

Evaluating the State of Predatory Alienation in New Jersey

Executive Summary

Predatory alienation is defined as "extreme undue influence on, or coercive persuasion or psychologically damaging manipulation of another person that results in physical or emotional harm or the loss of financial assets, disrupts a parent-child relationship, leads to a deceptive or exploitative relationship, or isolates the person from family and friends."

What did we want to know?

- How online predators, human traffickers, con artists, gangs, cults, and other groups use predatory alienation to isolate young adults and senior citizens from their family and friends
- The grooming practices used to target and control young adults and older adults
- The high-pressure tactics used in scams and exploitative relationships to manipulate, control, and take advantage of older adults
- Why young adults and older adults are particularly vulnerable to predatory alienation
- What young adults and older adults can do to protect themselves from predatory alienation

How did we find out?

Literature Review



Comprehensive literature review of sources related to predatory behaviors; isolation and grooming tactics used by traffickers, scammers, cults, gangs, extremist groups, domestic violence perpetrators, and online predators; risk factors for victimization; protective factors; and research on best practices and policy related to addressing predatory behaviors.

Qualitative analysis using NVivo was conducted by identifying common themes and coding each piece of literature.

Stakeholder Interviews



We interviewed 22 individuals who have professional experience with predatory alienation including:

- advocacy
- direct services
- research or practice expertise
- law enforcement
- legal services

Interviews followed a semi-structured guide with several domains of open-ended questions followed by a multi-step content analysis of qualitative data using NVivo.

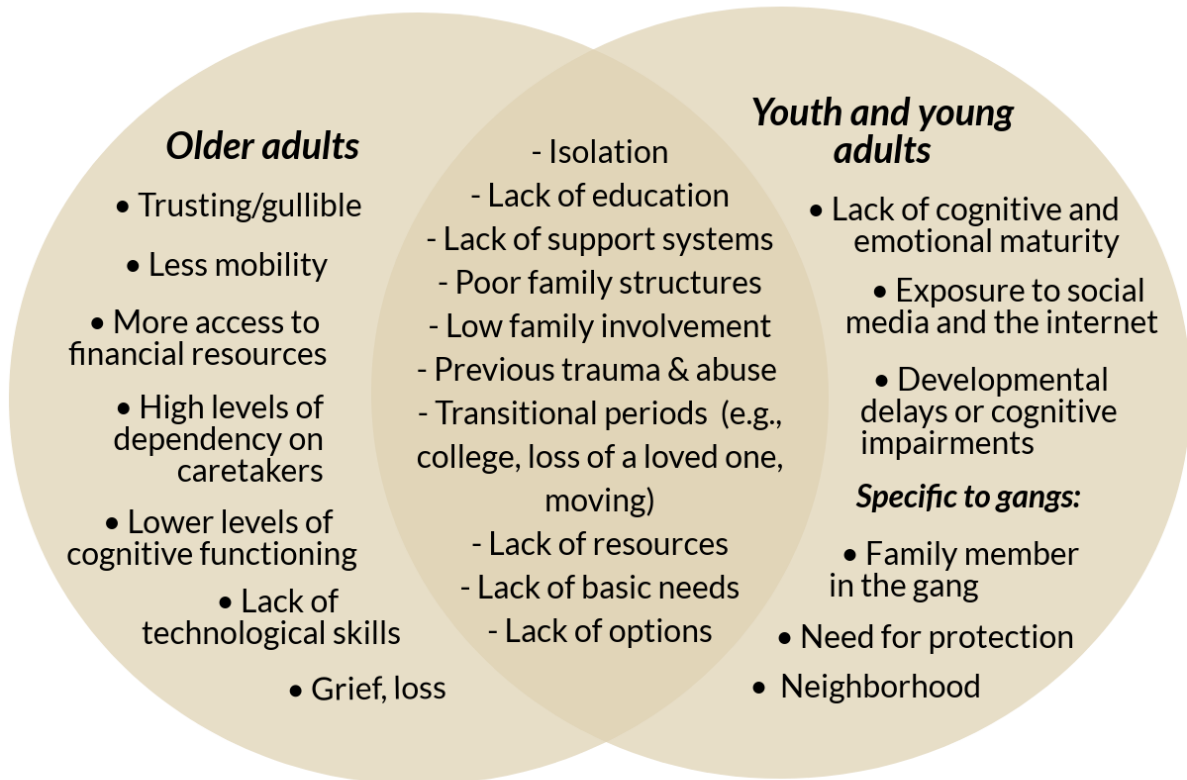
Key Findings



Terms similar to "predatory alienation":

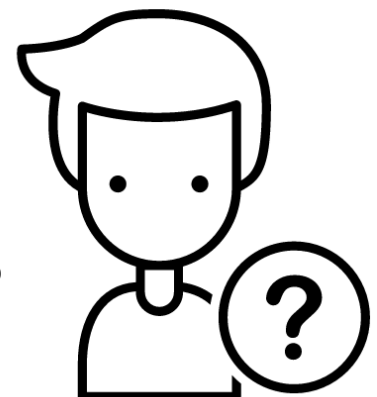
- Coercive control
- Coercive persuasion
- Undue influence
- Grooming
- Sexual exploitation
- Emotional abuse
- Manipulation
- Psychological manipulation
- Cultic influence
- One-on-one cult
- Brainwashing
- Mind control
- Membership
- Coercion
- Coercive isolation
- Purposeful isolation
- Predatory

Risk Factors and Vulnerabilities



Signs a person is being victimized:

- Changes in affect or behavior
- Physical signs of neglect or abuse
- Isolation from support systems, family, and/or friends
- Fearful
- Tattoos or branding
- Depressed mood
- Humiliation or shame
- Change in job, schooling, or interests
- Cannot leave perpetrators
- New friend or lover taking up their time
- Recruiting others



Key Findings

Predatory Patterns and Tactics

Dynamics

- Takes place over time
- Often recruits from certain spaces depending on intended victim
- Perpetrators can maintain psychological control even without physical boundaries on their victims
- Victimization can take place in a group or one-on-one setting

Grooming Tactics

- Romancing or "love bombing"
- Fulfilling needs
- Serving as a replacement family
- Establishing trust
- Gifts or bribes
- Acting as a savior
- Incremental escalation (i.e., exploitation or abuse begins at a minimal level and gradually gets worse)
- Reframing their experiences as negative or reframing their sense of self

Isolation Tactics

- Controlling phone and communication with support systems
- Controlling the places they go
- Taking up their time
- Controlling and restricting access to their needs (e.g., medication, food, money)

Abuse and Threats

- Sexual or physical violence
- Stalking and surveillance
- Degradation
- Threats to family and friends
- Blackmail
- Threats to self

High-Pressure Tactics in Scams

- Sense of urgency
- Changing numbers and repeat calls
- Threats

Recommendations

Recommendations are based upon the findings from the literature review and the responses from stakeholder interviews.



Collaboration

- Collaboration within systems (e.g. collaboration with law enforcement and service providers in gangs) and across systems (collaboration with trafficking and gang service systems)
 - Task forces made up of individuals in all areas to examine problem and response
 - Promotion of "one-stop shops" like Family Justice Centers and Child Advocacy Centers
 - Universal screening and assessments to make referral systems stronger
-
- Healthy relationship education and awareness campaign around predatory behaviors tailored to specific age groups
 - Appeal to existing awareness and education campaigns to make their education more general, since there is so much overlap in coercive and exploitative tactics
 - More public education about coercive control and psychological and non-physical abuse
 - Bystander and family education about recognizing risks and signs of victimization
 - Training first responders, police, service providers at all levels to take a trauma-informed approach
 - Public awareness about available services
 - "Healthy Relationship" hotline and/or anonymous online chatroom



Public Awareness and Education



Terminology

- Term is very similar to parental alienation, which is a controversial term in domestic violence field
- General term such as "coercive persuasion may be more appropriate; consistent term must be applied

Recommendations



- Using thorough and general screening and assessment tools to identify all issues an individual is facing at social services, ERs, doctor's offices, clinics, religious organizations, education systems, and law enforcement agencies
 - Promoting autonomy of individuals so they don't feel overwhelmed (recognizing that their victimization includes loss of autonomy so regaining that is important)
 - Considering cultural factors such as interpreters to establish trust
 - Focusing on creating a strong relationship between the service provider and victim
 - Establishing more funding with sustainability for long-term services
- Examining current policies to determine how best to strengthen to possibly cover more than one abuse "area"
 - Study laws related to similar concepts and possibly seek to expand definitions to include cases such as individual cult-like separation from family
 - Participants who worked with cults felt strongly about some sort of legal protection for victims of cults
 - One solution might be a law with general language so victims who don't fit into a "silo" can receive protection



- Continued research on similar laws such as coercive control law in the UK and undue influence law in California
- Identify victim perspectives of their experiences