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## Effects Of Parental Alienation: A Phenomenological Study



**Abstract:** - Parental alienation is a growing concern today. Many children grow up without the care and love of their parents. As a result, there are feelings of emotional rejection felt by the children, and some lead to a life of delinquency. This research aims to discover the effects of parental alienation and coping mechanisms of alienated children toward a better life. It utilized a qualitative research method through a phenomenological approach through an interview of four alienated children. The study reveals that the participants who have experienced parental alienation suffer from internal and external behavioral problems and search for their identity after reaching adulthood, which also leads to devastating complex trauma and low self-esteem. With this, parental alienation calls for a child protection response since it can be a form of collective abuse and the custodial parents may safeguard the child's relationship with an alienated parent to avoid negative views through counseling or focused group discussion, the Department of Social welfare and Development (DSWD) and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) can implement a Family Bridge Program an educational and experiential workshop that helps unreasonably alienated children and adolescents adjust to living with a parent they claim to hate or fear

**Keywords:** Alienation, child, relationship, emotional abuse, parental rejection.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Parental alienation is a growing concern today, and over the last few decades, there are effects associated with it have become increasingly acknowledged and studied. When a child was born, each parent forms a bond or attachment to the baby. For the alienating parent, this bond is on having his or her needs met by the child. Mostly these are emotional needs. The relationship reverses from meeting the child's requirements to meeting the parent's needs and wants. Children whose parents divorce suffer emotionally and psychologically, especially when the divorce is contentious and the children get exposed to an ongoing conflict between their parents.

According to current literature estimates that 2 – 4% of children end up being alienated from a parent (Warshak, 2015) and 13% of parents become alienated from one or more of their children (Harman et al., 2016).

Parental alienation syndrome (PAS), a term coined by Richard Gardner in 1985, is a condition in which a child repeatedly degrades, belittles, and harshly rejects a parent without justification. The situation teaches to be the result of both the coaching of the alienating parent and the child's involvement in the disparagement and condemnation of the alienated parent (Whitcombe, 2013). Gardner (1998) recognizes three levels of parental alienation: mild, moderate, and severe. There may be some alienation symptoms from the child and naïve programming from the alienating parent in mild cases. Still, the parent-child relationship and visitation are usually left relatively unchanged. There is usually more intentional programming from the alienating parent and rejection from the child in moderate cases. The child may have a difficult time transitioning between parents but still has a chance of eventually continuing the parent-child relationship with the targeted parent. Severe cases of parental alienation include the alienating parent becoming obsessed with aligning with the child and using this enmeshment to encourage separation. In some extreme cases, the alienating parent will even make accusations of abuse by the targeted parent. The child reports hatred for and completely rejects the targeted parent, often severing the relationship with little hope of recovery in the future (Gardner, 1998). In-depth descriptions of each level of alienation and behaviors and interventions coincide with these levels.

Consequently, there have been various adverse effects observed for the children who experience alienation isolation and depression, lowered self-esteem, attachment and identity issues, feelings of mutual mistrust, more insufficient communication, and psychological and emotional concerns from being manipulated, as well as the loss of a loving relationship with a parent (Baker, et al., 2014). The current literature estimates that 2 – 4% of children end up being alienated from a parent (Warshak, 2015) and 13% of parents become alienated from one or more of their children (Harman et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Gardner (2001) reviewed 99 cases of parental alienation syndrome and found that in 33% of cases, parental alienation lasted for more than two years. Through interviews with adults who reported experiencing parental alienation as a child, Baker (2007) found that in every case in her sample, the severed relationship between parent and Child lasted for at least six years; for half of the piece, the relationship remained disrupted for

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more than 22 years. A key characteristic of parental alienation syndrome is a robust and enmeshed alignment between the child and the alienating parent. Due to this dependency, the child may begin to adopt and replicate the alienating parent's negative views and behaviors toward the targeted parent.

In the Philippines, the duties of parents under Presidential Decree No. 603, also known as Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC), were created through Presidential Decree 603, otherwise known as the Child and Youth Welfare Code 1974. Article 46 of the Child and Youth Welfare Code (P.D. No. 603) provides that parents shall have the following duties following their children: 1) to give them attention, companionship, and understanding; 2) to extend to them the benefits of moral guidance, self-discipline, and religious instruction; 3) to supervise their activities, including recreation; 4) to inculcate in them the value of the industry, thrift, and self-reliance; 5) to stimulate their interest in civic affairs, teach them the duties of citizenship, and develop their commitment to their country; 6) to advise them properly in any matter affecting their development and well-being; 7) to always set a good example; 8) to provide them with the adequate support as defined in the law, particularly the Family Code; and 9) to administer their property, if any, according to their best interest subject to the provisions of the Family Code, particularly Article 225.

According to Alampay (2014), the conflicts and psychological stress experienced in the marital or couple relationship of the Filipinos may influence the way parents interact with their children. This interplay of psychological and parenting processes within the family is critical to studying Filipino mothers and fathers, given the cultural salience of family cohesion and family-oriented values. Specifically, local family systems perspectives posit that the Filipino family functions as a whole. The psychological stress experienced by one family member may affect another person or relationship in the family system (Carandang, 1987). In addition, relations between Filipino parents' psychological well-being and parenting behaviors are rare. However, there is evidence that stressful life events predict paternal hostility and aggression (Garcia & Alampay, 2012).

Maternal self-efficacy in parenting is associated with more minor rejecting behaviors toward children (Daganzo, Alampay, & Lansford, 2014). Poor psychological well-being may contribute to Filipino parents' harsh parenting and rejection. This association might be pronounced among low-income urban families who contend with other risk factors such as financial stress and poor living conditions (Racelis & Aguirre, 2002). Concerning Parental alienation as the child is one of the most important assets in the nation, all effort should be exerted to promote his welfare and enhance his opportunities for a useful life. Home is the cradle of human personality, a child is not a mere creature of the State that shows every member of the family especially their parents should strive to make the home a wholesome and harmonious place as its atmosphere and conditions will greatly influence the child's development. Within the Philippines, there are laws supporting the duties of parents under Presidential Decree No. 603 also known as Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) was created through Presidential Decree 603, otherwise known as the Child and Youth Welfare Code in 1974 Article 46. Applying the attachment theory in the duties of parents under P.D. 603 is to endow every child with dignity and worth of human being. Attachment to the mother is obviously important initially but attachment to the father is equally important to the child and such bonding is likely to lead to positive emotional and behavioral development. As supported by the Family Code, an egalitarian system is adopted by the said Code, thus supporting the importance of attachment not only to one parent but to both. This is made evident by the fact that the law requires joint parental authority and custody by both parents over their child.

Furthermore, Article 1 of PD 603 supports the welfare of a child which states that the child is one of the most important assets of the nation. Every effort should be exerted to promote his welfare and enhance his opportunities for a useful and happy life. The child is not a mere creature of the State. Hence, his individual traits and aptitudes should be cultivated to the utmost insofar as they do not conflict with the general welfare. The molding of the character of the child starts at the home. Consequently, every member of the family should strive to make the home a wholesome and harmonious place as its atmosphere and conditions will greatly influence the child's development. Attachment to the home and strong family ties should be encouraged but not to the extent of making the home isolated and exclusive and unconcerned with the interests of the community and the country. The natural right and duty of parents in the rearing of the child for civic efficiency should receive the aid and support of the government. Other institutions, like the school, the church, the guild, and the community in general, should assist the home and the State in the endeavor to prepare the child for the responsibilities of adulthood. Furthermore, Article 3 of paragraph 3, elucidate that the emotionally disturbed or socially maladjusted Child shall be treated with sympathy and understanding, and shall be entitled to treatment and competent care. In the case of Emma, a

woman married to a man in the military for many years. During that time, he repeatedly abused her and their children. She reported the abuse to the police and the military. When she went to court, she had recordings of her husband's threats against her. However, a court decision to award custody of their children to the father. The father claimed parental alienation that Emma was alienating the children from their father by false claims that he was abusing them. Joan Meir, a professor at G.W. Law, who gets letters from women like Emma numerous times each month, decided to find out just what happens in cases where parental alienation is claimed. In this case, it was funded by the Department of Justice. Meier showed how parental alienation claims affect custody. According to Meier (2020), this research team analyzed published court opinions that were available online between 2005 and 2014, resulting in their data set 4,388 custody cases. They coded the cases for differing abuse allegations by either parent: domestic violence against the mother, child sexual abuse, and child physical abuse. They also coded for allegations that one parent was trying to alienate the child from the other parent.

Alienated children are often separated from the targeted parent for extended periods; this separation paired with parental alienating behaviors is associated with poor psychological adjustment among children (Arce, 2016). Adults who were alienated as children report severe long-term effects of this abuse (Baker, 2005), low levels of self-esteem, and high levels of self-hatred, insecure attachment, substance abuse disorders, guilt, anxiety, and depression. These individuals also develop fears and phobias, experience attachment difficulties, have problems communicating with their children. (Aloia & Strutzenberg, 2019), and develop a lack of trust in others or themselves (Harman et al., 2018).

In connection with the mandate and gap in the literature, the study bridged the gap in several studies to address some specific issues of why alienated Child and parents did not have a word to describe or label their experience and understand the actual behaviors and so other children will not be used to hurt others their parents. The findings of the study will help strengthen the relationship of the family, especially the child's welfare, by recognizing the problem faced by the child and the parents in the process. Through these established challenges, the researcher would be able to suggest alternatives to overcome them. Specifically, it will be beneficial to the child and the parents

## II. METHODOLOGY

### 1. Research Design

The Hermeneutic Phenomenology Approach was used to be able to know and understand the lived experiences of the alienated children.

### 2. Population and Locale of the Study

The research exploited the concept of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sample that is selected based on features of the population and the objectives of the study (Creswell, 2003). Participants who are knowledgeable and/or part of the case at hand are purposely chosen as key informants. Through this, the research yielded a greater depth of information.

The participants of the study were four (4) purposely selected who: a) experienced parental alienation; b) at least 18 years old; and c) is from a family whose parents were legally separated and are residing in Baguio City and La Trinidad.

### 3. Research Instrument

An interview guide was used to identify the effects of parental alienation. The self-structured interview guide was further reviewed and validated by the Ethics Committee of the University. The instrument was composed of two parts: the first part was the profile of the participants; the second part dwelt on answering the three statements of the problem.

The instrument was written in English but was translated into Filipino. The researcher further explained the interview guide's content to understand deeper and answer the questions clearly using the dialect he or she understands. The participants were not restricted as to the manner if answering. They were given the freedom to respond verbally or in writing. The researcher further used a messenger through private message or voice conferencing to record the participants' responses to validate her written notes further. An in-depth interview or was conducted to participants through video conferencing via ZOOM, Facebook messenger, or google meet. The interview was only done once; however, the researcher had already met the participants twice before the actual interview for acquaintance purposes and to set a comfortable relationship.

Further, the research employed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach that aims to appreciate how a person perceives or talks about their experiences and hope; how the key informants depend on its extent and depth through coding.

#### 4. Treatment of Data

The data obtained from the in-depth interview was organized and segmented, including the identification of themes. The data gathered from Google forms of the participant's thoughts and feelings during the interview. The data was analyzed using hermeneutic phenomenology analysis with inductive hand coding to derive themes. Hermeneutic phenomenology analysis is a method for understanding, analyzing, categorizing, and interpreting the experiences of the participants. The hermeneutical process is carried through the following procedures; (1) Themes within the data- these themes capture something important about the data in relation to the research question, representing a level of patterned response or meaning within the data set, (2) Analyzing the lived experiences of the participants as the researcher seeks to introduce herself into and form part of the culture and context of the study subject, (3) Categorization of fundamental aspects of the reality through observation and distinctive element of close observation process in the production of anecdotes, (4) Interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 1. LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS REGARDING PARENTAL ALIENATION

Based on the interview conducted, the following themes were derived to show the lived experiences of the alienated children. These are Confusion after separation, Development of a strong bond with the custodial parent, Avenue for self-improvement.

##### 1.1. Confusion after Separation

This theme discusses the alienated children's feelings after separation. Most of them feel relieved from the burden because of the bad experiences during the presence of their father.

Confusion means in the state of bewildered or unclear in one's mind about something (Brown and Marsh, 2008). Right after the separation of parents, most participants mentioned their confusion. These confusions include emotionally unsure and feeling sad or mad. As mentioned by Participant No.1, "honestly, I feel relieved because there will be no domestic violence anymore, that we are all at ease and peace at that time. That there will be less drama in every day in our house." While Participant No. 2, speak briefly, "I felt sad at first but felt peace", and Participant No.3 raised, "I feel sad and angry because of how immature they both act while squishing me in the middle of the mess they created. But I still feel mad when I remember how they act and say things to me with no regards as to how I feel when they say things, especially since I do my best to act neutral," and Participant No. 4 also mentioned, "I honestly don't know; I was just a baby back then. I didn't really think much about it but when I see Fathers who are there for their children or "parang kahit mga bata lang sa park madali na akong umiyak parang ganun," I got affected. I get really emotional. (I honestly don't know; I was just a baby back then. I didn't really think much about it but when I see Fathers who are there for their children or sometimes even I see children at the park I get easily feels emotional like that. I got affected. I get really emotional). From this, it can be inferred that alienated children can feel loss when their parents got separated it could be a feeling of sadness, madness, happiness, or emotional ensure.

In relation to separation and attachment theory that most children of separated parents appear relatively free of painful loyalty conflicts as if they lack the capacity for ambivalence. Also, alienated child appear emotionally constricted; they are also likely to behave very inappropriately at times and manifest conduct disorders, at least in the presence of the rejected parent. Expressions of hatred, rage, contempt, and hostility can be acted out in rudeness, swearing and cursing, hanging up the phone, spitting at or striking a parent, sabotaging or destroying property, stealing, lying, and spying on rejected parent (Caye et al., 1996).

According to Carroll (2020), Most children react to their parents' divorce with painful emotions, including sadness, confusion, fears of abandonment, guilt, misconceptions, anger, loyalty conflicts, worry, and grief. Many children experience feelings of loss when one parent moves out of the family residence when a beloved pet is left behind, or even when they are with one parent and miss the other. In intense conflict and domestic violence situations like Participants No. 1 and 2, children may have a sense of relief.

##### 1.2. Development of a strong bond with the custodial parent

A bond brings two people together and forms a connection between them. It allows you to trust each other with all your thoughts and secrets and brings two people together. Like what other participants mentioned in this theme. Participant No. 1 brought up her feelings to her custodial parent and gratitude to alienated parent, "as my beloved parents, that I'm still blessed that they are my parents, especially my father, that I still consider him as my one and only father." While Participant No. 3 expressed her positive attachment to her mom as she said that, "I'm closer to my mom as compared to my dad since we had very little communication. But right now, I have very limited communication to the both of them since I haven't lived with either for a long time."

Also, they tell stories against the distant parent. In some cases, it is true as mentioned by Participant No. 2, "I have always been mom's girl because she always takes care of us, we are close, and I tell everything to my mom, and I idolized her because she is so strong. I have never been close to my dad because he is always busy or abroad working." and Participant No. 4, "Participant No. 4 said that, I'm kind of close with my mom? I have no relationship with my dad at all." Because of this, hatred or anger towards the other parent becomes stronger.

However, in some cases, the custodial parent like what Participant No. 1 shared, "mom says against my father was all true, that my father was a very irresponsible kind, that time to time, I grew up with anger and hatred towards my father, that he does not deserve to be called father at all. There are times, yes, especially those heated times that were my mom was very angry that she curses my dad and she always pin-point that every bad or negative attitude that we show to her, she always said that we got it from our father." In this theme, they tell stories or even curses against the other spouse but it is not clear if it is true which causes confusion.

In connection with Parental Attachment Model, someone who provides support, protection, and care. Because human infants, like other mammalian infants, cannot feed or protect themselves, they are dependent upon the care and protection of "older and wiser" adults. Children from intact families displayed more career decidedness and financial connectedness to their parents. Children with divorced parents reported higher financial stress and greater attitudinal, functional, and emotional independence from fathers (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

### 1.3. Avenue for self-improvement

Self-improvement is anything you do in an attempt to improve yourself like, knowledge, status, or character, by one's efforts. Most participants learned the value of patience, commitment, understanding, confidence, and independence. Participant no. 2 learned the very essence of patience like what she stated that, "I am struggling not to hurt the ego of a man because I am grew up strong and independent. I learned that men has really high ego and pride and that we as a women be careful about the things we say, but never let them men tell us what we should do because we women are powerful more than they are in fact. If a man started hurting you physically, emotionally or in any way you should take legal actions if it is done consistently to prevent them from making more severe actions in the future. Women should always be confident and know that we shouldn't be a victim."

In correlation with the Self-determination theory provides an understanding processes that influence identity formation and maintenance as well as the identity related concepts of exploration and commitment. This theory point of view, it is Ryan and Deci (2015) again who discern between two main types of motivation, based on the reasons that encourage action, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to the two researchers, the first one refers to undertaking an action because it is interesting and enjoyable, while the latter one means doing something because it leads to an outcome. Most of the participants have an intrinsic motivation seems to be an important driver when it comes to changes in lifestyle and self-improvement, more efficient than extrinsic motivation and, especially, financial incentives. There is pleasure and utility of improving their personal processes and performance, psychological needs that will drive the establishment of specific goals and initiatives and, ultimately, will enable their attainment. The alienated person is less effective socially and does not strongly attach with the goals of the society to which he or she should belong (Israel, 1971; Redden, 2002; Seeman, 1975). Feelings of alienation are characterized by an individual believing him/her to be different from others. In this state, the individual experiences low self-esteem and aspire to become another person, leading to psychological problems. Isolation may benefit the alienated child as they do their hobbies they find self-healing is the best way to move on in their tragic situation.

From this study, lived experiences of the respondents associated with this type of alienation had difficulties at school, internal and external behavioral problems, and searched for identity after reaching their adulthood. After separating their parents, most felt relieved from the burden and produced an avenue for self-improvement.

## 2. EFFECTS OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

There are effects of parental alienation since it can be a form of collective abuse, particularly in extreme cases. Long-term effects of such alienation in childhood can affect adults in later life. To provide answers for this problem, an in-depth- interview was undertaken to gather the data. In mapping out the responses of the participants, the following themes were revealed like Parental alienation as a form of complex trauma and Low self-esteem.

### 2.1. Emotional Effect

The emotional effect is any experience of feeling or emotion. Ranging from suffering to elation, from the simplest to most complex sensations of feeling, and from most normal to the most pathological emotional reactions. A very sad and complicated feeling as felt by Participant No. 2 as she said, "I am affected emotionally because I am constantly saddened by the incident. I developed anxious behavior as I grew up. I question my worth and felt underappreciated most of the times." All of them has the feeling of complex trauma, repression and emotional stress.

From this, Parental alienation is a form of emotional child abuse. The potential impact of this abuse on a child's life can be devastating. In correspondence, contemporary trauma theory deal with the long-term effects of such alienation in childhood and how it affects the adults in later life. Such children will frequently lack the ability to trust, enjoy intimacy in later life and demonstrate commitment to Long term effects of parental alienation or parental alienation syndrome. Trauma causes disruption and reorientation of consciousness, but the values attached to this experience are influenced by a variety of individual and cultural factors that change over time.

### 2.2. Low self-esteem

Low self-esteem is having a generally negative overall opinion of oneself, judging or evaluating oneself negatively, and placing a general negative value on oneself as a person. This theme concluded that all of the participants has low self-esteem. As experienced by Participant No. 3 that, "People see me as a confident person whenever I ask them or they simply tell me, but I know inside that I really am not. In fact, I get nervous at the smallest things like reciting in school and I always use the calculator to check my answers even if I am sure of my answer. If I were to rate my confidence from 1-10, I would say that my confidence lies between 4-5."

In similarity, alienation syndrome is defined as low self-esteem, low social interest and high self- centrality. Alienation is defined as an attitude of hopelessness resulting from an inability to structure the environment in terms of either a stable self-orientation. According to Thompson (2012) Terror Management Theory, the human species used same cognitive abilities that gave rise to the potential for terror to bring this terror under control by creating culture: a world of meaning that supersedes the natural world and elevates humans to a higher plane of existence than all other living things. Such conception of reality make it possible for people to feel significant (to have self-esteem) through the adoption of social roles and consequent satisfaction of associated standards of value. Individuals are "motivated to a sense of self which means the attainment of social worth.

In summary, it has enormous impact to the alienated child which is a form of emotional child abuse. The potential impact of this abuse on a child's life can be devastating that leads to complex trauma and low self- esteem.

## 3. COPING MECHANISMS OF THE ALIENATED CHILDREN

The strategies for coping emotionally and psychologically are covered in this chapter.

### 3.1. Avoidance

The action of keeping away from things that may distract distract them. Most of the participants would like to escape from emotional and psychological wounds and so they look for something that maybe beneficial to them in the future. Participant No. 1 make herself busy doing things that maybe productive in school as she mentioned, "I'm not thinking of it, rather I focused on my studies before, that I want to show to my alienated parent that I will be able to graduate w/o his help." On the other hand, Participant No. 2 stated, "I keep myself busy and occupied." Participant No. 3 said, "Distracting myself, talking out my feelings and accepting my past and current situation." While Participant No. 4 make herself busy in school and other curricular activities as she said, "naging busy ako sa sarili ko, my own little world, nagbabasa, naging active sa church madalas manood ng TV and I draw a lot." (I keep myself busy, my own little world, reading, being active in church and often watch in television and I draw a lot).

### 3.2. Self-Healing Mechanisms

Self- healing refers to a cluster of psychological characteristics involving a match between the individual and the environment, which maintains physiological and psychosocial homeostasis, and through which good mental

health promotes good physical health. Participant No. 3 find self- healing in her own creative way as she raised that, "Sometimes, I talk out my feelings with people I trust and who care about me just to let off some steam and sometimes I engage in some of my hobbies." Most of the participants reclude themselves.

From this, it can be inferred that alienated child use self- healing mechanisms like opening up there hard feelings to someone whom they only trust or keeps words to themselves.

In correlation to Stress Coping mechanism, the idea that emotional processes, including stress, are dependent on actual expectancies that persons manifest with regard to the significance and outcome of a specific encounter. This concept is necessary to explain individual differences in quality, intensity, and duration of an elicited emotion in environments that are objectively equal for different individuals Lazarus and Launier (1978).

### 3.3. Support from other agents

Support from other agencies including the family and friends designated to assist alienated children with available resources, capabilities, or expertise in support of emergency support response operations. One of the participants ask the assistance of a psychologist, Participant No. 1 stated, "Hindi ko na masyadong maalala, pinagdrawing ako ng bahay noon then nagtanong about sa bahay. I am your friend approach ang ginawa saakin, puro narration lang. Every weekends, Dko na ngay maalala kasi bihira akong pumunta parang 2-3 hrs lang ata or minsan parang 1hr lang. Tapos may report akong finifill-upan parang attendance ganon. Noong una tinitext pa si mama, pero after ilang months wala narin" (I don't remember, they just let me draw a house and asked me about it, the approach used was the "I am your friend" it was purely narration. Every weekends, I don't remember because I seldom go like 2-3 hours or sometime 1 hour only. Then, there is a form given for the attendance. Before, they're sending message to my mom but after how many months they never sent messages).

In connection with family-based treatment programs for adolescents with behavior problems and their parents, church activities intervention and presence of good friends as a source of emotional support and spiritual growth. According to Social support theory of Leahy-Warren (2014) explains the importance of relationship and interaction within those relationships which give a contribution to health and well-being. Family, friends, peers, and church can be emotional and practical support. At school, fellow students, supportive staff, and faculty may assist, and as we move into our professional careers, our colleagues may also be sources of support.

In summary, there is a great help with the social support system aside from self-healing for the alienated child to see positive things despite the tragic situation that happened in their lives.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The onset of alienation creates emotional disturbance to the alienated children. This includes feeling sadness, hatred and repression. The level of confidence of the alienated children lowers as they seek a sense of belongingness, attention and affection from others because of the absence of father figure. Such alienated children frequently lack the ability to trust, enjoy intimacy in later life and demonstrate commitment due to complex trauma. Majority of the alienated children are well performing students diverting painful experiences in a successful way of living. They have close friends whom they can share their stories but not everything is being expressed most of the time they keep it themselves. They love and appreciate the sacrifice of their mother. They believe in God and enjoyed engaging church activities.

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