

ANALYSIS OF TRAUMA FOUND IN PAULA HAWKINS' *THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN*

Graninda Mukti Aulia

English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences

E-mail : granindaau@gmail.com

Abstract

This study discusses trauma suffered by Megan, one of the main characters in Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*. The discussion is divided into four parts i.e. Megan's traumatic experiences, Megan's trauma, the way Megan deals with her traumatic experiences, and the effect of Megan's trauma towards her marriage life. In discussing the problems proposed in the thesis, some psychological theories related to trauma are applied. These theories function as a guide for the writer in revealing traumatic phenomena found in the novel. This study is a descriptive qualitative study with psychological approach. Psychological approach is applied because this study deals with a psychological issue experienced by one of the main character i.e. trauma. The result of the analysis shows that Megan

experiences traumatic events that lead her to suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Megan's PTSD is indicated through several symptoms – insomnia, anxiety attacks, avoidance and emotional reaction. To deal with her PTSD, Megan tries to involve herself with things related to her traumatic experiences like becoming a nanny and walking along busy roads with vehicles. In addition, she also tries to get some professional help. Megan's PTSD affects her marriage life. She often has arguments with Scott who wants children from his wife. This condition makes Megan betray her husband by having an affair with another man. The affair she does eventually makes her lose her life.

Keywords: *trauma, traumatic experience, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*

Introduction

The life is conducted by many symptoms that shape individuals to live their lives in any kind of various problems. Each individual has its own ability to maintain their existence. Maintain an unusual existence like what people suppose that the process is way easy. However, such an individual must understand the life situations they face. Therefore, they be able to handle these psychological problems during the socialization process.

Life cannot be separated from its internal condition where substances are directly shaped by the surroundings. It can be assumed that psychology and mortal life are tightly tied. According to Freud (1939) a psychology is a study of the human mind through its functions, especially beings affecting an action in alike ambient. The human is controlled by their mind, to act and reply from circumstances befallen on them. The result of acting or replying come assumptions and perceptions of others to classify the disorders they might have.

Trauma is an extraordinary event that raises wounds and feelings of pain, but it's also frequently defined as a wound or severe pain feeling due to an extraordinary occurrence that befalls a person directly or

indirectly. The light weight of an event will be felt differently by everyone, resulting in the influence of the event on the actions. In case, victims of sexual harassment and rape can endure stress as an effect from traumatic experiences they have had. The stress disorder that victims of sexual harassment and rape experience are frequently called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). People can get PTSD after living through one disturbing or terrifying experience in their history. While the symptoms of PTSD most commonly grow up in the hours or days following the traumatic event, it can sometimes work for weeks, months, or indeed years.

Trauma may run the subject of a literary work. One of the literary works that speak about trauma is a novel by Paula Hawkins entitled *The Girl on the Train*. The novel orations about Megan's trauma which was caused by the tragic death of her brother and her baby. Because of that she frequently experiences sleeping difficulty or sleeplessness, emotional instability and becomes excessive alertness or hypervigilance to circumstances. She has a bad relationship with her husband because of her guilt for not fulfilling her husband's desire to have a baby from her. The author chooses

to analyze trauma because this disorder is suffered by a lot of people and to live with trauma within a short period or long-term can work in hanging effect.

Definition of Trauma

Trauma is one of the most dangerous psychological injuries to people's lifestyles specially adolescents, as it can lower intellectual, emotional, and behavioral energy. Trauma commonly happens when a person constantly experiences traumatic events such as violence, rape, threats, armed conflicts, earthquakes, or tsunamis. According to Bryant & Ehlers (2003: 45) cerebral trauma is a category of damage to the psycho that occurs as a result of a traumatic event. Trauma comes in various forms, and there are big differences between people who have experienced trauma. However, the equation and the form of the reaction cross the types of stressors and victims, so it is helpful to make broad assumptions about trauma.

Trauma is no ordinary injury. Psychological trauma occurs with or without physical injury and also follows traumatic events such as sexual harassment, torture, inter parental violence, betrayal, major losses (a death lover, a death family, etc).

Based on the description above, the author is interested in conducting research entitled, "Analysis of Trauma Found Paula Hawkins' The Girl on the Train."

Fortunately, trauma is similar in common ailments which can be cured with several approaches or treatments. A different approach is needed to deal with trauma victims. There are several approaches to healing traumatic cases. In terms, memory, talking cure, mourning, medicine, etc (Herman, 1992). However, the psychological trauma is there. This is the honest effect someone who has had a traumatic experience will face. This effect is known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. PTSD is a form of psychological health that is haunted by traumatic events (Harvey, 2002: 5).

Definition of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)

PTSD or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is an extreme physical and mental state that arises after one sees, hears or encounters a great trauma or life - threatening incident (Sadock, B.J. & Sadock, V.A., 2007). PTSD is an anxiety disorder that develops in people who have been through traumatic experiences, such as war, bombing or situations that are very oppressive like the

holocaust, severe torture such as on rape, natural disasters such as overflows and earthquakes, as for accidents that aren't caused by nature such as airplane accidents. Several symptoms can indicate a person with a traumatic experience. Bradshaw (1990: 217) especially lists symptoms of PTSD as anxiety attacks, insomnia, worry, over-control, memory knocks, depression, age reversions and overmuch alertness. Generally, the person with a traumatic experience is having painful memories that aren't easily forgotten, recurring nightmares about the traumatic event, and seeing things related to the event. Memories of traumatic events can trigger feelings of anxiety, excessive fear, and feelings of distress. PTSD is characterized by symptoms of intrusions, avoidance of trauma related internal and external cues, negative differences in cognition and mood, and differences in arousal and reactivity following exposure to a traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, discussion or activities, places or people connected to trauma. Symptoms of trauma can include insomnia, feelings of fear when having to sleep alone, not wanting to be left alone even for a short time, being aggressive when asked to talk about the history, and becoming suddenly angry.

Anxiety Disorder

Anxiety can be interpreted as a feeling of unease, worry or fear of something unclear or unknown according to Craig in Indayani, (2006: 12). Anxiety is a disturbing feeling of psychological pressure as a common response to the inability to cope with problems, lack of safeness and erratic feelings. Individualities experience anxiety due to future uncertainty. Anxiety is a response to a real or imagined threat. Someone experiencing anxiety is naturally insecure about unexpected dangers in the future Schwartz (2000: 139).

Research Method

1. Research Design

This research is a qualitative research. Qualitative research is a general term for a broad range of different approaches and strategies, which transform considerably in terms of focus, assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the work of the researcher. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993 479) qualitative research is defined as classify inductive progress of organizing data into classifications and identifying designs (relations) among classifications. Qualitative research works out under a combining of observations and document surveys and does not run from the theory prepared beforehand,

but it starts from the natural environment. Data and information are withdrawn in meaning and concepts, through the descriptive exposure of analytic, without having to use numbers, because it is more prioritizing the process of occurrence of an event in a natural situation. Generalization does not need to be done because descriptions and interpretations occur in certain contexts and situations.

2. Research Instrument

This study analyzes the trauma suffered by main character Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*. The discussion with the psychological aspects the character that is to say that the study deals with human behaviors, expression, thought, and motivation. Therefore, the approach applied in this study is a psychological approach. Wellek and Warren (1962: 81) states that psychological analysis can be divided into the psychology of the author, the psychology of the characters in the story, and the psychology of the reader. This research will focus on the second type as it.

3. Data Source

The data source of this research is the novel *The Girl on the Train* by Paula

Hawkins that contains psychological elements. This novel is originally published by Black Swan in 2015, and it consists of 409 pages. The data in this study is quotations from the novel that support the topic being discussed.

4. Data Collection Procedure

The data which is in the form of quotations taken from Green's *The Girl on the Train* are collected through some steps.

1. Reading the novel repeatedly to get deep understanding
2. Underlining or marking the suspected data based on the focus of discussion
3. Selecting and classifying the relevant data that supports the research topic

5. Data Analysis Procedure

There are several steps applied in analyzing the data. The steps can be described as follows:

1. Revealing the trauma experienced by Megan on *The Girl on the Train*
2. Describing effects of trauma on Megan's life
3. Describing how Megan deals with the trauma
4. Making conclusion based on the analysis and presenting the finding of the research.

Analysis

Megan's Traumatic Experiences

1. The Death of Her Brother

"I miss him every day. More than anyone, I think. He is the big hole in my life, in the middle of my soul. Or maybe he was just the beginning of it. I don't know. I don't even know whether all this is really about Ben, or whether it's about everything that happened after that, and everything that's happened since (Hawkins, 2015: 41)."

The quotation above tells about Megan's feeling due to the loss of her brother. She feels that there is something missing in her soul after Ben's death. Ben is his only brother and she is the only sister that Ben has so that he loves her so much and always gives Megan attention and protection in any way. This is what makes Megan very sad and depressed because she never thought that her brother would leave her forever. She always remembers all the memories she had with Ben.

2. The Death of Her Baby and Being Left by Her Boyfriend

"...I close my eyes, and it doesn't take me long to get back there, back to the bathroom. It's weird, because I've spent so long trying not to think about it, about those days, those nights, but now I can close my eyes and it's almost instant, like falling asleep, right into the middle of a dream (Hawkins, 2015: 274)."

The death of her baby Megan due to her negligence is a traumatic event for Megan. It was this negligence that caused her baby to tragically die and depressed her greatly. Because of that incident she felt guilty for not being able to care for the baby carefully.

After the death of the baby, Megan is left by Mac. He has left Megan alone at her house without clarity after the funeral of the baby. This makes Megan panic and grieve because she thought that her boyfriend would take care of her under any circumstances.

3. Megan's Trauma

1. Insomnia

"I can't sleep in this heat. Invisible bugs crawling on my skin, there is a rash on my chest, I can't feel comfortable. And Scott seemed to radiate warmth; lying beside him is like lying beside a fire. I can't get away enough from him and find myself pressed against the edge of the bed (Hawkins, 2015: 216)."

The quotation above tells how Megan feels when her sleeplessness attacks her. She even feels that Scott makes her comfortless beside her when she slept so that it makes Megan unable to sleep. Megan's sleeplessness also confirmed by her husband, Scott that his wife experienced symptoms of

difficulty sleeping. Megan's insomnia is caused by her trauma of being left by her boyfriend Mac and of losing her baby after she was abandoned by her brother that she loved.

2. Anxiety Attacks

"I can feel the butterflies now, I'm getting nervous. I was horrified to run into the Watsons, because it was always awkward when I saw them; It was clear that I didn't have a new job, that I lied because I didn't want to continue working for them (Hawkins, 2015: 45)."

The quote "I can feel butterflies now, I'm getting nervous." interpreted by her body's turbulent and restless response, Megan was in a state of anxiety. "I was horrified to meet Watson, because it was always awkward to meet them," explained

4. Megan's Emotional Reaction

"I pulled away, angry, violently. He tried to hug me, but he couldn't. I was screaming at him, telling him I didn't care about this job. He tried to calm me down - worried, I assumed, about what the receptionist was thinking, what the other patients were thinking. He grabbed hold of my shoulders, his thumb pricks the flesh at the top of my arm, and tells me to calm down, to stop acting like a child. He shook me, hard; I thought for a moment he was going to slap my face (Hawkins, 2015: 181)."

the reason for her anxiety. Megan's anxiety attacks were not only short term but appeared whenever she wants to go out and takes a walk.

3. Avoidance

"It is not really about her child at all, despite the fact that the child never stops whining makes it hard to love. Everything was much more complicated, but of course I can't explain it to her. However, That's one of the reasons I've been shutting myself away (Hawkins, 2015: 46)."

Megan's statement above indicates that she has agreed to break up her activities to become a babysitter. Megan does not only try to avoid children, but she also avoids having discussion or question related to her trauma.

Megan's statement shows her angry outburst. She is not only behaving like a child but also acting out of control. As Bradshaw (1990: 217) explained, one of the symptoms of PTSD is self-control. Megan's behaviors indicate that she cannot control herself when her desire was rejected.

5. The Effect of Megan's Trauma towards Her Marriage Life

“He lay on the bed, watching me while I got dressed. He said, ‘This cannot happen again, Megan. You know it can’t. We can’t keep doing this.’ And he is right, I know we can’t. We shouldn’t, we ought not to, but we will. It won’t be the last time. He won’t say no to me. I was thinking about it on the way home, and that’s the thing I like most about it, having power over someone (Hawkins, 2015: 73).”

From the quotation shows Megan tries to seduce her psychiatrist. Megan's dialogue with her psychiatrist proves that she really wants to be close with Kamal and has a special relationship, although the psychiatrist has realized that, this should not be done because Megan is married and is still a wife and also Kamal who was afraid of losing his job due to Megan's action, but Megan still did not realize that this is mistaken, in case she feels very comfortable with her psychiatrist, her psychiatrist attention made her find comfort even though Kamal did it just because he thinks Megan was his patient.

The Way Megan Deals with Her Traumatic Experience

“There’s no sense blaming him for this, it was my idea. I volunteered to do it, become a babysitter for people down the street. At the time, I thought it might be fun. Really insane, really, I must be mad. Bored, mad, curious. I

wanted to see. I think I got the idea after I heard her screaming in the garden and I wanted to know what was going on. Not that I’ve asked, of course. You cannot really, can you? (Hawkins, 2015: 37).”

The quotation gives another proof about how Megan deals with her trauma. The decision to become a nanny is her own idea. She tries to convince and motivate herself that by being near to children, she will be able to overcome her trauma. Usually, express for another activities that can divert trauma on other personal property that are not correlated to the personal property that causing the shadow of the trauma arise. In this case, the trauma experienced by Megan also makes her motivated and try not to stay away from it.

Conclusion

After doing the analysis of trauma depicted in Hawkins’s *The Girl on the Train*, the writer finds out that Megan’s suffers Post Traumatic Stress Disorder because of some traumatic events. There are three traumatic events that make Megan suffers from PTSD i.e. losing her brother in a road accident, losing her baby due to her negligence, and being left by her boyfriend who is the father of her baby in an unexpected way.

Megan’s PTSD can be reveals through the symptoms experienced by Megan. One of the symptoms experienced by

Megan is insomnia. Megan has trouble sleeping because every time she tries to close her eyes she relives her traumatic event. She even experiences hallucinations like hearing the cries of her baby, smelling the skin of her baby, and hearing Mac's footfalls. The next symptom experienced by Megan is anxiety attacks. The anxiety attacks can be seen through her physical reactions like nervous and trembling when she deals with something that reminds her of the traumatic events. Another symptom shown by Megan is avoidance. She avoids a situation that remind her of her traumatic events or talking about her traumatic events. Megan's PTSD is also shown through her emotional reactions that manifest in the forms of irritability and angry outburst.

Megan makes some effort to cure her traumatic experiences. To overcome her traumatic experience with a baby by trying to become a nanny. However, this method does not work well and she finally gives up. To overcome her traumatic experience due to the loss of her brother, she often walks along

streets and go to the places she used to visit with her brother. By walking along some streets, she can overcome her frights of streets and vehicles, although her trauma has not completely cured yet. Moreover, Megan also tries to get some professional help. She has therapy session with a psychiatrist.

The PTSD suffered by Megan makes her unable to hold a good relationship in her marriage life. She and her husband always argue about the child that Scott wanted from her. This condition makes Megan betrays her husband. She tries to seduce the psychologist to whom she has therapy sessions, but the psychologist does not give her equal response. She eventually has an affair with Tom, the husband of Anna, to whom she ever works as a nanny. This affair makes her become pregnant, but Tom does not want to be responsible for the pregnancy. This makes Megan angry and threatens Tom that she will tell his wife about this. Tom, who is overcome with emotion, finally hits her on the head and kills her.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorder, 5th ed.* Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association. Retrieved from <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm>
- Freud, Sigmund. (1939). *Person of Issue: Sigmund Freud*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266141594_Person_of_Issue_Sigmund_Freud_1939
- Harvey, John. H. (2002). *Perspectives on loss and trauma: Assaults on the self*. Sage. Retrieved from <http://sk.sagepub.com/books/perspectives-on-loss-and-trauma>
- Herman, Judith Lewis. (1992). *Trauma and recovery*. New York: Basic Books. Retrieved from <https://www.basicbooks.com/titles/judith-lewis-herman/trauma-and-recovery/9780465061716>
- McMillan, James H., & Schumacher, Sally. (2001). *Research in Education. A Conceptual Introduction (5th ed.)*. New York: Longman. Retrieved from <https://www.worldcat.org/title/research-in-education-a-conceptual-introduction/oclc/925232664>
- McNally RJ: Bryant, Richard A., & Ehlers, Anke. (2003). *Does early psychological intervention promote recovery from posttraumatic stress?*. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 4(2), 45-79. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/1529-1006.01421>
- Read, J., & Ross, C. A. (2003). *Psychological trauma and psychosis: another reason why people diagnosed schizophrenic must be offered psychological therapies*. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, 31(1): 247-268. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1078/0813_Psychological_Trauma_and_Psychosis_Another_Reason_Why_People_Diagnosed_Schizophrenic_Must_Be_Offered_Psychological_Therapies Sadock, Benjamin James & Sadock,