

New research shows how courts often resist abuse allegations

April 9 2021, by Kara Tershel



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A new four-part HBO series, "Allen v. Farrow," documents the accusations of sexual abuse against film director Woody Allen and the aftermath. The documentary calls on the expertise of Joan S. Meier, a professor of law at George Washington University Law School. In the docuseries Meier comments on strategies of disinformation used by abusers, and references her research focusing on a particularly

widespread one: the claim of "parental alienation" often used to deny abuse claims by women and children.

Meier's latest research examines multiple reasons why many family courts resist abuse allegations made by mothers and children against fathers. It also describes how mothers and children are less likely to be believed when the alleged abusers claim [parental alienation](#). As a result, "mothers who allege abuse are losing custody at disturbing rates, and children often face grave consequences when they are forced to return to their allegedly abusive parents," Meier said.

"The widespread skepticism by [family courts](#) toward allegations of child physical and [sexual abuse](#), as well as other forms of domestic violence, is troubling," said Meier, who is also director of the GW National Family Violence Law Center. "The courts are failing to protect children, who too often pay a high price when courts penalize mothers and [children](#) by reversing custody to the alleged abuser."

Meier's latest research, "Denial of Family Violence in Court: An Empirical Analysis and Path Forward for Family Law," is available on SSRN and forthcoming in The Georgetown Law Journal.

Meier wrote about the "Allen v. Farrow" case in a [blog post published on Medium](#).

More information: Meier, Joan S., Denial of Family Violence in Court: An Empirical Analysis and Path Forward For Family Law (2021). GWU Legal Studies Research Paper No. 2021-12, GWU Law School Public Law Research Paper No. 2021-12, Available at SSRN: ssrn.com/abstract=3805955

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