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Meaning Of Life For Mothers With Sexually-Abused Children

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Abstract

The meaning of life is defined as things that are perceived as necessary, felt useful, and believed to be wonderful and can be used as a life goal. The meaning of life can be discovered in joyful and tragic situations. This research aims to examine the meaning of life among mothers with children who have been sexually abused. This study employs a qualitative method with a case study approach. The research subject is a mother with two sexually abused children. Interviews, observation, and documentation were employed as data-gathering methods. The findings revealed that women who had children who were victims of sexual abuse felt embarrassed, depressed, sad, and exhausted at first. However, the subject always strives to accept what happened to her two children, seeking help from institutes specializing in children. As a result, the subject can still perform positive things like working and expressing support, attention, love, and affection for her children. The subject's meaning of life for the circumstances that occurred to her children caused the subject to grow more attached to them because she was always connected with affection, could live

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his life with the conditions that transpired, and finally made the subject happy with her children.

Abstrak

Makna hidup adalah hal-hal yang dipandang penting, dirasakan berharga dan diyakini sebagai sesuatu yang besar serta dapat dijadikan tujuan hidup. Makna hidup tidak hanya ditemukan dalam keadaan yang menyenangkan, namun juga dapat ditemukan pada saat penderitaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna hidup pada ibu yang memiliki anak korban kekerasan seksual. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Subjek penelitian adalah satu orang ibu yang memiliki dua anak korban kekerasan seksual. Metode pengumpulan data menggunakan wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Ibu yang memiliki anak korban kekerasan seksual semula merasa malu, tertekan, pikiran kacau, sedih dan merasa sangat lelah. Namun demikian, subjek selalu mencoba menerima kenyataan yang terjadi pada kedua anaknya, mencari dukungan dari lembaga-lembaga yang konsentrasi dibidang anak. Dengan demikian, subjek tetap dapat melakukan hal-hal yang positif, seperti bekerja, memberi dukungan dan perhatian, kasih dan sayang untuk anaknya. Makna hidup subjek atas kejadian yang menimpa anaknya membuat subjek menjadi lebih lekat dengan anak-anak karena selalu bersama dengan penuh kasih sayang, dapat menghayati hidupnya dengan kondisi yang terjadi dan pada akhirnya membuat subyek bahagia bersama anak.

Keywords: Meaning of life; children as sexual abuse victims; mothers' meaning of life.

Introduction

Sexual abuse toward children is a social issue that can occur anywhere, including in schools, homes, and public areas. Pre-sexual contact between children and adults (through words, touch, visual images, and exhibitionism) and direct sexual contact between children and adults (incest, rape, and sexual exploitation) are both examples of sexual abuse (Sulastri, 2019). Sexual abuse toward children is increasing in both quantity and quality. Unfortunately, according to the findings of Ivo's (2015) research, the offenders are usually from the children's immediate environment, including at home (fathers or siblings), schools (teachers), educational institutions, and the child's social milieu.

Some cases of sexual abuse involved children. One such instance is a case of sexual abuse in Rusunawa Marunda, North Jakarta, in early 2023. This incident happened to a three-year-old child with the initials AN. A neighbor was the perpetrator. This sexual abuse prompted AN's parents to take her to the Community Health Center to confirm their daughter's sexual abuse. The findings

of the investigation revealed that there had been abuse. The case was reported to the police and continued to the Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital for a post-mortem examination. The examination showed that the perpetrator was the victim's neighbor (Kompas.com, February 13, 2023). According to this scenario, the perpetrator of sexual abuse was a neighbor who was as close as a family member.

According to SIMPONI-PPA data, there were 5,354 cases of sexual abuse involving children and women across Indonesia. There were 921 victims aged 0-5 years, 2,696 victims aged 6-12 years, and 4,553 victims aged 3-17 years (accessed on March 20, 2023, from <https://kekerasan.kemenpppa.go.id/ringkasan>). According to the data, sexual abuse predominantly impacts children.

Children are members of the younger generation with strategic roles, qualities, and unique characteristics. They require supervision and protection to ensure complete, harmonious, balanced physical, mental, and social development. However, abuse affects children's psychological development.

Suyanto (2013) believes that sexual abuse of children causes symptoms such as difficulty walking and sitting and venereal diseases infection. In reality, sexual abuse may end in unintended pregnancies. Lubis (2017) adds additional psychological impact, namely the birth of chronic trauma, which results in undesirable qualities such as inferiority, excessive fear, disrupted mental development, and mental retardation. This situation brings back painful memories for children who have been sexually abused and parents, particularly mothers. As a parent with a child who has been a victim of sexual abuse, this reality is very tough to live with, especially for mothers who have a closer relationship with their children. A mother who has a child who has been sexually abused is more likely to experience unpleasant feelings, such as negative self-appraisal and social settings.

The majority of children who are victims of sexual abuse are under the age of 18. They suffer bodily, mental, and/or financial harm due to the crime (The Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, 2013). Parents with children who have been sexually abused are undoubtedly devastated and heartbroken. As one of the aims of marriage in Islam, every married couple desires children (As-Subki, 2010). The Qur'an Surah Al-Kahf verse 46 expresses Islam's attitude toward children:

الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا

” *Wealth and children are the adornment of this worldly life,*” (Kemenag, 2018).

Lestari (2018) claims that children are a symbol of marriage perfection and dreams for perfect joy alongside the growth and development of children. Therefore, sexual abuse against children will significantly strain a mother. On the one hand, a mother must always accompany her children when dealing with authorized law enforcement. On the other hand, she must continue to communicate with the community. In actuality, child victims of sexual abuse face ostracism, alienation, insults, sneering, and even banishment due to the socio-psychological implications. This impact results from society's prevalent notion that virginity is essential, even morally and normatively. In truth, children victims of sexual abuse are victims of undesired events. The condition causes the mother to feel guilty and worthless and lack purpose and significance.

The meaning of life is things that are perceived as important, useful, and great and may be used as a life goal. Individuals who identify and fulfill the meaning of their lives are less likely to experience despair (Bastaman, 1996). According to Frankl (in Naisaban, 2004), the meaning of life is the meaning of a human's life. The meaning of life should not be questioned but rather responded. This response is offered in actions rather than words.

According to Victor Frankl, the meaning of life is a valued item resulting from a link with the purpose and reason for existence. The meaning of life is objective since it exists independently of humans and must be attained. Humans can select their psychological condition and attitude because it is a total unity of physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions, as found in logotherapy. Furthermore, Agustini (2016) argues that no one gives the meaning of life but must be explored and discovered by oneself. Once discovered, the meaning of life must be realized. The meaning of life can be found not just in joyful circumstances but also in difficult ones.

According to Frankl (1984), three potential areas contain values that allow a person to discover the meaning of life. These three values that become the roots of the meaning of life are creative, experiential, and attitudinal. According to Frankl (in Bastaman, 2007), the meaning of life has several characteristics: 1) it is unique, personal, and temporary; 2) it is specific and real (the meaning of life can be found in daily experience and life and is not always associated with

abstract things); and 3) it provides guidance and direction of purpose for the activities carried out.

Mothers who have children who have been sexually abused face a variety of issues and suffering as a result of changes in their social circumstances. The suffering is surely not limited to feelings but to individual social interactions. According to Frankl, as stated by Bastaman (in Nafi, 2020), these are the emotions of meaninglessness, which are typically characterized by inner emptiness, a lack of purpose in life, a lack of hope, a lack of drive to live, and being overwhelmed by feelings of uselessness. The problems are exacerbated if sexual abuse against children leads to pre-marital pregnancy, low self-esteem, self-blame, and environmental withdrawal (Sulastri, 2019). As a result, mothers must safeguard their sexually-abused children (Sulastri et al., 2021).

Gaining life's meaning is a series of experiences and stages in one's actions that change one's view of life from meaningless to meaningful. Bastaman (1996) defines the stages of life's meaning as follows:

- a. Suffering stage (tragic experiences or pointless appreciation). Because of terrible events or unpleasant living situations, each individual feels negative feelings and lives a pointless life at this stage.
- b. Self-Acceptance Stage (self-awareness and attitude shift). At this stage, an awareness arises within oneself to improve one's situation. Many factors contribute to the creation of this self-awareness, including self-reflection, consulting with experts, receiving feedback from others, the results of prayer and worship, learning from the experiences of others, and particular events that have significantly affected his life thus far.
- c. Life Meaning Discovery Stage (finding meaning and determining life goals). At this stage, a person recognizes the presence of valued values or important things in life, subsequently set as life objectives. Important and useful things can take the shape of creative values (works), appreciation values (beauty, religion, and belief), and attitude values, namely determining the proper attitude in the face of adversity.
- d. Meaning Realization Stage (self-attachment, directed attachment, and life fulfillment). The spirit of life and drive for work improved during this period. A person will consciously commit to engaging in various more directed real-world activities. These

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activities are typically focused on developing talents, abilities, and skills.

- e. Meaningful Life Stage (meaningful appreciation, happiness). At this level, there is a positive shift in living conditions and the development of a meaningful life appreciation so that individuals feel happy in their lives.

The components that determine the success of a person in changing life from a meaningless appreciation of life to a more meaningful one, according to Bastaman (2007), are:

- a. Self-insight: greater awareness of one's poor situation and a strong desire to improve.
- b. Meaning of life: vital and very meaningful values for one's existence that serve as life goals to be achieved and the direction of one's actions.
- c. Changing attitudes: shifting from improper to appropriate responses to difficulties, living conditions, and unavoidable tragedies.
- d. Directed activities: conscious and purposeful attempts to develop personal potentials, talents, abilities, and positive skills and use personal relationships to attain life's meaning and goals.

Social Support: the presence of someone or a group of persons who are known, trustworthy, and always willing to assist in times of need.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative method with a case study approach. The case study is research on the status of research subjects concerning a specific or typical phase of the whole personality (Maxfield in Nazir, 2003). Stake (in Mulyadi, Marzuki, and Prabowo, 2019) explained that case studies emphasize maximizing understanding of the case being studied and not obtaining generalizations. The research subject was a 40-year-old mother who had two sexually-abused children. The data was collected through interviews, observation, and documentation.

Result and Discussion

The subject is 40 years old and lives in a village in Natar, South Lampung. She used to live in Bandar Lampung City before moving to the village. She worked as a self-employed clothing

salesperson. She has two children who were the victims of sexual abuse. The table below describes the subject description:

Table 1. The Description of the Sexually-abused Child (NT)

Status	Initial	Age	Education	Perpetrator	Volume	Impact	Actions Taken by the Subject (The Mother)
First child	NT	16	Second-grade of Senior High School	36-year-old neighbor	Three times	Embarrassed toward neighbors; Low motivation; Moved schools and residences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue working - Accompany the child to report to the police, make a police investigation report, and additional police investigation report. - Accompany the child to the UPTD PPA (Regional Technical Implementation Unit Women and Children Protection). Reporting and requesting legal, psychological, social, and health rehabilitation assistance

NT was sexually abused by a neighbor who was considered a relative by both the subject and the subject's husband. The crime occurred at the subject's home when the subject and her spouse

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worked. NT was alone at the time of the incident and usually played with the perpetrator. Meanwhile, the perpetrator worked in the traditional market with her husband, selling clothes. Here is the excerpt from an interview with the subject:

My husband and I sell clothes around the markets that we know. We are forced to keep our children at home and leave them with a neighbor I consider my brother.

Because economic circumstances necessitate the subject to work hard outside the home, supervision, attention, and affection for children are frequently compromised. The subject and her husband were concerned with job and family demands. The following is the subject's account from an interview with the researcher:

What else can we do because we have this job? We have to go to the markets often. If we don't go, people will buy the clothes we sell. My husband and I trusted our neighbors who cared and loved our child. We never suspect anything because we think of her as our sister.

The subject's trust in the perpetrator, a neighbor (T), was exploited for heinous crimes. NT was molested and invited to watch sexual videos saved on his laptop. Furthermore, the culprit (T) encouraged NT to have marital intercourse. NT could not refuse since the perpetrator (T) was polite, kind, and affectionate and frequently gave her snacks. The perpetrator's (T) good deeds were frequently performed when the subject and spouse worked to sell clothes.

When the subject found that NT had been a victim of sexual abuse, she became extremely frustrated, almost to the point of depression, necessitating the need for psychological support to recover her shaken psychological state. This is what the subject said in an interview with the researcher:

“What should I do to protect my child and prevent this from happening again? I have to work because I have no enough money to pay for food, my child's school tuition, and other necessities. I must be prepared to face this hardship because I must support my child, accompany her when she is summoned by the police, attend her District Court trial, and work. But, to be honest, I cannot afford to live this way.”

The subject stated that she was extremely shy around her neighbors. Especially at the workplace/clothing store, because the store where the perpetrator's wife (T) worked was not far from the shop where the subject worked. Every time the subject worked, the perpetrator's wife (T) noticed her, especially if the NT came with the subject. Other traders were frequently drawn to the topic and her child (NT). Besides, the traders frequently discussed NT's case. After the judicial procedure was concluded and the offender (T) was detained, the subject and her husband decided to relocate and prepare for NT's school transfer.

One year later, in July 2019, the subject's second child was sexually abused. The table below describes the subject:

Table 2. The Description of the Sexually-abused Child (JHN)

Status	Initial	Age	Education	Perpetrator	Volume	Impact	Actions Taken by the Subject (The Mother)
Second child	JHN	14 years old	Second-grade of Junior High School	PTP pensioner aged (MD)	X 64	Several times Pregnant; Dropping out of school; Gave birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep working - accompany the child to report to the police, make a police investigation report, and make an additional police investigation report. Go to the hospital for pregnancy control, caring for children after childbirth, taking care of grandchildren) - Accompany the child to the UPTD PPA (Regional Technical Implementation Unit Women and Children Protection). Reporting and

requesting
legal,
psychological,
social, and
health
rehabilitation
assistance

Researchers discovered critical information about sexual abuse experienced by a child with the initials JHN based on the interviews and observations. JHN was abused sexually till she became pregnant and gave birth. The subject was very saddened by what occurred to JHN because JHN, like her first child (NT), was the victim of sexual abuse.

JHN was a victim of sexual abuse perpetrated by a 64-year-old PTP X retiree. JHN frequently met with the perpetrator (MD) and was frequently given money for snacks, an Android mobile, and money to purchase Internet bandwidth. A rented residence served as the crime site. JHN was always given Rp 15,000 by the perpetrator to meet her necessities when she went to school. JHN was accused of being a victim since she was convinced and given all the resources she needed. JHN had no idea that the sexual abuse she experienced had resulted in her pregnancy. JHN delivered this statement during her trial at the Tanjung Karang District Court, Lampung.

According to observations, the individual was weary when accompanying JHN for psychological evaluation. She claimed it was her and her husband's fault because they paid less attention to their child and did not monitor her development. Nonetheless, the subject thought she had cared for her child and met her needs. If they could not meet her needs, she gently relayed them to the children and encouraged them to be patient. On the other hand, the subject believed that the sexual abuse suffered by her two children was her and her husband's fault. She felt quite gloomy and nervous, and she grew increasingly concerned about the well-being of her children. In an interview with the researcher, the subject stated the following:

I'm quite depressed about my second child (JHN). I am not peaceful, and my thoughts are quite heavy, but I must remain strong. What will happen to JHN if I am unable to accept this reality? Everything has happened, and all I have to do now is face it. I must accompany JHN everywhere she goes.

The subject conveyed in a slightly trembling voice holding back tears that JHN's education had to stop due to pregnancy. The subject and her husband hope that JHN can continue her education to a higher level.

"I truly have big hopes for JHN to continue his education. Her sister completed vocational school but did not continue his education since she married young (after finishing vocational school)." With this incident, I can no longer hope for JHN's education because she will soon give birth and have to care for her child, and I will also have to help her." All of this must be accepted; perhaps it is the result of my mistakes."

The subject, as the mother of JHN, was devastated when she found out JHN was pregnant. JHN was not yet independent. The burden was getting heavier because of JHN's pregnancy, and she was about to give birth. Not only that, but the subject also had the responsibility and burden to continue to provide for JHN, who, in this case, is a victim of sexual abuse. The burden increased because the subject had to care for her grandchildren and sell clothes to fulfill their daily needs.

"I was confused, JHN was also a victim of sexual abuse, the same as her sister. To make matters worse, my daughter is pregnant and I automatically have to take care of her because JHN is not yet independent and doesn't understand how to do housework, let alone take care of a baby."

This condition made the subject believe she failed to educate her children because she overindulged, fulfilled all their demands, gave them too much freedom, and never paid attention to them. The subject stated that when her children returned home from school or played, and she was at home, there was no interaction or dialogue between the subject and her children. The subject stated that she never said hello to the children and always let them walk straight to their rooms.

The subject expressed her gratitude to competent parties for assisting her children who were victims of sexual abuse, stating that "if I never meet with the experts, then I would be confused about what to do for the children." The subject was grateful to the people who assisted her in accepting the truth she was confronting. She saw the incident as a challenge that she needed to face rather than avoid

and stated that she needed to change drastically. Furthermore, she knew that children want not only objects but also attention, love, and warmth from their parents.

Table 3. The Interpretation of NT's Problems

No	Interpretation	Psychological Dynamics
NT Sexual Abuse		
1	Sexual abuse	Molested by another adult (neighbor)
2	Frequency of sexual abuse	Three times
3	Causes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Persuaded by giving pocket money. 2. Often accompanied at home due to working parents. 3. T was very affectionate, caring, and kind. 4. Often gave snacks 5. Conducted in the home of the victim.
4	Impacts	Changed residence and school.
Subject's Meaning of Life (The Mother)		
1	What it feels like after a child is a victim of sexual abuse	The subject felt ashamed of her neighbors and felt guilty for not being able to take care of her child.
2	Trauma	If she works, she worries that sexual abuse will happen again to her child.
3	The lowest point in the subject's life	Depressed, devastated, cried a lot, tired, and confused about what to do.
4	Trying to accept what happened to the child	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The subject stated that she must be prepared to face the trials that befell her child. 2. She must support her child and accompany her anywhere.
5	Positive things done	She can still work and always be with her child so that she can pay attention and love her.
6	Feeling herself valuable	This incident made the subject happier because he could always be with her child, increasing the attachment between her and her child.
Conclusion		
1	Child sexual abuse	three times sexual abuses, which caused the victim to change schools and places of residence.
2	The meaning of life	The subject is now at the meaningful life stage. Living conditions are better and happier because she can always be with her child, making the relationship between mother and child closer.

Table 4. The Interpretation of JHN's Problems

No	Interpretation	Psychological Dynamics
JHN'S Sexual Abuse		
1	Sexual abuse	Abused by another adult (retired PTP)
2	Frequency of sexual abuse	Many times
3	Causes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Persuaded by giving pocket money to buy Internet bandwidth and a cell phone. 2. MD was very affectionate, caring, and kind 3. Often gave snacks 4. Conducted at the rented house
4	Impacts	Pregnant, gave birth, and dropped out of school
Subject's Meaning of Life (The Mother)		
1	What it feels like after a child is a victim of sexual abuse	The subject and her husband felt guilty for not paying enough attention to their children and not following their children's development.
2	Trauma	
3	The lowest point in the subject's life	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The subject was very confused because this was the second child victim of sexual abuse. 2. The subject was very depressed, unsettled, and her mind was burdened.
4	Trying to accept what happened to the child	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The subject stated that she had to be strong and that this had happened, so she had to face it. 2. Wherever JHN went, she was always accompanied. 3. She had high hopes that JHN could study to the highest level. 4. Always supported JHN to face reality.
5	Positive things done	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Felt grateful that someone accompanied and helped to deal with this case. 2. Could still work and always be with the child so she can pay attention and love her.
6	Feeling herself valuable	This incident made the subject happy because she could always be with her child, increasing the attachment between the subject and her child.
Conclusion		
1	Child sexual abuse	Repeated sexual abuse that caused pregnancy, childbirth, and dropping out of school.
2	The meaning of life	The subject is now at the meaningful life stage. There is a change in living conditions and life direction for the better in the form of clear life goals, especially in assisting children who are victims of sexual abuse.

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A mother must guarantee that her child receives attention and supervision during parenting and childcare. It also applies to mothers with sexually-abused children, making the mother's responsibility of caring for her child much more difficult. A mother must shield her child from other things due to the sexual abuse she experienced and offer love at home. This problem affects all family members; thus, there is a unique approach to dealing with it and making it a separate life purpose for someone, in this case, the mother. According to Frankl (in Bastaman, 2007), the value of attitude is the foundation of life's meaning. The value of attitude is that the source of life's meaning comes from full acceptance, fortitude, patience, and courage in the face of all sorts of suffering that can no longer be avoided. Thus, the incident of child sexual abuse might give the person a sense of purpose in life.

According to the study's findings, there are variations in the subject's approaches to dealing with problems that arise for their two children, who were the victims of sexual abuse, particularly in determining the meaning of life. Because this incident was a family disgrace, the subject was embarrassed, nervous, unhappy, and had a very chaotic mind. The subject felt guilty and believed she was incapable of caring for children. Therefore, the stage of seeking the purpose of life in this situation transitions into the stage of suffering. Furthermore, the subject admitted that her children had been sexually abused. In terms of discovering the purpose of life, the subject obtained it by completely appreciating the important values she possessed, mainly children. The subject realized she had not been paying attention and loved her child. With the sexual abuse that occurred to her children, the subject got increasingly attached to them and always supported them. SNT and JHN required subject support because it indicated the parents' response to their children's needs and was critical for the children (Lestari, 2018).

The incident occurred to NT, and JHN proved that the subject was more than capable of dealing with it. Furthermore, the subject could find values associated with the incidents. The gained meaning of life provided direction and purpose for the subject's actions toward

her children. This finding is consistent with Frankl's (in Bastaman, 2007) description of the characteristics of a meaningful life. The meaning of life has a distinct nature, is distinctive and real, and provides guidance and direction of purpose for the activities undertaken.

The achievement of the meaning of life when viewed from the NT case, the subject was at a meaningful stage through the emergence of changes in better living conditions and developing a meaningful appreciation of life; therefore, she felt happiness. The incidents changed the subject's life for the better in parenting, such as paying more attention to her children, paying attention to children's needs, and always accompanying children. This subject hoped that her children could feel support from their parents. The subject learned a lot when dealing with the JHN incident. Even though the problem had a tremendous impact, the subject could pass all stages in achieving the meaning of life to achieve the stage of a meaningful life. This finding is in line with the meaning of life proposed by Schultz (in Oktafia, 2008), which explains that the meaning of life is to give a purpose to one's existence and give someone a goal to become a whole human being. According to him, a person's existence, in this case, the mother, is how to accept her fate and courage in accepting suffering.

According to Frankl's theory (Naisaban, 2004), the meaning of life is the meaning of one's life. The meaning of life is not questioned, but it must be responded to because humans are responsible for living. The response to the meaning of life is in the form of action, not in the form of words. The meaning of life is not only found in pleasant circumstances but also in times of suffering. In this case, the subject could respond to all suffering with acceptance. The subject took responsibility for any situation by still working and being able to accompany her children wherever needed.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis and interpretation, the subject, a mother of two sexually-abused children, still experiences unpleasant feelings even at the lowest point in her life, such as feeling ashamed, depressed, chaotic thoughts, sad, and very tired. The subject always strives to face reality and seek help from institutes specializing in children's issues. These actions allow her to continue doing positive things like working and providing support, attention, and compassion to her children.

The subject's life is at a meaningful stage. The incidents that occurred to NT and JHN enabled her to change her family's living conditions, feel closer to the children because they can always be together, and live her life despite the circumstances. It ultimately makes the subject and her children happy.

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