainable relationship between the child and the parent before the parents separated (Witt, 2023). The third factor is that the rejected parent must be unjustifiably rejected by the child. In other words, there must be no reasons such as child abuse, neglect, violence or abuse that lead to the rejection of the child. To fulfil the fourth factor, the alienating parent must use some of the mechanisms explored by

Baker to actively alienate the child. Some of these mechanisms include bad-mouthing the rejected parent, reducing contact or disrupting communication between the child and the other parent[4] . The last factor includes eight different behavioural characteristics of a child that are unique and specific to induced parent-child alienation. These include aberrant, non-age-appropriate rationalizations, the absence of normal ambivalence in the child's behavior or the denial of feelings of guilt about the estranged parent[5] (Witt, 2023). Other characteristics of parent-child alienation are, for example, that the caring parent refuses to communicate with the other parent and is unable or unwilling to engage in counselling or mediation. In addition, the ex-partner is often written off in a negative or derogatory manner. This unwillingness to communicate often means that the separation conflict has to be dealt with in the family court. In most cases, however, the measures and agreements negotiated and agreed there are not honoured, so that the conflict continues to escalate. Institutions such as the family court, counselling centres or professionals such as social workers often take a one-sided stance (Väteraufbruch für Kinder e.V., 2023).

Various factors are responsible for the occurrence of parent-child estrangement. In the majority of cases, the underlying cause is a highly conflictual separation situation between the two parents. Conflicts that are actually at the couple level are carried out at the parent level and therefore often to the detriment of the child. Another cause can be competition for the child's love. In order to present themselves as positively as possible, the other parent is actively devalued. Another common cause is the parentification of the child. The child is given the feeling by the caring parent that they need to be protected by the child and, for example, that they cannot cope emotionally if the child has contact with the other parent. This can happen consciously or subconsciously. In addition, the conflict of loyalty is often the cause from which the child tries to escape. To do this, it gives up a relationship in order to be able to enjoy the relationship with the other parent more, which in turn gives it a sense of security (Väteraufbruch für Kinder e.V., 2023). Overall, it can be said that Baker's 5-factor model offers a comprehensive understanding of parent-child alienation by taking into account the relationship history, the strategies of the alienated parent and the behavioural characteristics of the child. The child's behaviours are specific and include extreme levels of rejection, irrational

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[4] For complete list see Annex VII
[5] For a complete list, see Annex VIII

rationalisation and a reflexive siding with the estranged parent that go far beyond what can be observed in children in other difficult family situations.

After reviewing the basic characteristics and mechanisms of parent-child alienation, the following chapters present and discuss the study we conducted, the impact of the phenomenon described on the life satisfaction and mental and physical health of affected parents. The study is intended to provide an insight into the far-reaching consequences of parent-child alienation for the parents concerned and to broaden our understanding of the complex dynamics of this phenomenon.

4.3.3. Effects of parent-child alienation

Parent-child estrangement is a complex phenomenon that has a profound impact on the mental and physical health and life satisfaction of the parents and children affected. At the heart of the process is the unjustified rejection of one parent by the child, often influenced by the other parent or, in some cases, the family dynamics during and after the separation process.

The research by Dr Guerra González (2023) mentioned in the introduction examines the effects of parent-child alienation on children. He comes to the conclusion that adults who were estranged from at least one parent as a child have lower life satisfaction and poorer mental and physical health than (other) separated children and especially than children from intact families.

Parent-child alienation can also lead to serious psychological and psychosomatic disorders in affected parents. These include feelings of grief and loss, which can have long-term consequences for life satisfaction. The parents affected can be traumatised by the alienation, which can have long-term negative consequences for their health, for example in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder (Cartwright, 1993). Chapter six of this study describes the effects on the parents affected by alienation in more detail.

5. Presentation of the project proposal

In this chapter, the research questions for the overall study and the hypotheses derived from them are presented and the objectives of the project are explained. The seminar was divided into six groups. Each group formulated and answered its own research questions and hypotheses. The cross-group project report answers the

research questions and hypotheses of the seminar. Furthermore, the methodology of the research project is presented.

5.1. Research question and objective

The overarching research questions are:

1. Do parents who are estranged from their children have poorer physical and mental health, as well as poorer life satisfaction than separated parents or intact parents?
2. Do separated parents have poorer physical and mental health, as well as poorer life satisfaction than intact parents?

And the hypotheses derived from this are as follows:

1. Estranged parents have poorer physical and mental health, as well as poorer life satisfaction than separated parents and intact parents.
2. Separated parents have poorer physical and mental health, as well as poorer life satisfaction than intact parents.

The hypotheses are comparable with the report by Guerra Gonzales entitled "Causes and long-term consequences of separation and alienation experiences in childhood." (2023).

The aim of the research is to verify or falsify the hypotheses using quantitative and qualitative methods. In addition, more knowledge about the topic of initiated parent-child alienation is to be gained from the reported experiences of the test subjects.

5.2. Procedure and methodology

The quantitative part of this study consists of the questionnaires and the semi-structured interview guide. By recording and analysing the data, results can be generated from which correlations and causalities can be derived.

The qualitative part consists of analysing the interviews. This allows deep insights to be gained and "key terms" to be worked out that better explore the "why?". In addition, the personal reality is to be presented in order to better contextualise the

topics of the guidelines, but also the topics addressed by the interviewees, far removed from the figures.

In addition, the words of the respondents must be heard in order to understand the extent, especially with regard to parent-child alienation. This reflects the individual level of the research design.

The lecturer was responsible for categorizing the participants in the respective groups. Being a parent was a prerequisite for taking part in this study and was therefore the main criterion. The categorization is derived from the gender of the respondent and is carried out in the group of "mothers" or "fathers". The decisive factor is the relationship status with the other parent. If the respondent is married or in a stable partnership with the biological child of both parents, then they belong to the "Intact" group. If the respondent(s) is/are divorced or living separately with the other parent, they belong to the "Separated" group. It is not relevant for the group categorisation which of the various care models, such as the alternating model or the weekend model, the respondent's child is in.

If the respondent(s) live separately or divorced from the other parent and have no contact with their child due to a boycott of contact or instrumentalization of the children, then they were assigned to the "alienation" group.

This results in the following group constellations and the respective abbreviations: Group 1 - Intact Fathers (IV), Group 2 - Intact Mothers (IM), Group 3 - Separated Fathers (TV), Group 4 - Separated Mothers (TM), Group 5 - Estranged Fathers (EV) and Group 6 - Estranged Mothers (EM).

Further conditions for the participants were that they had to be of legal age. That they had at least one underage child and had the respective contact situation according to the group classification. And that they had grown up and socialised in Germany. These criteria are intended to improve comparability so that the results are based on the respective group categorization and are not influenced by other factors.

The language used in the questionnaires and interviews is German. This also results in a further requirement for the respondents to be able to participate in the study. Furthermore, the German language was chosen because the study and its results are aimed at German addressees, such as the family support system, politicians, those

affected and interested parties. It serves to improve comprehensibility and should not create any additional barriers to getting in touch with the topic.

The interviews were conducted by the students in each group. The organization within the group and the distribution of tasks were the responsibility of the students themselves. After the initial contact with the lecturer, they also organized the communication and appointments. For better manageability, the interviews were conducted either in face-to-face meetings or online in pairs via Zoom (video call/call). In each case, the interview was recorded. Consent was obtained from the respondents beforehand.

The aim of the study was to use quantitative data to analyze the hypothesis variables, physical health, mental health and life satisfaction. It was considered whether life satisfaction or quality of life should be chosen. The decision was made in favor of life satisfaction, as it represents a person's satisfaction with their actual life situation, which is more tangible (Dorsch). Quality of life is a broad concept in which a person's environment is influenced in many ways by conditions that also affect mental and physical health (Noll, 2022). It was concluded from this that quality of life cannot be clearly separated from the other two hypothesized variables - physical and mental health.

The three questionnaires were sent to the respondents electronically before the interview. The questionnaires were arranged in ascending order based on the questions or statements asked. The questionnaires also serve to get the respondents in the mood and mentally prepare them for the interview.

The first questionnaire (Appendix I), German version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), contains 5 general statements about life satisfaction, which can be answered using a Likert scale. The response scale is divided as follows: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (somewhat disagree), 4 (partly/partly agree), 5 (somewhat agree), 6 (agree) and 7 (strongly agree).

The second questionnaire (Appendix II), Psychosomatic complaints in a non-clinical context, contains 20 questions on physical complaints. The answer options, again a Likert scale, are divided as follows: 1= Never, 2 = Every few months, 3 = Every few weeks, 4 = Every few days, 5 = Almost daily. Physical complaints can develop into

stress factors that influence life in different ways, depending on how strongly the respondents perceive them.

The third and longest questionnaire (Appendix III), Weiss Functional Impairment Rating Scale - Self-Assessment (WFIRS-S), contains 7 main categories, each with a different number of statements to be answered on a scale of 0 to 3 and not applicable. The questionnaire contains a total of 69 statements on the following headings: A. Family, B. Work, C. School/ College/ University, D. Life Skills, E. Self-Concept, F. Social and G. Risk Behaviour. The scale has the following structure: 0= Never or not at all, 1= Sometimes or somewhat, 2= Often or frequently, 3= Very often or very frequently and ()= Not applicable. The respondents have to rate themselves. If two characteristics in an area are rated 2 or one characteristic within an area is rated 3, this area is considered impaired.

In addition to the questionnaires, data could also be collected from the guideline interviews (Appendix IV). The guideline interview had a different number of questions depending on the group (intact/separation/alienation). For the intact groups, the questionnaire had 33 questions. These were expanded to include the topics of separation for the "separated" groups, so that this group was asked 36 questions. Groups 5 and 6 "estrangement" had the longest questionnaire with 45 questions. This covered the topics of separation, alienation and how to deal with them. The first part of the questionnaire included demographic questions such as age, gender and the highest school-leaving qualification achieved. This was followed by questions that the respondent(s) had to assess using a predefined scale. Here is an example from the questionnaire: Question 10: How is/was your relationship with your mother? The answer scale was categorized as follows: 1 extremely bad, 2 very bad, 3 bad, 4 average, 5 good, 6 very good, 7 excellent. The interviewers then asked "Why?" so that respondents could expand on their answers to cover the qualitative side of the study.

As the interviews were semi-structured, the interviewers asked in-depth or comprehension questions depending on the situation. The recording of the interviews was essential for the transcription. The simple transcription rules of Dresing / Pehl were followed (scribbr). A content analysis of the interviews was then carried out in MAXQDA 2022 using the previously defined code system (Appendix V), which was

adopted by each group to ensure uniformity. The code system was developed both deductively and inductively. The code system from the lecturer's previous study was known and provided an initial orientation and structure. The transcriptions provided initial insights into the interviews and thus also into the participants' topics, so that key terms could be derived.

the help of SSPS, the mean values and correlations were derived from the compiled data. The lecturer took on this task and communicated the results to the groups.

The aim of the cross-group project report is to compare the results of the six individual groups and draw conclusions from them.

The preregistration of this study was carried out in November 2023, after the formulation of the hypotheses. In February 2024, a check was made when the general data was collected and unfortunately it was found that the study had not been successfully preregistered. The reasons for this can no longer be traced. The document that was used for registration has remained unchanged since the supposed registration, so it can be verified that the hypotheses have not been changed since then and therefore still exist.

6. Results and reasoning

In the following, the results of this study are summarized, evaluated, presented and considered under certain thematic focal points. The evaluation and presentation of the results were partly carried out in the context of current scientific discourse. In order to analyze the hypotheses, put forward before the study, the aspects of life satisfaction, mental health and physical health or psychosomatic complaints are examined first. Subsequently, individual aspects such as the gender aspect, hypothesis variables, the question of whether parents only stay together because of their children and the consequences and effects of parent-child alienation are analysed. The results of the questionnaires, the interviews and their evaluation are analysed and evaluated.

6.1. Life satisfaction of the test subjects

This text deals with the topic of life satisfaction of parents in different family constellations. Based on the data collected in the study, an assessment of their physical and mental health can be depicted. The research focusses explicitly on the differences between intact families, separated families and estranged families. Special attention is also paid to the differentiated effects of these constellations on mothers and fathers.

The results of this study suggest that parents from intact families have a higher level of life satisfaction on average. The mean value is 5.5111 with a standard deviation of 1.43402. Such a result was to be expected, as they live in more stable social structures and are therefore in a supportive environment.

> *"Currently good! Very good is an exaggeration. Who can say that after 40? But good." (Respondent 21-IM21)*

Compared to parents who are separated or are separated, as well as those who experience or have experienced alienation from their child, this mean value is higher. Families living in separation situations have a significantly lower mean life satisfaction score of 4.2571 with a corresponding standard deviation of 1.17838. Separation leads to emotional difficulties and insecurity, which has a negative impact on well-being.

Estranged families, on the other hand, have the lowest life satisfaction score at 3.5280, deviation 1.07839. This shows the serious effects of estrangement on the life satisfaction of estranged parents. Emotional distress caused by estrangement is severe and painful. This has a negative impact on the respondents' life satisfaction. There are also significant differences between mothers and fathers. Mothers from estranged families have a mean value of 3.5200, but a deviation of 1.14093. Fathers, on the other hand, have the same mean value, but a lower deviation.

Accordingly, it could be assumed that mothers have a greater variance in how they react to the alienation of their children with regard to their life satisfaction.

These findings emphasize the assumption that intact family structures provide a stable and supportive environment that can contribute significantly to the quality of life of its members. In contrast, separated families and especially estranged families

experience lower levels of life satisfaction, which can be attributed to the emotional stress and conflict in such situations, among other things.

According to one affected person: *"It's not really a life anymore, it's just an existence"* (PG6-EM19, interview, 24/11/2023).

Interestingly, the data show that estranged fathers have higher average physical symptoms than estranged mothers, suggesting that the impact of estrangement may have gender differences. This emphasizes the need to consider both maternal and paternal perspectives, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of different family structures on health.

Furthermore, the results indicate that mental health is significantly better in intact families than in separated and estranged families. This gradual decline in mental well-being, from intact to separated and finally to estranged families, illustrates the strong influence of the family situation on the mental health of parents.

> *"I exchanged ideas with other like-minded people. And I just realised that this way of breaking down is not the right one for me. Because my life is very precious to me and, as I said, I also have a responsibility towards other people." (PG6-EM11, interview, 01.12.2023)*

The separation itself and the associated challenges, such as legal disputes and financial worries, can lead to additional stress, which has a negative impact on physical health. The results of this study therefore confirm the assumption that the well-being of parents is closely linked to the structure and stability of the family.

To summarize, this research provides important insights into the complex relationships between family structures and the well-being of parents. The results emphasize the importance of a stable and supportive family environment for life satisfaction and the physical and mental health of mothers and fathers. These findings can serve as a basis for developing targeted support programs for families in different ways, and thus promoting the well-being of parents and children.

6.2.Mental health and psychosomatic complaints of the test subjects

In our society, which is characterized by rapid change, every individual has to adapt on a daily basis in order to keep pace. The demands placed on us on both a societal and social level are higher than ever before. In order to be able to fulfil these demands without becoming ill, a stable mental state is essential.

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which a person can fulfil their abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and contribute to their community (WHO, 2019, p.6) to understand. Mental health and well-being must always be considered in the context of individual characteristics, but they are also influenced by the social circumstances and the environment in which a person lives. If the mental health described is impaired, we can speak of a mental illness. They often occur in combination with stressful emotions, behaviours and relationships with others (Robert Koch Institute, 2019). In addition, mental well-being also influences a person's physical state of health. Psychological stress can lead to psychosomatic disorders and problems such as back and neck pain, headaches, fatigue and many other symptoms. The connection with the study we conducted can be established at precisely this point, because the mothers and fathers surveyed, from intact, separated and estranged families, are all in different social contexts that influence their mental and physical health.

In order to answer the part of our research questions relating to the mental and physical health of parents[1] , the results of questionnaire two were compared with each other. The 20 questions from the questionnaire include questions on psychosomatic complaints and cover various types of mental health problems. These include physical pain, fatigue, sleep disorders and other complaints. The response scale ranges from 1 (never) to 2 (every few months), 3 (every few weeks), 4 (every few days) and 5 (almost daily). The questionnaires show that fathers from intact families answered never or every few months for most psychosomatic complaints. The mean value of all answered questions is 1.915, which indicates that psychosomatic complaints are generally low in this group. The values for mothers from intact families are very similar, with a mean value of 1.96. Overall, physical and mental health is little or not at all affected by psychosomatic complaints, i.e. in the case of intact parents. The analysis of the interviews is somewhat different. Seven fathers stated that they suffered from various mental disorders such as depression, ADHD or

anxiety disorders. Two of the fathers are undergoing therapeutic treatment. However, no direct link to the current life situation could be established for these disorders. Instead, the fathers described their family as a source of support. They gave examples such as *"[our daughter] always comes and hugs us again before she goes to bed"* (PG1-IV16). In the case of both fathers, a connection to their own parental home can be established, which could possibly be one of the reasons for their current mental illness. The two fathers who are currently undergoing psychotherapy (PG1-IV18, PG-IV02) also had negative experiences at home and have a poor relationship with at least one parent. This also confirms that the mental illnesses are not caused by the family situation. When analysing the interviews with mothers from intact families, it is noticeable that the mothers often stated that their everyday lives were characterised by stress and that they had little time for themselves. Some mothers also reported a difficult relationship with their family of origin. However, just like the fathers, the mothers from intact families described their family and partnership as supportive. Overall, it can be stated that parents from intact families have a mean score of 5.64 with a standard deviation of 0.745 for mental health. In terms of physical health, they have a mean score of 5.26. This means that, despite a few exceptions, they are generally considered to be relatively mentally and physically stable.

When analyzing the questionnaire, fathers from separated families show a high degree of sleep disturbance and the resulting fatigue. 3 out of 13 fathers also stated that they get tired quickly almost every day. Compared to the frequency of other symptoms that occur, this is relatively often the case. It can be assumed that the reported concentration problems are due to sleep disorders. The problem of sleep disorders and fatigue was also confirmed in the analysis of the interviews. Many of the test subjects stated that they were often tired in everyday life and noticed a resulting drop in performance at work. In addition, 80% of the test subjects reported receiving psychological treatment. The most common diagnosis for three out of eleven test subjects was depression. Some of the fathers reported clearly pronounced stress symptoms, *[...] because I have to experience a lot again due to the current situation, I have to participate."* (PG3-TV08, 00:04:13).

Overall, it can be shown that fathers in separated families very often react to the changed living situation with sleep disorders, which affects their mental state. With a mean value of 4.77 and a standard deviation of 1.423, it can be seen that fathers from

separated families are in a worse mental state than fathers and mothers from intact families. The relatively high deviation also shows that the mental state of the test subjects varies. This can be explained by the fact that fathers tend to be in a better mental state the longer it has been since the separation. Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that the psychological strain and, in particular, the physical health of separated fathers is sometimes severely impaired.

Despite the sometimes-pronounced psychosomatic complaints, the results indicate that the mental health of fathers from separated families shows a certain resilience. The analysis of psychosomatic complaints in mothers from separated families shows that a significant proportion of the test subjects suffer from psychosomatic complaints such as sleep disorders, fatigue and head and neck pain. The interviews revealed that five of the test subjects were currently undergoing psychological treatment. Some of them stated that they were suffering from severe exhaustion and were very worried about the future and their financial situation. Overall, the mental health of mothers from separated families, with a mean score of 4.29 and a deviation of 0.951, is significantly lower than that of parents from intact families, as well as that of fathers from separated families.

An analysis of the mental and physical health of estranged fathers using the questionnaire revealed that they, like fathers from separated families with a score of 3.8 out of 5, often suffer from sleep disorders. They have significantly higher mean values (4.0, standard deviation 1.732) for psychological symptoms, which indicates increased psychological stress. These findings are consistent with theoretical considerations that estrangement from one's own children leads to considerable emotional stress, which has a negative impact on mental health. The qualitative analysis of the interviews makes it clear that many of those affected are in an emotional crisis. They report feelings of isolation, loss and powerlessness. Overall, the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data makes it clear that estranged fathers are significantly more psychologically burdened than fathers from intact and separated families. The same applies to mothers from intact families and separated families. The standard deviation is also relatively large here, which suggests that some fathers are better off in terms of their mental health than other estranged fathers. The situation is different for physical health. Fathers from separated families have a lower mean score for physical health than fathers from estranged families,

meaning that they are more affected by psychosomatic complaints than fathers from estranged families. The following statements further emphasize the physical strain:

"About the case. Yes, the complaints after the accident at work and now in general, you sleep a lot less. There's less movement here. There's no hobby at the moment. To be honest, the zest for life, the motor skills, that's missing, the energy." (PG5-EV10, P. 5)

"Sometimes neck pain, back pain, shoulder pain. The stress affects my stomach. I have nausea and vomiting when it gets too extreme. Sometimes diarrhoea, (...) sleep disorders, concentration problems". (PG5-EV20, item 45)

By analyzing the mental health questionnaires completed by the estranged mothers, it can be determined that, without exception, every psychosomatic symptom occurs more frequently than in mothers from intact families. The values are sometimes relatively close together, sometimes far apart. For example, mothers from estranged families experience nausea every few weeks to every few months, while mothers from intact families experience nausea every few months.

However, mothers from intact families only experience a tensing of their own body every few months, whereas estranged mothers experience it every few days. By summarizing all the individual average values, this finding becomes even clearer: the average frequency of psychosomatic complaints among estranged mothers, measured on a scale from 1 (never) to five (almost daily) is 3.2415, while the corresponding average value for mothers from intact families is 2.1242. This shows that the psychosomatic complaints observed in the former occur approximately every few weeks, whereas in the latter they only occur every few months. It should also be noted that there is more than a whole unit on the scale between the two average values, which also makes it clear that mothers from estranged families are significantly more frequently affected by psychosomatic complaints. The interviews also illustrate the profound emotional impact of estrangement on mothers. The respondents described how they perceived the alienation as very stressful, as *"inhuman, degrading and absolutely unnatural [-] the most unnatural (...) thing in the world."* (PG6-EM17, 0:49:43). Many of the mothers interviewed are mentally ill as a result of or in the context of alienation and are undergoing psychological and/or psychiatric treatment. Disorders that occur include adjustment disorders, panic attacks, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. Ten out of 16 of the mothers surveyed compare the feeling of loss and grief with the death of their child: *"Well, I don't think [the] relationship [with my child] itself is broken. So feelings, but. [...]. But on the other hand, it's gone, as if it had died. You can compare that, it's like grief. [...] Permanently."* (PG6-EM06, 0:56:53). This again illustrates the intensity of the pain that estranged mothers can be confronted with. To summarise, it can be said that estranged mothers are in most cases under great psychological and resulting psychosomatic stress and are confronted with feelings of grief and loss. Overall, it can be seen that intact families have the highest mental health score with a mean of 5.54, while separated parents have a mean of 4.60 and estranged parents have a mean of 3.88 for mental health. These results illustrate a gradual decline in the mental well-being of parents in intact relationships, separated parents and finally estranged parents. The results make it clear that the family situation has a significant influence on mental health. Estranged families in particular show a significantly increased risk

of psychological symptoms due to the emotional stress and conflicts in this constellation. A gender-specific difference was found in the mean values for the mental stress of estranged mothers and fathers, which is discussed in detail in section 4.6. In terms of physical health and the severity and burden of psychosomatic complaints, the distribution is somewhat different. Parents from intact families have a mean value of 5.26 for physical health, while separated parents have a mean value of 4.23 and estranged parents a mean value of 4.76. This means that the value for separated parents is higher than for estranged parents. This means that the value for separated parents is the lowest by a small margin. This shows that the physical well-being of parents living in a separated family constellation is most negatively affected.

6.3. Hypothesis variables

Three hypothesis variables can be recognized from our hypotheses: Life satisfaction, mental health and physical health. The aim of the following investigation is to extract factors or variables that have a direct or indirect influence on the three hypothesized variables. The identification of such variables favours the understanding of how the results of the study came about. As already mentioned, the hypotheses were almost exclusively verified. According to this, life satisfaction and mental health are highest in intact families and lowest in estranged families. At the same time, there is a proportionate falsification, which represents the fact that the group of separated parental homes has lower physical health than the estranged parents. At the same time, the intact parents group has the highest physical health, in line with the hypotheses. At this point, the question arises as to which influences, independent of the family constellation, could have brought about these results. The aim here is not to capture the comprehensive "low road" of causality, i.e. all the variables, but merely the findings recorded primarily quantitatively by the study. Listing the measured hypothesis variables in their complex effect structure can favour a better understanding of the above-mentioned hypothesis-specific results.

In order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the variables, the mutual correlations between two selected factors (bi-variate) were calculated in the SPSS program according to "Pearson". In contrast to the qualitative results, these quantitative

results provide a more effective way of gaining knowledge, as they are more representative of all the test subjects. The following correlations were taken from the SPSS tables according to their individually measured significance to the hypotheses. The first important finding is that the three hypothesis variables life satisfaction, physical health and mental health correlate positively with each other. This means that the higher the life satisfaction, the higher the physical and mental health and so on.

One variable that has a strong influence on the three hypothesis variables based on the correlations is conflict. The measured correlations indicate that the higher the conflict, the lower the life satisfaction and thus all three hypothesis variables. The results also show that the more one's own children are involved in the conflict, the lower the level of life satisfaction. Conflicts of this kind, particularly couple conflicts regarding parenting issues, are particularly noticeable among estranged parents in the run-up to estrangement. These conflicts also have a lasting amplifying effect on the relationship between parent and child and thus their alienation as a result. Accordingly, conflict in the estranged family constellation is a comparatively particularly striking phenomenon (Bleser, 2021: 32 f).

Conflict protection also seems to be something that is very important to people in family life. Not least because it has a positive influence on life satisfaction and mental and physical health. The correlations show that parents who grew up in a conflict-ridden family themselves appear to have less conflict in their own family household. At the same time, it can be seen that parents who were less confronted with conflict in their own home recognise the added value of a low-conflict family and have the necessary know-how to protect their own family from conflict as far as possible. This is also the case for affection: the more affection the parents themselves experienced as children, the better their relationship with their own family currently is and therefore the lower the conflict is in comparison.

Another finding is the positive correlation between the stress of separation and life satisfaction. This means that the perceived stress of separation has a negative effect on life satisfaction and thus on the three hypothesis variables. In addition, the measured correlations show that this is also the case for the perceived stress caused by parental alienation. What also correlates with the parents' stress caused by

alienation is not only life satisfaction, but also the children's stress in the context of alienation. This means that the more their own child suffers from the lack of contact with the parent, the greater the level of suffering for the respondents. And their own stress also has a negative effect on life satisfaction, physical and psychological stress.

The family has a particular influence on life. Other variables measured for life circumstances were work, self-image, education, social issues, risk behaviour and family status. It can be seen that family status correlates positively with the other life circumstances mentioned. Family blessing has a significant influence on the other life circumstances. This leads to the conclusion that a low-conflict family constellation, such as the "Intact", has comparatively better living conditions. This is due to the fact that family status has a significant influence on life satisfaction as well as physical and mental health. As these three variables are highest among the intact parents, the family status is also the best. Not least because they have comparatively less conflict. Due to the positive influence of family status on other life circumstances, these circumstances are presumably also comparatively better in intact families. At the same time, a correlation also applies the other way round. Accordingly, it can be deduced that the worse your work, the worse your family relationship and so on, which would then probably apply more to estranged families.

However, it should be noted that a difference between mental and physical health can be recognized for the family circumstances variable. When analyzing the correlations with SPSS, the significance can be measured using the "Pearson correlation". This means the influence of the correlation on the result of the hypotheses, or their falsification or verification. The significance of the correlation between family status and both life satisfaction and mental health is comparatively high. At the same time, no relevant significance to the hypotheses can be measured for physical health. This means that life satisfaction and mental health are more strongly affected by a possible poor family situation than physical health.

The hypotheses could be verified in all aspects except one, physical health. Here it was categorized as worse for the separated parents than for the estranged ones. This was contrary to the hypothesis that the estranged parents reported the lowest level of physical health. Based on the correlations, the only difference between physical and mental health can be seen in the family status. This explains in part why a difference

between these two variables was also measured in the results. This is because it is obvious that the family state is worst in the estranged family constellations due to the high level of conflict and suffering caused by alienation and separation. For this reason, the results of the hypothesis test also show that life satisfaction and mental health are lower than physical health among those who are estranged. These findings from the correlations offer a clue for possible further research into why the separated parents have a higher level of physical distress than the estranged parents.

Overall, the correlations provide important clues to the complex relationships between family structures, conflicts and the well-being of family members. The effects of separation and alienation are striking factors that have a significant influence on the hypothesised variables. The same applies to conflict in the family. On the subject of conflict, it was also found that estranged parents are most affected and that this also has a negative impact on living conditions and therefore also further influences the hypothesis variables. The difference between physical and mental health is striking here. These results explain, at least in part, how the verification and the proportional falsification of the hypotheses came about. The findings suggest that the promotion of low-conflict family environments, in the most intact family circumstances possible, can have a positive influence on well-being and general living conditions and offers incentives for future research in this area.

6.4. Consequences and recognisable connections

The results from the interviews are shown in brackets as follows: Abbreviation of the group - number of times the code was used (Appendix VI): Number of interviews in which the code was used. The frequency of coding is listed in full in Appendix VI.

This sub-chapter mainly looks at the groups "separation" and "alienation". The interviews revealed the consequences for the respondents of the difficult to no contact situation with the child. The consequences affect those affected in different areas of their lives, which are also described. In addition, the contexts in which the consequences could occur are highlighted.

6.4.1. Consequences and effects

Parent-child alienation is a process initiated by the caring parent in which a child is emotionally distanced from the non-caring parent. The instruments for distancing are very diverse. In the group of estranged mothers and fathers, the respondents reported that the child was perceived as being "negatively influenced" (EM - 25:9, EV - 17:9). This influence has many facets, such as putting the non-caring parent down, which is perceived by the child and later internalised, or a material influence on the child from the caring parent.

Here are excerpts from the interviews:

"The main problem was always that I realised very early on that he kept talking the child into things and making me feel bad for my child. Things like our child saying: Dad will always love me, but he doesn't love you anymore. Or how I then wanted to move and was told that asylum seekers were playing in the street and smashing car windows..." (PG6-EM12, pos. 155)

"And my child was running around here, in the living room, throwing objects down and swearing at me..." (PG6-EM19, item 146)

"She [the child's mother] tried to minimise the times we had together with the children .... She spoke badly about me and of course also about my new wife, my partner at the time, later my new wife." (PG5-EV02, item 377)

"Because when I go to my child's house, he doesn't want to come with me and is very, very aggressive towards me and then doesn't want to come. But he's only so aggressive when his mum is there. Otherwise, I visit my child twice during the week, if possible, at his hobby and watch him briefly. And he greets me there and talks to me, provided she [the child's mother] isn't there and that's the situation at the moment. So I no longer have any contact or contact with my child." (PG5-EV01, minute 20)

"because he promised the child a lot, the father promised the child a lot. If it moves in with him, it will get this and that. My child got everything materially. A tablet, an iPhone, a cat, a dog, an aquarium, guinea pigs, birds. So you really can't imagine, he then had a whole zoo." (PG6-EM02, item 153)

"When my child told something good about me, he came back after the weekend, cried and said: "Dad doesn't want to hear about how nice it was on holiday with you, I'm only allowed to tell bad things."" (PG6-EM02, pos. 141)

"A few days later she [the child's mother] said, "Yes, yes, you'll be back soon" and then she seems to have changed her mind. Anyway, she then sent my child ahead and said, she had the child say, "Dad, I don't want you to come to my First Communion tomorrow." " (PG5-EV09, minute 40)

"And my little child rebelled and said something I'll never forget: "Dad, Dad, leave my mum, I like my mum, my mum can be here!" And then I also spoke to my child on the phone and he was always so cross." (PG6-EM03, pos. 209)

This changed relationship with the child and the changing behaviour of the children has an enormous impact on the psychological stress of the estranged parent.

In addition to the fact that the non-carer parents see their children much less or not at all, there is also limited or no involvement (EM-19:12 , EV-3:3, TM-0, TV - 3:) in the children's lives. This can be identified as a consequence. The respondents described these painful experiences as follows:

"So (...) and of course, something is missing because I don't know anything about the child now. I don't know what they like now and what they do and what they want for their birthday, for example. I don't know the boyfriend/girlfriend, so there's a lot missing." (PG6-EM06, item 162)

"At the moment I don't know where my child lives because my ex-husband hasn't told me." (PG6-EM11, item 158)

"Test subject: The load is very high.

Interviewer: Why?

Respondent: You don't notice anything." (PG5-EV10, P. 11)

But still, when I try to remember my child now, I do have memories. So it's totally faded. I can't remember what the voice sounds like [...] and I don't know how big it is. So, I have no idea at all whether my child is smaller, bigger, how much it has grown." (PG6-EM11, pos. 203)

"I don't even know where my child lives anymore." (PG6-EM16, pos. 119)

"And then there was the mother's, er, ADHD diagnosis and tablets that the child was supposed to take. And I didn't know anything about it, I had been deprived of health care" (PG5-EV20, minute 47)

As a further consequence of alienation, it was found to be an enormous burden for the respondents and the loss of contact with the child was compared to the experience of death. (EM-18:10, EV-9:6, TM-0, TV-5:4).

"Because it's my child and I have to live without it." (Transcript TV09, pos. 300)

"Interviewer: How stressful was the separation for you?

Proband: Extremely stressful.

Interviewer: 1 is the lowest level, 7 is the highest.

Respondent: 7 "Because they wanted to take the children away from me. Because they hurt me about the children." (Transcript New TV10, pos. 278-284)

"And of course it sometimes feels as if it has died. So you have a child's room that's covered in dust and clothes in the wardrobe that no longer fit and cuddly toys that are still here and you try to deal with this situation every day. And it's very, very difficult to endure this powerlessness." (PG6-EM11, item 201)

"On the one hand it was the powerlessness, on the other hand it was seeing what was happening and not being able to do anything about it. And then it was also mentally incredibly stressful. I had hallucinations at night, sometimes from my children. And so it just brought me to the edge, the separation from the children." (PG5-EV13, minute 15)

"Interviewer: How stressful was the alienation overall for you? from 1 very low stress level to 7 highest stress level.

Test person: 100! (laughs)... That was the worst thing that has ever happened to me in my life. I really thought I wouldn't survive it." (PG6-EM17, pos. 200-201)

"Interviewer: (...) And how would you describe how stressful was the estrangement for you from your children? One is that it didn't bother them. Seven is that it was extremely stressful for them.

Respondent: (...) I don't know if you can write down the scale up to 100 at all." (PG5-EV20, pos. 165-166)

"So I have to say, I really have to say, it's more stressful than a death. Because it just doesn't stop. It doesn't stop, it has no end." (PG6-EM19, item 154)

Katona (2007) states the following in her study: "For almost all parents, children are a central part of their identity, their self-confidence and thus also their self-esteem." Rando (1986, quoted from Katona 2007) says that the parent-child bond is unique in its closeness and intensity. Furthermore, attachment to a person represents security.

The security of the bond is no longer there due to the "unusual" actions of your own child. In addition, self-efficacy is limited as there are fewer activities and interactions with the child. The unique bond is deeply disrupted by the irregular contact. Those affected are deprived of their parental identity, which simultaneously restricts their self-worth as a result of this initiated break in the bond. The consequences listed above cause psychological impairment. This was established in the interviews. Diagnoses such as depression (mentioned a total of 26 times in the EM, EV, TV and TM groups) or PTSD (mentioned a total of 10 times in the EM, EV and TV groups) were mentioned by those affected. These reactions are also confirmed by the literature (Katona, 2007, 22). From the semi-structured interviews, it can also be heard that most of them are dealing with it in a therapy context, either currently or in the past (38 mentions in the four groups of separation and alienation).

Placed in a wider context, these psychological burdens resulting from the aforementioned consequences of alienation (or separation) also mean economic burdens. Due to the difficult private circumstances and the associated loss of performance, the absenteeism of those affected increases, including temporary or permanent incapacity to work. This places a burden on the social security system. In addition, the costs to the social security funds increase due to payments for sickness benefit, therapies, rehabilitation measures or unemployment benefit, among other things.

There are many other consequences for the parents concerned. It became very clear to some respondents that they are in a poor financial position after the separation/divorce. The increasing alienation from the child and the associated costs for child maintenance or lawyer, legal and expert costs also contribute to this situation. Mentions, poor financial situation (EM-6:6 , EV-0, TM-14: , TV-2:).

> *"I've been working in geriatric care again since autumn 2021. (...) And I'm actually only there to earn a living for the children, which is very difficult. So I'm doing very*

badly financially, unfortunately. You can't live self-sufficiently." (PG6-EM09, item 134)

"And after the divorce, I had to go to work full-time. And then of course I only had a little time or less time, so the first few years. The first few years, my child, the younger one, until he was 8, I was really available full-time for my children, always there for them. And after that it was just worse." (PG6-EM16, pos. 133)

On the one hand, this puts a strain on the mental situation of those affected, but also on the relationship with the child that still exists in some cases. The effort involved in planning childcare or obtaining childcare time is very high with an uncooperative parent who initiates an estrangement. In addition, the parent's own time is limited due to their (for some, newly started) work and therefore the parent's availability for the child is also limited. The parent's financial difficulties also restrict their leisure activities and affect their ability to do an activity with the child or go on a (short) holiday if the childcare situation would allow it.

It can also be difficult for those affected to establish a new partnership. The separation from the ex-partner combined with the disputes regarding contact with the child are sometimes lengthy, which can put a strain on a new partnership and also make it difficult to enter into a new partnership. It was found that some of those affected did not enter into a new partnership (EM-6, EV-4, TM-3, TV-7). However, new partnerships were also mentioned by those affected in the interviews (EM-8, EV-8, TM-1, TV-8). A new partnership can also be seen as a positive thing, in that one accepts that life has changed dramatically and continues to search for one's own personal happiness.

All the listed consequences of alienation and their effects can also be summarised as an impairment of the respondents' life satisfaction.

6.4.2. Recognisable connections within parent-child alienation

The question of "why?" is increasingly coming to the fore. Why is parent-child alienation initiated? The following reasons were identified from the interviews (the frequency of use of the code is given): Revenge (25 in total), financial benefits (10 in total), new stable partnership (5 in total), freedom to organise life (2 in total),

personal contribution (12 in total) and other reasons (31 in total). The following are passages from the interviews that were coded as reasons:

"Interviewer: What do you think are the motives from the other parent's point of view?

Respondent: It's definitely also protective love for the child, but on the other hand also hatred and aggression and anger towards me." (Transcript TV18 2, pos. 320-322)

"He wants to punish me for leaving." (PG6-EM06, pos. 128)

"Interviewer: What do you think are the motives of the other parent from your point of view? So from your ex-husband?

Respondent: Power." (PG6-EM16, pos. 180-181)

"I would say absolute control, i.e. what I or we, my current wife and I, did with the children, how we endeavoured to do their hobbies. That didn't suit her. I got a whole Excel spreadsheet, an instruction manual for the children. And of course it was annoying when we did things differently or when we said, okay yes, so these 5 points, we're happy to implement them, they seem sensible to us, but not the others, of course that's not possible. I am simply disruptive. I'm just disruptive in what she wants to do with the children." (PG5-EV11, minute 30)

"So he's totally terrified of ruining himself financially and that's why he's endeavouring to keep the child with me so little and so that he gets the maintenance so that he has the money." (PG6-EM09, item 146)

"Now he really only has one way to get me down and that's my children and one child is already gone." (PG6-EM13, pos. 211)

"I have the impression that she has let herself be talked into something. Um, as I said, in combination with things that happened in her family. And it turned into a revenge that was actually deliberately aimed at completely breaking the bond. It was about... It was about destruction." (PG5-EV12, pos. 127-128)

"Interviewer: From your point of view, what are the motives of your ex-partner? Respondent: Injury." PG6-EM14, pos. 160-161)

"Interviewer: What do you think were the motives of the other parent that led to this?

The literature confirms that "revenge is seen as the most obvious and strongest driving reason for alienating behaviour (Calvar & Rivlin, cited in Katona, 2007)." In the psychodynamics of the alienating person, these motives for alienation are justified. Sometimes it can be seen as their way of processing the separation and the pain. However, at the considerable expense of the other parent and, of course, with consequences for the children (cf. Guerra Gonzales 2023).

Before the parent-child estrangement, there was a family life and a couple relationship between the parents, which then led to a separation. The respondents were asked about the separations in the interviews and the following could be determined: in the four groups (EM, EV, TM, TV), the code "serious conflicts" was used a total of 48 times within the partnership, whereas the code "minor conflicts" was only used 14 times. Some respondents reflected on their own conflict behaviour, which was rated as positive 14 times and negative 9 times. The conflict behaviour of the ex-partner was rated as "negative" 51 times and only once as "positive". In addition, the following reasons for separation were obtained from the interviews (with frequency): a total of 47 "incidents with the ex-partner" were coded, including physical violence (11 in total) and psychological violence (27 in total) (double mentions within an interview cannot be ruled out). "Alcohol/substance abuse" was mentioned once, "breach of trust by the ex-partner" was mentioned three times (only in the group of estranged mothers, therefore not gendered here) and "other stressful events" was coded 30 times (here too, double mentions in an interview cannot be ruled out).

From the analysis of the data, it can be deduced that the relationships were predominantly negative and full of conflict. The following statements by the test subjects support this, as many test subjects spoke of a "liberation" after the separation from a relationship that was stressful for them.

"Separating from my ex-partner was very liberating." (PG5-EV13, P. 6)

"From this togetherness, from this relationship, [which] was also physically separate, I suddenly felt better. From then on, it was a liberation for me, also in dealing with the children. At that time, I didn't really have the opportunity at home

to be with the children the way I am or the way I would have liked to be." (PG5-EV11, P. 9)

"Yes, so at first I was doing badly and then I was doing very well and I think that's one of the reasons why my ex-wife couldn't cope with it, she thought I would fall into a deep hole if I wasn't with her anymore and still had her and that wasn't the case. " (PG5-EV11, P. 9)

"Interviewer: How stressful was the separation for you?

Proband: Separation from the wife or from the child.

Interviewer: From the woman.

Proband: Not stressful at all. Liberating." (PG3- TV18 2, pos. 284-290)

"Interviewer: How stressful is or was the separation for you?

Test person: "It was actually... not very stressful. It was rather liberating." (PG6-EM04, pos. 105-108)

"The separation from my ex-husband was really a liberation for me, I have to say that quite clearly, I was very happy to have got away from him and I realised relatively soon that I was simply much better off. But the absolute catastrophe was what happened to our child." (PG6-EM12, pos. 149)

"Interviewer: And what consequences did the separation have for you, for your children? And for your ex-partner?

Test person: Well, I think it was a bottomless pit for my ex-partner. He's still not finished with the break-up. I'm convinced of that. And for me it was a liberation. Yes, and I think for my children too, because they realised that I was happy again. But they realised that their father couldn't cope on his own." (PG6-EM13, pos. 222-223)

"Well, I split up because I couldn't take it anymore. So it was actually liberating for me." (PG6-EM13, pos. 195)

"Interviewer: And eh, how was the separation? For you? Was it stressful for you?

Test person: "Before the separation it was stressful. (...) So a year before the separation de-this was very, very stressful, but the separation itself was a liberation." (PG6-EM14, pos. 156-157)

"Breaking up with my ex-husband was like a liberating blow, but I also broke up because I simply wasn't happy in that relationship and it took me many years before I really took the plunge. So it was liberating for me." (PG6-EM21, pos. 131)

It was coded 8 times that "attempts at mediation" were made. These relate to preventing the relationship from breaking up, using couples therapy or making the separation more pleasant and finding a joint solution for dealing with the children.

"Interviewer: Did the court somehow recommend mediation, or?

Test person: "Mhm, they did that and I also went to the parent counselling alone, but my ex-husband doesn't feel ready for it. " (PG6-EM11, pos. 192-193)

"Because she blocks everything. So there is a mediation experience that we drew up together, which she never signed, saying that what it says is not acceptable to her (PG5-EV01, p. 5)

"I had a mediation appointment with my ex-husband, but unfortunately he turned it down like everything else." (PG6-EM21, item 165)

"Well, we went to six or seven counselling centres, all unsuccessfully cancelled by the mother." (PG5-EV20, item 149)

It turns out that the ex-partners and main carers of the children are uncooperative and rather uninterested in resolving the conflicts. The experiences shared by the respondents give an indication of the hurt felt by the ex-partners. This can also be confirmed by the current contact situations with the ex-partner. From the interviews, it was filtered out that in all groups there is no contact 10 times, 17 times there is little contact and 6 times there is regular contact. This indicates how limited communication between the parents is, which is also visible in the consequences of the estrangement (and separation). With little to no communication, no exchange can take place. Without communication between the parents, no bond can be maintained or a new one formed, which leads to a break in the bond.

It can be concluded from all of these connections that the parental level mixes with the couple level. In the event of a separation, i.e. when the couple level no longer exists, this leads to considerable consequences, as described here. The usually unresolved couple problems are now played out with the ex-partner on the only level

that still exists - the parental level. Motives that cause considerable damage arise from the hurt feelings of these people.

6.5. Gender aspects

In this study, a major focus was placed on the differences between the various constellations of parents. It was important to note how the life satisfaction, mental and physical health of estranged parents differed from that of parents who still have contact with their own children. We noticed that there were also anomalies between the genders within the constellations. Consequently, this aspect also receives special attention in the report. It is noticeable in the study report that women in the respective groups are physically and mentally worse off than in the male constellation. In terms of life satisfaction, only mothers from intact families fare better than fathers. If we compare this data with the ifd Allensbach survey "Value orientations of the German population in gender comparison in 2023 - Survey in Germany according to value orientations in gender comparison 2023" from the two studies "Men in Germany[6] "(2023) and "Women in Germany[7] "(2023), we can see that the women surveyed place more value on the desire to have children, on being committed to the family and on a happy partnership, while men tend to strive for professional success and independence in comparison. This could explain the rather happy state of mothers in intact families and also the poorer results for mothers living apart and those who are estranged from their children. In addition, the survey on the "Role of men in parenting by gender" (Ipsos 2023) shows that 29% of men and 25% of women stated that a man is less masculine if he stays at home to look after the children. This could be due to the fact that professional success is still more of a priority for men than for women, which could explain why the men in our study seem to be only slightly better off than the women. Due to the societal pressure on women to be there for the family while men are expected to strive for a successful career, men have a better chance of achieving a higher status than women after separation or estrangement. However, our study shows that separated and estranged fathers are more likely to speak of a social downfall than the respective mothers. Only separated mothers show a clear pressure of expectations, while this is not mentioned among estranged mothers, although the survey "Childless women and men on perceived

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[6] Compiled surveys and statistics. Sources are cited individually according to APA citation style.
[7] As footnote 1

discrimination"[8] (BMFSFJ 2020) shows that 61% of women and 67% of men claim that "being a mother is part of being a woman" (Männer in Deutschland, 2023), which could have increased the pressure of expectations among estranged mothers. In comparison to the statement "Being a father is part of being a man", 49% of women and 61% of men agree with this. In our study, the clearest negative conspicuous features of estranged mothers tend to be in their own self-image and self-efficacy. In addition, a worse financial situation can be recognised among separated and estranged mothers. Another striking point in our study is the mention of domestic violence in the former partnership. Both mothers and fathers from the constellation of estranged parents report experiencing domestic violence. It is striking that the estranged fathers from our study were more likely to have been affected by physical violence than the estranged mothers. According to the MAXQDA coding, however, they were more often victims of psychological violence in the partnership. This leads to the next question of how custody of the children is divided between the parents after separation if violence also plays a role. The financial factor could also be cited as an argument, which would put parents who stay at home for childcare at a disadvantage. Nevertheless, public opinion tends to assume that mothers have an easier time in custody disputes and are given more rights of access. However, the study on child welfare during separation and divorce by the BMFSFJ (current report 2023) shows that the most important factor is the welfare of the child. The article states: "For example, positive family relationships and regular contact with the other parent are decisive for the child's well-being - regardless of the respective care arrangement". It has been proven that taking children's wishes and needs into account leads to better health and quality of life for them. Although the article states that children should have the opportunity to have conflict-free contact with both parents, according to an article in the German press agency with reference to the Federal Statistical Office, German judges awarded custody to the mother in 914 cases in 2018, to both parents in 251 cases and to the father in 102 cases. Even in special cases such as "isolated family cases" or custody in the case of unmarried parents, the trend shows that custody is being awarded to the mother in more cases. Although many courts did not have to make a decision in 2018 because neither parent applied for sole custody, in the vast majority of cases the children still live with

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[8] The question was: What experiences have you already had due to your childlessness and what prejudices have you encountered? Childless women and men on perceived discrimination 2020

the mother. This is also confirmed by the study "Single parents in Germany by gender" (Federal Statistical Office 2022), which found that around 2.27 million mothers and around 487,000 fathers in Germany were single parents in 2022. The enormous difference is striking, but there is a trend towards growth among fathers.

In terms of the children's well-being and respect for their wishes, this would mean that the children would make a conscious decision in favour of the mother and against the father. This is also shown by our study, in which the estranged fathers spoke of an originally positive parent-child relationship and yet were not allowed to have contact with the child for various reasons due to a court judgement. According to our study, in most cases both the ex-partner and the child rejected contact with the father. The most frequently cited reasons for the estrangement by the mother were the exercise of power, revenge and financial gain. The children are said to have deliberately rebelled against their father. The estranged fathers did not feel supported by the family support system and feared that this decision, which they felt was wrong, would jeopardise the child's welfare. What is striking in our study is that the estranged mothers also have an almost similar experience and attitude towards the estrangement process. For them, too, the exercise of power and revenge are the most important reasons and their assessment of the family support system is largely negative. It can be seen that the estranged parents, regardless of gender, have a negative view of the family support system, while in the separated families it is mainly the fathers who speak of a negative view.

Among other things, the parents criticise the fact that the children's needs were not taken into account, although judges argue that this is the most important criterion for custody and access rights. Some interviews state that the youth welfare office was aware of an alienation process that had been deliberately brought about by the other parent and that it had been ignored due to discriminatory aspects. To summarise, it can be seen from our study that the alienated parents would have liked more support from the family support systems and have lost trust in them. It should be emphasised that all of the comparisons made between the results of our study and other sources mentioned in this section of the project report are based on assumptions and no demonstrable link between the different studies can be proven by the students. However, these connections could provide support for future studies and possibly confirm or refute a connection. The focus should not only be on estranged or

separated parents, but more parents from "intact" family relationships should also be surveyed more intensively in order to examine the basis on which the marriage exists. Whether married life exists because of a happy life satisfaction, is maintained for the benefit of the children or is even continued for fear of losing custody are factors that could be of interest for future studies in order to cover more areas of parent-child alienation.

6.6.Remaining in the partnership due to joint children?

Why many parents stay together is a big question. This is because it involves not only psychological but also physical health risks for those affected and also influences the child or children involved. The family bond within the family plays a decisive role in the well-being of all those involved. Why do parents stay together despite relationship problems? Is it the shared responsibility towards the child? Or the hope of offering the child a supposedly stable environment despite all the adversities?

One participating father from Group 1 of the intact fathers reported "I think the children [are the reason why the relationship works] for the most part" (PG1-IV14).

The decision to stay together seems to be the logical consequence that we have been taught by the obligatory nature of the concept of family and its traditional model of the 1950s (Katona, 2018).
It is important to understand that parents staying together out of a sense of responsibility for the children is not necessarily in the best interests of all involved. The stress and damage caused to everyone involved can have long-term negative effects. Parents need support to strengthen their partnership and deal with conflicts constructively. After all, a stable and satisfying partnership forms the foundation for a positive family life and the psychosocial development of children (Hillmann et al., 2011).
Nevertheless, there are various factors that prevent parents from dissolving the relationship and possibly living a more modern form of family. These include social expectations, financial dependencies, fear of change and concern for the well-being of the children.
The quality and stability of the parental relationship is also of central importance for the child's psychosocial development. Studies indicate that a good parent-child

relationship and the role of the facilitators are considered relevant for the healthy psychological and physical development of the child (Eckert et al., 2020).

It is also important to recognize that it is not the separation itself that is important, but the way in which parents deal with the separation. Open communication, maintaining shared rules and regular interaction between separated parents can help to support the wellbeing of all involved (Bergold et al., 2017).

"[My parents] basically just waged a war with us" (PG1-IV02).

The basis of how parents behave in their family begins with their own family history. The most important caregivers model the first visible relationship for the children. They learn from observing how mum and dad interact, communicate and resolve conflicts. Previous experiences and the relationship patterns learnt in childhood therefore influence parental behaviour and their decisions (Hillmann et al., 2011). This becomes particularly clear when dealing with their own conflicts and maintaining relationships. Positive interaction between parents and children is important for the development of a healthy family structure (Hillmann et al., 2011). However, negative experiences and conflicts within the partnership can lead to parents being less satisfied with their relationship, which in turn has a negative impact on the family climate (Hillmann et al., 2011).

Overall, it is important that parents in difficult relationship situations receive support and counselling in order to make the best possible decisions for themselves and their children. Encouraging open conversations and removing the taboos surrounding separation can help to ensure that parents are able to make the right decisions for themselves and their family and receive the best possible support.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Conclusion

The research objectives of our study were achieved, and the hypotheses were confirmed. The estranged parents are worse off in terms of life satisfaction and mental health than in the other family constellations. Only in the area of physical health did it turn out, contrary to our hypothesis, that in this case the separated mothers and fathers were the worst off compared to the other constellations. The correlations between family structures, conflicts and the well-being of family members provide important clues to the complex relationships in this area. The effects of estrangement and conflict on the estranged parents represent a central finding of the study. The qualitative and quantitative results of the study show that this has a negative impact on the hypothesis variables. This explains, among other things, the low scores of the estranged family constellations in life satisfaction and mental health. However, the question remains as to why physical health is not just as low as the other two variables. The fact that a poor family relationship and other life circumstances have a primary influence on life satisfaction and mental health and have less influence on physical health could partially answer this question. Nevertheless, the psychosomatic effects of conflict and stress should not be underestimated. Many interviews with affected parents revealed complaints such as neck and back pain, nausea, vomiting, sleep disorders and concentration problems. Promoting family constellations that are low in conflict and as stable as possible, as in the case of intact families, can therefore have a positive influence on well-being and living conditions. It should be noted that the study only had a small number of test subjects available and that these differed in terms of numbers in the respective groups. For a clearer result, more people affected would have to make themselves available. This could be more difficult because the topic of parent-child alienation is an emotional and highly stressful experience that those affected are reluctant to talk about. This could also partly explain why there is currently little fact-based research in the field of parent-child estrangement. However, our study could be the start of encouraging more people to talk about their experiences in order to create more awareness in society.

In addition, this awareness could reach people who do not realize that the parent-child estrangement they are affected by is seen as a psychological syndrome. In the interviews, the interviewers learnt that some of those affected were not aware of the alienation until it was brought to their attention by outsiders, or that they only became aware of it in the midst of the alienation. They had previously been unaware that such a phenomenon existed. This shows that education is needed in society. There are few sources on parent-child alienation and our study raises even more questions that need to be clarified in the future. Why do attempts at mediation and alternating models fail? What additional support can be offered to those affected in order to avoid alienation from their children? Why is it that many of those affected have similarly bad experiences with family support systems? How and what do family support systems need to change in their work in order to minimize criticism? The respondents repeatedly expressed a desire for more training and educational work in these systems. It was also revealed that judges receive little or no feedback after a court judgement has been made on who is to receive custody and an alienation order has been enforced. This hardly gives judges the chance to reflect on any wrong decisions and take this into account in future decisions. The study found that the well-being of children is crucial to their health and quality of life. Nevertheless, statistics show that in many cases custody is awarded to the mother, potentially leading to conflict and alienation. It is important to note that our study consists of the subjective perception of our respondents. This factor, in combination with the fact that such cases of custody disputes are not publicized due to the protection of minors, makes it difficult to make fact-based statements that justify the argumentation of a court judgement of alienation. All of the above points would have to be taken into account for a well-founded study. How will this be possible for future studies and surveys? In addition, the question was raised during the implementation of the study as to whether it makes sense to give affected parents who have been estranged from their children (also through court judgements) the opportunity to share their stories with experts from the family support system. The lecturer of the seminar organized a meeting on 29.02.2024 between a family court judge, a lawyer, a psychologist and three parents affected by alienation. This took place as part of the Leuphana University of Lüneburg conference week. The experts were shocked by the experiences of the estranged mothers and fathers during the process with youth welfare offices and courts. This should not have happened, was the approximate

wording used by the lawyer in reference to one mother's experience during the custody dispute. How often such mistakes happen should also be recorded statistically but is difficult to determine in practice. All these unanswered questions show that much more research needs to be done on the topic in order to resolve the problems in practice. The students at Leuphana University of Lüneburg and their lecturer Jorge Guerra Gonzales hope that the study will have taken a further step towards raising awareness of parent-child alienation and provide inspiration for future studies.

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Child Welfare & Social Sustainability

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