

# Opinion Exchange Meeting on Parental Alienation

## (Summary/Private Translation)

August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024(JPN Time)

August 21<sup>st</sup> 2024(USA Time)

### 1. Participants

- Ms. Y. Kada (Described as **【Kada】** in below)
- Ms. M. Umemura (**【Umemura】**)
- Professor W. Bernet Ph.D. (**【Bernet】**)
- PCB Taque (**【Taque】**)
- PCB Ken (**【Ken】**)

### 2. Summary

#### (1) Outline of Parental Alienation

##### ① What is Parental Alienation

- A mental state in which a child, mainly whose parents are separated or divorced, refuses to establish or maintain a relationship with the non-cohabiting parent for no valid or reasonable reason. This does not apply if the child is estranged as a result of actual abuse or neglect from his or her parents.
- No parent is basically perfect, and each has a certain level of understanding of why their child dislikes them, but the essential feature of the problem of parental alienation is that it warrants a complete severance of the parent-child relationship. Children who suffer from parental alienation are often disproportionately affected.

##### ② How international or American standards of mental disorder define Parental Alienation?

- It is necessary to pay attention that the act of parental alienation itself is not a mental disorder. On the other hand, the symptoms that appear in the child as a result are mental illnesses. Therefore, DSM-5 defines the symptoms as “Child Affected by Parental Relationship Distress (CAPRD)”. Parental alienation is stated as one of the root causes of it by text (\*2). ICD-11 (\*3) similarly expresses it as “Caregiver Child Relationship Problem (CCRP)”.
- Also, AFCC (\*4) and NCJFCJ (\*5) have clearly stated that causing parental alienation

is child abuse that can cause the mental illness mentioned above (\*6), and many countries and states have already set various criminal and civil penalties to protect child from parental alienation. The understanding of that “causing parental alienation is child abuse” have become common like that.

## **(2) Scientific Aspects**

### **① What is the basis those who are against to recognize Parent Alienation as child abuse?**

- There are some claims such as “parental alienation does not exist” or “it is not abuse because it occurs regardless of the behavior of the parent.”. However, there is no clear scientific basis, and those have been only claimed by people with extreme ideas who can never be agreed by silent majority.

### **② What is the major basis that parental alienation is child abuse?**

- Qualitatively, in various countries with different cultures, languages, historical backgrounds, etc., this problem has been defined as child abuse. In other words, regardless of social factors, as far as we were all born as human beings, children desire love from their parents. Therefore, depriving a child of their parents defined as an abuse.
- Quantitatively, plenty of statistic evidences have been presented, I will share them with you later (\*7).

## **(3) Apart from phycological aspect.**

### **① Even when considered from a non-psychological perspective, such as a sociological perspective, parental alienation harms the welfare of the child because it prevents the child from accessing the social resources (intellectual, occupational skills, etc.) of the other parent. I believe that this is the case, but have such discussions been held in the United States as well?**

- That perspective is exactly right. Therefore, basically, the conventional wisdom has formed that the act of not allowing a child to meet his or her parents causes great harm to the child’s development. The focus then becomes, “In what cases is it better to actively inflict these harms on children and prevent them from seeing their parents?”

## **(4) How to identify the case of Parental Alienation?**

### **① How to identify children suffering from parental alienation, and what are the criteria?**

- There are five factors. (1) The child living with one parent is actually denying access to

the other parent, (2) That parent and the child previously had a good relationship, (3) The parent does not have any reason such as child abuse which deserves to be denied by the child. (4) There are acts of alienating behaviors by the parent living with the child; (5) The child's reasons for rejecting one parent are not worthy of rejecting the parent.

**② How have you, Dr. Bernet, identified them in the real practice of courts?**

- It depends on age, but it is very simple. If you interview the child and the child says, "I don't want to see my parents," I suspect parental alienation. When these children are allowed to actually meet their separated parents in a relaxed setting, in almost all cases the children say to separated parents like "Why didn't you come see me sooner?". It is quite opposite from the beginning.
- Children who have been actually abused or neglected say that "I want to see my parents." Then, they state things like, "I want to see my parents, but I want him/her to stop hitting me." Or, "I want him/her to stop neglecting me." Having this case, I start to think about the next step carefully while assessing evidences to validate how the child should be allowed to meet their parents.

**③ Human beings are born to love their parents...**

- At least I have never met a child who was born hating his parents.

**④ What is the procedure used by US courts to investigate a child's psychological condition?**

- There are slight differences by states, but 1) the husband and wife are interviewed together, 2) the husband and wife are interviewed individually, and 3) one parent and the child are interviewed together, and 4) the second parent and the child are interviewed together, which may be quite different from Japanese one.

**(5) How to save children suffering from parental alienation.**

**① In terms of social systems, what measures are necessary to protect children from parental alienation?**

- More than anything else, it is an education for public institutions. In particular, institutions involved in child protection work, followed by courts. I myself have trained court staff in Tennessee, and if those people do not understand the problem of parental alienation, it will cause very serious problems for society as a whole.

**② What measures are being taken to save children from parental alienation?**

- Step-by-step measures are necessary, but the first step is for court officials with the correct expertise to issue a court order for children who have suffered from parental alienation to receive treatment such as counseling. A program will begin to restore a healthy bond between parent and child.

③ **Which countries have well-designed systems for child protection, and which countries should we refer to?**

- Many countries, including the United States, are working on this, but it can be said that Denmark has particularly well-developed systems.

(6) **Other Free Discussion**

- **【Kada】** Is it correct to understand that the importance of joint custody and the seriousness of the problem of parental alienation become more pronounced as the child's development progresses?
- **【Bernet】** Exactly. The more independent a child becomes, the more their opinions will come to the surface side.
- **【Kada】** One says that Japan's sole custody system stems from the traditional family system. In the past, children were treated as the property of (mainly) the male head of the household, and later, when gender equality was advocated, it actually extended beyond gender equality to assert female authority, and before you knew it, children were once treated as women's property, Japan is finally beginning to see signs of a shift towards gender equality in its truest sense.
- **【Bernet】** Exactly the same as the United States 100-50 years ago. Even in the United States, in the past, children were the property of men. Then, extreme feminism arose and children were treated as the property of women. It is widely known for, about 50 years ago, society as a whole began to think about what true gender equality meant. After those cycles, once Arizona introduced shared custody for the first time, which quickly gained citizenship and spread throughout the United States.
- **【Ken】** When I work as NPO, even though I am a man and talk about the issue of parent-child separation issue, people don't take it serious. On the other hand, when I talk about a mother who dropped into panic after her infant is taken away, people says, "Parent-child interaction is essential!" This issue is tied up in gender matter, which may be a kind of paradigm issue. Children loves both their father and mother. I hope people to think about this once again.

- **【Umemura】** At last, I would like to ask Bernet-san to tell us about the background that led you to tackle the problem of parental alienation.
- **【Bernet】** At first, I only became interested after hearing about the case of a friend who had gone through a divorce. However, as I was actually in charge of child custody issues in court and proceeding with my practice, I realized that the problem of parental alienation was so serious. Since then, I have become aware of the current situation that is affecting many children, and I have shifted my main field of activity from clinical to academic fields with the aim of getting more people to know about it and helping as many children as possible. That is my story to being here.
- **【Ken•Taue】** We believe that both Professor Bernet's knowledge, based on his clinical experience and research with numerous children, and the overall United States society which has a leading history of joint custody and co-parenting, is an extremely important asset. I would like to receive your continuous advise so that Japanese children can meet their parents as earlier as possible.

\*1: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition.

\*2: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27343884/>

\*3: International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition.

\*4: Association of Family and Conciliation Courts

\*5: National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

\*6: <https://victimtohero.com/afcc-ncjfcj-acknowledge-parental-alienating-behaviors-are-a-cause-of-parent-child-contact-problems/>

\*7: Article by Edward Kruk about "[Parental Alienation as a Form of Emotional Child Abuse](#)"、  
Article by Jennifer Harman et al. about "[Parental Alienation Behaviors and Family Violence](#)"、  
Article by Bernet and Greenhill about "[The Five-Factor Model for the Diagnosis of Parental Alienation](#)"