

Exploring Child Abuse Revealed in Jennette McCurdy's I'm Glad My Mom Died

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Exploring Child Abuse Revealed in Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*

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Abstract. This research discusses child abuse in Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*. This study aims to analyze the cause, types, and impacts using the theory of child abuse by John Briere. The method that is used in this research is descriptive qualitative method. This thesis also uses the psychological approach. Based on the analysis the cause of the abuse is the obsession of Jennette's mother to be an actress, which failed. In Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, the writer found three types of abuse experienced by Jennette: physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, and child neglect. The example of physical abuse found in the novel are: forced to do an extreme diet and beauty treatment that causes harm to Jennette's body. The psychological/emotional abuse found in the analysis is divided into eight parts: rejecting, degrading / devaluing, terrorizing, isolating, and corrupting, denying essential stimulation, emotional responsiveness, or availability. The last one is unreliable and inconsistent parenting. Furthermore, the child neglect found is divided into four types: physical neglect, emotional neglect, educational neglect and medical facility neglect. There are three impacts of child abuse found in the analysis: psychological issues, personality development, and physical health. The example of psychological issues found in the novel are: eating disorders, depression and anxiety. The instances of personality development found in the novel are: turning into a bitter person, cannot manage jealousy and temperamental. The example of physical health found in the novel are: issues with alcohol, illness, and bulimia. After experiencing that abuse, it influences Jennette such as struggles with self-image, mental health issues, the impact of career choices, and desires for healing, advocacy, and sharing about mental health issues.

Keywords: child abuse, child neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse.

INTRODUCTION

Many cases of abuse involve children as victims. Instead of being mistreated by their elders, childhood should be a time for children to enjoy themselves with their family, friends, and peers. This situation is not impossible to have happened around us, especially in our own family environment. Abuse does not only happen to adults but also to children. It can be concluded that problems like this should be a concern of the authorities (Gill & Snyder, 2005). According to World Health Organization, child abuse is all forms of physical violence, sexual violence, emotional neglect, and even exploitation committed by parents or caregivers. Child abuse is also an act that can cause a child to be in danger. Abuse of children can manifest in a variety of ways; either physically, sexually, or emotionally through neglect. It can be said to be a phenomenon in society. This topic can

be explored through a novel. One of the novels by Jennette McCurdy that discussed child abuse entitled *I'm Glad My Mom Died*. *I'm Glad My Mom Died* by Jennette McCurdy is based on the author's true story. Published by Simon & Schuster on August 9, 2022, it is also Jennette's first novel. This novel is about the author's childhood and relationship with her abusive mother who died in 2013. Jennette is a former actress who suffered from mental illness and substance abuse. In the novel, Jennette discusses her experiences growing up in a toxic and abusive household, and how her mother's behavior affected her own mental health, family relationships, and acting career. The novel is a powerful and moving story that explores the lasting impacts of childhood trauma and the complexities of family relationships. Jennette's honest and open narrative offers a unique perspective on the effects of parental abuse and mental illness, and the journey of healing that can come from recognizing and confronting those traumas. The mentioned problems become the reason why the writer chose the title *Child Abuse in Jennette McCurdy's I'm Glad My Mom Died* because based on the various child abuse presented in the novel *Jennette McCurdy's I'm Glad My Mom Died*, it will be interesting to discuss more in the research. This research will analyze the cause, types, and impacts of child abuse experienced by the main character Jennette McCurdy when her mother was alive. It is also expected that this research will make readers understand the cause, types, and impacts of child abuse experienced by Jennette as the main character in the novel *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, and can also be useful as a reference for those who are interested in discuss the same topic in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The writer uses the psychological approach in conducting this study. According to Weiten (1989), the psychological approach refers to how researchers use theory and methodology to understand psychological phenomena. Psychological research aims to gain insight into the human mind, behavior, and experience, and to develop theories that can explain and predict human behavior. The psychological approach is applied to analyze *Jennette McCurdy's I'm Glad My Mom Died*. The writer uses the psychological approach to find out the cause of the abuse, the types of abuse, and the impacts of the abuse on Jennette. To analyze the cause, types and impacts of child abuse, this study uses Gill & Snyder's theory of child abuse. According to Gill and Snyder (1996:312), child abuse is defined as any deliberate or neglectful action or failure to act that is intended to inflict or that results in physical or emotional harm to a child. Briere's theory of types and impacts of child abuse. Briere states types of child abuse are divided into four namely physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, sexual abuse and child neglect. Based on the four types of child abuse, the writer only focuses on analyzing three types of it namely physical abuse, psychological / emotional abuse and child neglect. The impacts of child abuse according to Briere are psychological issues, personality development and physical health. There are three previous studies that discussed the same topic, the first one is entitled *Child Abuse in Dave Pelzer's A Child Called 'IT'* by Niska Supriyanti (2011). This study examined the child abuse that David experiences in Dave Pelzer's novel *A Child Called 'IT'*, the kinds of abuse David receives from his mother and how he can survive the abuse. The second one is a thesis entitled *Child Abuse in Rowell's Eleanor and Park* by Bella Melvina Wijaya (2020). The research explores Eleanor's experience of child abuse in Rowell's *Eleanor and Park*. The study describes Richie's abuse of Eleanor as her stepfather. This discussion focuses on Eleanor's struggles with her abusive partner. The three main aspects of this study are the causes of abuse that Eleanor experiences,

the effects, and the types. The third one is entitled *The Analysis of Child Abuse in the 21st Century in London Reflected in "Ugly", A Novel Written by Constance Briscoe* by Fithrie Yulyana (2014). This research examines the phenomenon of child abuse and is aimed to reveal that literary work reflects social reality. In the first and second previous studies, the writer finds similarities to this present study where it also discussed the kinds or types of abuse experienced by the character. The difference from this present research is that the writer does not discuss how the character survives the abuse like in the first previous study. The difference between the second previous study, the writer does not discuss the struggles that the character experienced with the abuse. In the third previous study, the research discusses sexual abuse and how child abuse is reflected in society in the UK, meanwhile, this present study does not discuss it. Also, the theory, object, and source of data differ from previous studies to this present study.

METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative to analyze the cause, types, and impact of child abuse experienced by the main character in the novel *I'm Glad My Mom Died*. Because descriptive research collects data in words rather than numbers, words are the preferred format. Furthermore, Gay (2006:9) defines qualitative research as the collection, examination, and interpretation of detailed narrative and visual evidence to shed light on specific occurrences. In this study, the researcher observes, collects, analyzes, describing the data and only focuses on the main character Jennette McCurdy. The source of the data that will be used in this research is the novel entitled *I'm Glad My Mom Died* written by Jennette McCurdy which contains of 313 pages with 91 chapters. This data will focus on the main character Jennette McCurdy who was abused by her mother. The writer will collect the data by reading the book and taking a note in the parts that contain the data of abuse that the writer will analyze. The research instrument is the writer herself, the study's topic, who reads and comprehends the references that support this study. The writer's approaches for gathering data before evaluating the novel include reading the novel, recognizing the data, and selecting the data. After collecting the data, the writer starts to analyze them. The procedure of the data analysis are analyzing the data, interpreting the data, and drawing the conclusion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Cause of Child Abuse in Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*

The abuse in the novel begins with Debra's obsession of making Jennette to be an actress. Debra (Jennette's mother) tells Jennette about her childhood dreams of being an actress and having a good life of being rich but her parents never let her do what she wanted when she was young. Due to Debra's dreams to be an actress which never happens, she asks Jennette to be an actress instead. Debra does everything to makes her dream come true, so Jennette ends up going to many auditions and acting class because she thinks Jennette is her only hope for that. Jennette loves her mother so much, which makes her always be controlled by her mother as if she could not choose what she wants to do at a very young age. Though Jennette hates acting, she still obeys her mother's wish to go to a lot of auditions and acting classes because she does not want to make her mother disappointed or sad because of her.

Jennette is conversing with her mother, who is expressing her regrets about her past and what could have been if she had been allowed to follow her dreams and pursue a career in acting. She tells Jennette that she wants to give her the life that she never had, the life

of fame and fortune that she believes she deserves. Jennette's mother is trying to live vicariously through her daughter and is putting pressure on her to achieve what she never could. Jennette is nervous about what this means for her and her relationship with her mother, as it is clear that her mother's ambitions and desires are influencing her own life in significant ways. The passage highlights the complicated relationship between parent and child, and how a parent's expectations and pressures can impact the child's decisions and experiences, even into adulthood.

Jennette realizes after the conversations that she is unable to choose what response she would give her mother. It is obvious enough that there is only one appropriate response, and that is a yes. Even though deep down she does not want to act, she could not refuse her mother's wish because Jennette understands that it is not a request but an order she must obey. Long story short, Jennette signed up for her first audition, and she doesn't feel ready. She suffers a stomach ache as a result of her nervousness. Finally, it is her turn to go on stage but Goatee (the judge) is not satisfied with her acting. He looks disappointed. After Goatee gives her a suggestion of what she should and should not do, the audition is finally over. Jennette is chosen as a background actor. At first, her mother seems genuinely happy for her because she does not know that there is a higher tier that Jennette might have been chosen for.

2. The Types of Child Abuse in Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*

a. Physical Abuse

The first type of abuse that the writer is going to discuss is physical abuse. According to Briere (1992), this abuse can happen in any specific situation, such as when adults are not in a good mood, frustration, depression, mental illness or another emotional condition can cause or become the trigger of physical abuse. In Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, the writer finds examples of physical abuse experiences by Jennette as the main character herself.

Jennette accompanies Debra to a doctor's appointment where the doctor expresses concern about Jennette's weight being significantly lower than normal for her age. The doctor suggests that Jennette may be exhibiting signs of anorexia, a serious eating disorder characterized by restrictive eating habits and an intense fear of gaining weight. Debra responds defensively, claiming that Jennette eats normally and that she has not noticed any changes in her eating habits. However, Jennette knows that this statement is not true, as Debra has been actively involved in monitoring and supporting her restrictive eating behaviors. The doctor then explains that individuals with anorexia often hide their eating disorder habits and suggests Debra to keep a closer eye on her eating behaviors. Jennette finds this confusing, as Debra is already deeply involved in her eating habits and encourages her restrictive behaviors. It shows how Jennette's mother may be in denial about the severity of Jennette's condition or may be actively enabling her eating disorder behaviors. It also illustrates the disconnect between the doctor's concern and Debra's response.

b. Psychological/Emotional Abuse

According to Briere (1992), psychological abuse involves a caregiver's inability to offer an adequate and supportive environment, as well as actions that affect a child's emotional health and development. Such acts include restricting a child's mobility, denigration,

⁹ mockery, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection, feelings of inferiority, and other non-physical kinds of hostile ³⁰ treatment. In this study, the writer finds examples of psychological/emotional abuse in Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*.

Jennette wrestling with conflicting emotions toward Debra. Jennette admits to feeling moments of intense dislike and even hatred towards her, which causes Jennette to experience guilt and self-loathing. Jennette acknowledges these feelings but immediately suppresses her, telling herself that she is ungrateful and worthless without Debra's presence and support. Jennette describes a pattern of pretending to be okay and suppressing her true feelings, both for the sake of her job and for Debra's sake. However, Jennette also begins to question her self-worth and feels inferior. She is also pretending for herself, suggesting a growing awareness of the need to confront her emotions and identity honestly.

c. Child Neglect

According to Briere (1992), child neglect refers to a pattern of behavior by a caregiver ¹³ that fails to meet the child's basic physical, emotional, or intellectual needs. This can include a lack of attention, ¹² love, care, supervision, or guidance, and can have long-term negative consequences for the child's development and well-being. Child neglect can be intentional or unintentional. It is important to recognize and address child neglect to ensure that children receive the care and ¹¹ support they need for healthy development and the prevention of future problems. In Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, the writer finds examples of child neglect.

This passage delves into Jennette's complicated relationship with food and their body, particularly in the absence of Debra's influence. Jennette describes feeling a sense of fullness after meals, which is a new sensation for her. However, this feeling of fullness are quickly overshadowing by a deep sense of guilt. The guilt stems from Jennette's belief that her current eating habits would not meet Debra's expectations and would disappoint her. This bingeing behavior continues until Jennette's stomach feels uncomfortably full, leading to physical discomfort and an inability to sleep comfortably. Despite feeling horrified by the weight gain resulting from her bingeing, Jennette feels unable to stop. Jennette expresses a sense of being trapped in her past experiences of starving herself for years due to Debra's request to keep on an extreme diet. Jennette's body is currently craving food. The act of weighing herself and seeing the number on the scale climb further intensifies her distress.

3. The Impacts of Child Abuse in Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*

a. Psychological Issues

Child abuse can have a significant impact on psychological development, with long-term effects on a person's mental health. According to Briere (1992:271-301), the impact of child abuse can affect a person's mental health in several ways, including child abuse, which can lead to depression, causing feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and anxiety. Child abuse can lead to PTSD, causing flashbacks, nightmares, and avoidance behaviors associated with the trauma. Child abuse can lead to eating disorders, ¹ such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa, as a way to control the impact of the trauma. In Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, the writer finds examples of the impacts of child abuse according to Jennette's psychological issues.

Jennette is expressing a complex and deeply personal struggle with her eating disorder. Jennette is articulating a shift in her perception of bulimia and expressing a desire for anorexia instead. In Jennette's view, she used to see bulimia as a way to maintain control over her weight by eating freely and then throwing it up, but now she feels differently. Jennette may be experiencing shame or dissatisfaction with the consequences of her bulimia, and as a result, Jennette is idealizing anorexia instead. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are both serious psychological health disorders characterized by unhealthy behaviors around food and body image, but Jennette manifests differently.

b. Personality Development

Child abuse can have a significant impact on personality development, with long-term effects on a person's behavior and outlook on life. According to Briere (1992:271-301), the impact of child abuse can affect a person's personality development in several ways, including child abuse can impact the way a person form relationship and attaches themselves to others, leading to difficulties with intimacy, trust, and vulnerability. Abuse can affect a person's ability to regulate their emotions, leading to difficulties with stress management and emotional intelligence. Child abuse has been linked to a higher risk of developing personality disorders, such as Borderline Personality Disorder and Antisocial Personality Disorder. Abuse can have a significant impact on a person's self-esteem and sense of self-worth, leading to difficulties with confidence, assertiveness, and self-value. In Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, the writer finds examples of the impacts of child abuse according to Jennette's personality development.

Jennette reflects on her initial ability to manage her jealousy effectively referring to a colleague or fellow actor who has achieves success. Jennette admit that she initially handled her jealousy well, suggesting that Jennette is able to suppress her negative emotions and continue with her work without letting her jealousy affect her behavior or performance. However, Jennette's composure is challenging when Jennette's co-star announces that they will be featured on the cover of *Elle* magazine. This particular achievement triggers Jennette's insecurity and intensifies her feelings of jealousy. Despite these overwhelming feelings of jealousy and insecurity, Jennette admits to pushing down these emotions and continuing with her work.

Jennette expresses intense emotions of bitterness and resentment towards a particular show or perhaps the circumstances surrounding their involvement with it. Jennette feels this show has negatively impacted her life, specifically by robbing her of the opportunity to have a typical youth and adolescence. "...Sometimes they'll call after me and say that I'm rude. I keep walking. I know I've grown bitter. I know I've grown resentful. But I don't fucking care. (McCurdy, 2022:221)" The phrase "I know I've grown bitter. I know I've grown resentful. But I don't fucking care" suggests a defiance or refusal to suppress these feelings, despite being aware of her presence. Jennette is unapologetically acknowledging her bitterness and resentment, indicating the depth of her emotional response. The sentiment of feeling "robbed of my youth" conveys a sense of loss and deprivation. Jennette believes that her involvement with this show has deprived her of the chance to enjoy a normal adolescence, free from scrutiny and judgment. The mention of "every little thing I did being critiqued, discussed, or ridiculed" suggests that Jennette's experiences with the show have resulted in intense public scrutiny and criticism.

c. Physical Health

Child abuse can have a significant impact on physical development, with long-term effects on physical health and well-being. According to Briere (1992:271-301), child abuse can affect physical health and development, and the child abuse survivors may be more likely to develop chronic illnesses. The child has been linked to a higher risk of substance abuse, including alcohol and drug addiction. The effect of child abuse on mental health is well-documented, and survivors may be more likely to develop mental health issues later in life, such as anxiety and depression. In Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, the writer finds examples of the impacts of child abuse on Jennette's physical health.

Jennette expresses confusion and distress over her recent eating habits. Jennette describes a significant change in their relationship with food, noting that for the past month, she has been unable to think about food and has subsisted primarily on whiskey, Coke Zeros, and bags of barbeque Baked Lay's chips.. Jennette's use of profanity and her stark description of her limits and unhealthy diet reflect her sense of desperation and concern. Jennette describes feeling starving and ravenous. The use of alcohol and reliance on sugary drinks and processed snacks as sustenance further underscores the severity of Jennette's situation and the potential impact on her physical and mental well-being.

Jennette describes putting on ten pounds since the initial stages of her bulimia when she is apparently at a weight that Debra considers ideal for Jennette. The mention of being "Mom's goal weight" suggests that Debra has specific expectations or standards regarding Jennette's weight, which contributes to Jennette's body image concerns and potentially influences her eating disorder behaviors. Jennette's intense preoccupation with the ten pounds she has gained indicates a deep-seated obsession with her body and weight. The use of the words "obsessed" and "tortured" conveys the distress and anguish that Jennette experiences as a result of her fixation on these ten pounds.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the novel, the writer found the cause of the abuse experienced by Jennette that is done by her mother Debra. The abuse begins with Debra's obsession with making Jennette an actress. When Debra was young, she wanted to be an actress but her parents never let her. Debra thinks Jennette is suitable to become an actress to make Debra's dream come true. Jennette really hates acting but she cannot do anything except obeying her mother's request. In this research, the writer found 3 (three) types of child abuse experienced by the main character Jennette, namely physical abuse, psychological / emotional abuse, and the last one is child neglect. The writer also found 3 (three) impacts experienced by the main character Jennette: psychological issues, personality development, and physical health. After experiencing the abuse since Jennette was six until her mother died in 2013, Jennette has openly discussed her experiences with abuse from her mother, which significantly impacted her psyche and life choices. After enduring this trauma, Jennette faced challenges with body image and self-worth, often feeling pressured to meet certain expectations set by her mother. Jennette additionally opened up about her struggles with anxiety, despair, and eating problems, which were aggravated by her childhood traumas. Jennette's experiences influenced her decision to step away from acting, reflecting a desire to reclaim her identity beyond the expectations of her early career. Jennette's journey includes a focus on healing and understanding her past, often engaging in therapy and self-reflection. Now she has become an advocate for mental

health awareness, using her platform to discuss the importance of addressing trauma and seeking help.

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