

The Influence of Child Maltreatment on Young Adult Attachment Style in the Novel *Needlework* by Deirdre Sullivan

Dina Regita Putri

Universitas Balikpapan

dinaregitaputri@gmail.com

Adi Prautomo

Universitas Balikpapan

adi.prautomo@uniba-bpn.ac.id

Abstract:

*This thesis studies the types of child maltreatment and its influence on young adult attachment style in the novel *Needlework* by Deirdre Sullivan. The aims of this research are: 1) To find out the types of child maltreatment in the novel *Needlework* by Deirdre Sullivan, and 2) To describe the child maltreatment that influences young adult attachment style in the novel *Needlework* by Deirdre Sullivan. The theory used in this research is Perrin's child maltreatment theory and Bartholomew's attachment theory. This research used qualitative methodology research, which is presented descriptively. The researcher collected the data from the excerpt related to the theory in the novel *Needlework*, written by Deirdre Sullivan and published in 2016. The final result of this research is the researcher found 74 data of child maltreatment influencing young adult attachment style with the most dominant data of child maltreatment is neglect with 40% of the data (30 out of 74 data) which is influencing the young adult attachment style of the character into fearful-avoidant as much as 50% data (15 out of 30 data).*

Keywords: *Child Maltreatment, Psychology of Literature, Young Adult, Attachment Style*

INTRODUCTION

Child maltreatment is bad treatment committed by a caregiver toward their child, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, and neglect. It is in line with the definition from World Health Organization (2020) that, “The term child maltreatment means the parental abuse and neglect happened on children under 18 years of age. It includes physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, and neglect.”. The quotation explains that either it is abuse or neglect that causes a child suffer physically, psychologically, sexually, and neglect is considered as child maltreatment.

The phenomenon of child maltreatment is essential since this topic is one of the social issues in society. Until now, child maltreatment still occurs and even increases day by day. There is a news article in 2020 revealing that the number of child maltreatment reports has risen to the highest level in a year (Breaking News Ireland, 2020). This issue in Ireland is also depicted in the novel entitled *Needlework* (2016), a novel written by Irish author Deirdre Sullivan. The novel tells about a seventeen years old young adult female named Cessie which lonely and unloved. It took times for her to open up and told her experience regarding her past and the times she is currently facing. As a child, she used to be abused and neglected by her parents. What her parent did is influencing her young adult attachment style with other people around her.

World Health Organization (as cited in Abbasi, 2015) stated “Child maltreatment is a worldwide issue with long-term influences.” (p. 357). It means, the influence of maltreatment against children done by parents will not only be felt when the child is still in their age, but it also carries over until into adulthood and forms their attachment style towards themselves and others. Attachment style is a strong emotional bond developed through interactions between a person with other people who have special meaning in life that lasts a long time and continuously. In this research, the style of attachment that will be analyzed is when a child reaches their young adult stage of age. According to psychologist Levinson (Zgourides, 2000, p. 111), young adult is the stage for the person between 17 and 22 years old. Attachment style formed when infancy commonly will always be their attachment style in young adulthood because any experiences obtained by a child from their caregiver are crucial and will shape them for the rest of their lives. It becomes the reason maltreatment done by parent or caregiver to a child may influence child’s attachment style when they grow up into a young adult individual.

The problems experienced by the characters in the novel are very relevant with psychology of literature approach to find out precisely what causes the characters in the novel to act in such a way. Psychology of literature is an approach to interpret literary works by using various concepts or theories that exist in the field of psychology. The researcher uses psychology of literature as the approach and the theory of child maltreatment by Perrin (2013) and the theory of attachment by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) The researcher is interested in analyzing the topic about child maltreatment and its influence on young adult attachment style because the issue of child maltreatment is close and frequent around us yet still ignored by the society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORY OF CHILD MALTREATMENT

Child maltreatment is any acts from parent or caregiver to children which result in harm or threat of potential damage to the children. According to Chicchetti (1989), "The term "maltreatment" refers to a wide range of events or activities which considered as maltreatment, including physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse" (p.4). From the citation, child maltreatment means a general reference for child abuse and neglect. There are many acts of maltreatment on children. Perrin (2013) stated in the book entitled *Child Maltreatment: An Introduction*, it classifies as a common four types of child maltreatment; physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, and neglect.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse in a child maltreatment case is described as any action done with or without using a particular object by parents or other caregivers that causes physical injury to the child's body.

Sexual Abuse

Forcing a child physically to engage in any sexual activities calls as sexual abuse in child maltreatment. It is kind of abuse that could be very sensitive to a child because involve a sexual conduct between a child and the caregiver.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is also known as psychological abuse. It is a type of child maltreatment that happens when a parent or caregiver emotionally harms a child to the level where the child's emotional development will be threatened because of the negative mental impact received.

Neglect

Neglect in child maltreatment is described as the carelessness of parents or other caregivers toward their children's needs, such as deliberately ignoring a child's primary needs, child's health, child's education, or restricting children excessively, among other things.

THEORY OF ATTACHMENT

Attachment style in general is the emotional closeness of each person to the various people in life. Meanwhile, the young adult attachment style is the emotional closeness of young adult individuals with other people. In the following years since the attachment theory appeared, Bartholomew (1991) was developing research regards to young adult attachment style; "There are two types of inner working models: an internal model of the self and an internal model of others. Each model might be positive or negative, representing four style of attachment." (p. 226). It means, the research experiment of Bartholomew and Horowitz tried to explain attachment style when the child reaches There are four styles of attachment: secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant.

Secure

As previously mentioned, each attachment style is affected by how the primary caregiver behaves to their children during early childhood. People with secure attachment style commonly had an attentive caregiver when they were a child. Therefore, people who have this style have positive views about themselves and others. Secure adults quickly become close to others and unworried about being ignored.

Anxious-Preoccupied

Meanwhile, people with anxious-preoccupied or preoccupied attachment style have a caregiver who was not as consistent in their responses. As adults, preoccupied become extremely afraid of being alone individual and more possessive because this style views negative on themselves but view positive on others.

Dismissive-Avoidant

There are also the styles of attachment which have avoidance character that makes them views negative on others; the dismissive style and fearful style. The researcher describes both dismissive and fearful have a careless caregiver. Nevertheless, dismissive or dismissive-avoidant still views themselves positive and become trust-issue adults because they often repress their emotions and do not trust their caregiver during childhood.

Fearful-Avoidant

The last and only style that views negative on themselves and others is fearful or fearful-avoidant. This style can be called a fear without solution attachment style since the people who have this style frequently had either a frightening or abusive caregiver, worse than a dismissive one. It made people with this style grow up afraid of rejection and would rather avoid a relationship, although deep in their hearts, they also want to be loved.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used a qualitative research method since the data used in this research are the narrative dialogue in the novel. It was also descriptive because the data was written in the form of narrative description. The data sources in this research are sentences and dialogues in the novel *Needlework* related to child maltreatment and the influence on young adult attachment style as the primary data and library sources discussing the psychology of literature approach and any other topic related to the theory of child maltreatment and theory of attachment as secondary data. The data will be collected by reading the novel, marked the particular section, then analyzed and interpreted it with the theory. In the end, the researcher will use theoretical triangulation to compares the data finding with theory of child maltreatment and attachment theory that is relevant to the research questions to get data validity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

TYPES OF CHILD MALTREATMENT

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is an intentional act involving direct contact to a child. It includes hitting, striking, beating, slapping, throwing, punching, biting, choking, stabbing, or other things that might harm a child. In the novel *Needlework*, the mother physically abused Cessie, her child as shown in the following excerpt:

"I hurl the ice cream on the ground. She slaps me on the face." (Sullivan, 2016, p. 17)

The excerpt explained that Cessie threw the ice cream to the ground since her mother washed her eyes with soft drink which hurting her eyes. Then, her mother got offended and slapped Cessie's face. Slapping includes physical abuse because slapping means making physical contact with another person by striking their face or other parts of their body with a hand. Slapping can cause damage to a child, and the result could be seen physically on the part of the child's body that has been slapped, like contusion or bruise.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is a kind of abuse which is involving an adult and a child conducting a sexual activity with force. The most common sexual abuse is rape, but it could be something else, such as; touching a child with sexual desire, making a child watch or perform a sexual act, and any other action which aims to achieve sexual gratification by forcing a child. The one who force the child in the novel *Needlework* is Cessie's father, as demonstrated below:

"When we were in the house alone, he would ask me to sit on his lap and wiggle, or press himself against me rubbing up and down, whispering disgusting things in my ear." (Sullivan, 2016, p. 142)

In the excerpt above, Cessie recounted what her father did when there were no people in the house except both of them. There were two actions that Cessie revealed. The first one was wiggling on the lap. So, Cessie was told to sit first on her father's lap, and then her father asked her to wiggle. Second, her father would push Cessie's body with force. While pushing, her father would rub her and mumble dirty things in her ear. Cessie's father actions is categorized as sexual abuse. Wiggle activity can cause friction between Cessie's lower body and the vital parts of Cessie's father. Meanwhile, pushing someone else's body makes sensitive body parts stick together, and the pressure from these activities certainly causes sexual stimulation. Cessie's father also groped cessie's body parts. It is inappropriate touching which further increases intense physical contact. These acts will make Cessie's father achieve sexual satisfaction from the stimulation received from friction in his vital parts even though clothes block it.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse or psychological abuse defines as abuse that happens when a caregiver or parents harms a child emotionally and commonly in the form of mean words like blaming,

accusing, humiliating, yelling, belittling, intimidating, degrading, terrorizing, corrupting, and confining. This kind of abuse threatens a child's emotional development because of the mental damage they get and also might cause a child to believe that they are despicable, meaningless, unloved, and unworthy. In the novel, Cessie's mother was always trying to yell at Cessie as seen in the excerpt:

“Mom doesn't approve of daughters locking doors. She likes to poke around my room for evidence of any damage to my psyche she can find. She just likes to yell at me about any secrets she uncovers and find suspects.”
(Sullivan, 2016, p. 51)

In the excerpt above, Cessie recollected memory of her mother who did not give her permission to lock the door of her room. The reason was because her mother wanted to go inside her room and looked around in case there was something she would find. Then, after finding secrets or she thought there was wrong in Cessie's room, she would yell at Cessie. The phrase 'she just likes to yell at me' indicates emotional abuse, referring to rude words. Yelling includes emotional abuse. Moreover, Cessie's mother yelled not because Cessie made any mistake. Cessie's mother was only looking for something suspicious, like Cessie's secret or something that she thought was wrong in Cessie's room. Then, she made it as an excuse to yell at Cessie.

Neglect

Neglect is a type of abuse in which the figure parents as the child's caregivers ignore to provide the child life necessities like primary needs, health, education, and affection. Examples of neglect are; ignorance towards child or abandonment, absence of love, compassion, and support, inability to provide basic physical needs like proper food, safety, a clean house to live, inability to supply medical care, and inability to give appropriate education. One of the examples of neglect existed in the novel *Needlework* depicted below:

“Mother wakes me up at eight o'clock. I cough and cough and tell her I feel rotten. She sighs and tell me to 'go to the doctor'. I ask her for some money for the doctor. “Use your own if you really fell that bad,” she says.”
(Sullivan, 2016, p. 70)

The dialogue in the excerpt happened when Cessie was feeling unwell. Her mother roused her because it was not as usual that Cessie woke up late. Cessie was coughing many times, but her mother seemed not to care. She just told Cessie to go to the doctor without any intention of accompanying her. When Cessie replied by asking for money to see the doctor, her mother quickly said that Cessie had to use her own money. The last sentence in the excerpt shows how much Cessie's mother did not care about Cessie's health and unwillingly gave Cessie any money. Instead, she told Cessie to use Cessie's money if she felt sick. The researcher interpreted that Cessie's mother is unable to supply medical care for Cessie and it is categorized as neglect.

CHILD MALTREATMENT THAT INFLUENCES YOUNG ADULT ATTACHMENT STYLE

Child Maltreatment Influencing Secure Attachment Style

Individuals with secure attachment style generally had a caring caregiver as they were a child. Hence, secure adults quickly become close to others and unworried about being ignored. In the novel *Needlework* by Deirdre Sullivan, the researcher identified the child maltreatment phenomenon in this novel influenced the character in having a secure attachment style. Among the four types of child maltreatment, the most influential child maltreatment type is neglect, which shown in excerpt below:

“My brain's the thing that should make her afraid. It's ticking all the time. It's going to blow. And she will have me locked up somewhere safe and go on mini breaks with Simon and his wallet. Which is fine with me.” (Sullivan, 2016, p. 69)

The excerpt is depicting how Cessie's mother does not care about her child and thinks that her child is a kind of nuisance. One of Cessie's mother's behavior towards Cessie that shows their carelessness is to lock Cessie somewhere so that Cessie's mother does not feel disturbed when traveling with her boyfriend. This is classified as one of child maltreatment, namely neglect. Cessie who always gets constant neglect from her mother influences Cessie's attachment style to a secure attachment style which makes her feel unworried if her mother ignores her. It is obviously seen in the last sentence that Cessie does not mind if she is locked up by her mother.

Child Maltreatment Influencing Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment Style

An anxious-preoccupied attachment style people have a caregiver with inconsistent responses. As these people get older, they tend to grow more possessive and have a severe fear of being alone. The researcher only depicts the most amount of child maltreatment type in the following paragraph:

“I need Tom. Someone who can touch me and not know. Someone who can want me properly, without it being heavy, forced and wrong.” (Sullivan, 2016, p. 96)

The last sentence of the excerpt implies that Cessie has always felt unwanted by her parents, as if her parents were coerced to have a child like Cessie. Cessie is frequently ignored and not nurtured, but her other classmates are attended to and cared for by her parents. Cessie's attachment style became anxious-preoccupied as a result of the neglect she had always endured. Therefore, Cessie is afraid to be alone and needs other people. The people that Cessie mentioned in the excerpt above is Tom, the only close friend Cessie has. Cessie needs Tom because she receive the comfort that she seek which her parents never gives.

Child Maltreatment Influencing Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment Style

The people with this attachment style have a careless caregiver which makes them view negative on others. Even so, dismissive or dismissive-avoidant people still see positively of themselves. Hence, they develop trust issues as adults since they frequently repress their emotions and have little trust in their caregivers when they are children. The most frequently exist type of child maltreatment in the novel is neglect, as depicted in the excerpt below:

“Simon tells me he will call her a taxi if I’m worried about being on my own when I am sick. I tell him not to be silly. I will be fine. I always have been fine.” (Sullivan, 2016, p. 159)

The researcher interpreted that Cessie is repressing her emotion by refusing Simon’s offer with the words ‘I will be fine’. The words showed that without anyone in the house, she would be alright. The following words also emphasized that she tried to be okay the whole time, even if there was just her alone. Cessie used to repress her emotion and it is referred to the attachment style named dismissive avoidant. Her attachment style influenced from her mother who was rarely by her side. Cessie’s mother was not into Cessie and did not care about Cessie’s life. Cessie has been neglected since she was a child.

Child Maltreatment Influencing Fearful-Avoidant Attachment Style

The final and only type that regards oneself and others negatively is fearful or fearful-avoidant attachment style. It's possible to term this a "fear without solution" attachment style since those who have it are more likely to have grown up with a terrifying or very abusive parent. People who have this style grew up to be afraid of being rejected. As a result, they would prefer to avoid becoming involved in a relationship, despite the fact that deep down they also want to be loved. One of the excerpts showing that Cessie avoids social relationship can be seen hereunder:

“Days and weeks and months have passed since first I came here, obvious and slow. Nervous and alone.” (Sullivan, 2016, p. 20)

The excerpt above represents Cessie's heart, which explains why she spends her days alone, without anybody, even her own mother. From the time Cessie was small until Cessie entered young adulthood, her mother still did not care about Cessie. Cessie's mother's treatment can be described as child neglect. Neglect in childhood can lead to a fearful-avoidant attachment style in young adults. Consequently, they prefer being alone and avoid to socializing due to their negative view of other people. But at the same time, this individual also has the need to be loved by others. The other excerpt also showed that although Cessie has a fear towards people and avoids social relationships with friends and family, but deep down, Cessie really wants to be loved because she has always been ignored all the time.

"Not that I want her to see what we get up to. But maybe to worry? To be engaged with me, and want me to be safe and warm and cared for and not

treated like a child or a real doll, depending on his mood." (Sullivan, 2016, p. 11)

The excerpt showing that Cessie's mother has treated her badly since she was a child. Cessie's mother is always ignoring Cessie and not giving any attention to Cessie's need of Cessie's life in general. The lack of concern shown by Cessie's mother over her daughter's friendship with Tom even made Cessie questioning the reason why her mother not worried at all about this matter. Cessie's mother's careless and uncaring behavior is called neglect in child maltreatment. When a child is constantly ignored, it directly influences the child's attachment style as a young adult, which is called the fearful-avoidant attachment style. This is clear from the sentence in the excerpt, which says, "to be engaged with me and want me to be safe and warm and cared for and treated like a real child.", which means that Cessie actually still wants to get affection, attention and love from her mother.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the research which is represented by the first and second chart in the previous chapter, it is showing that the most influential factor of child maltreatment is neglect with the average contribution of 41% of the data (30 out of 74 data) which is influencing the young adult attachment style of the character into fearful-avoidant as much as 50% of the data (15 out of 30 data). It is caused by the character's parents who are always busy with their own business and choose to ignore their children. Persistent and continuous neglect by parents towards their children will evidently have a serious influence. The child then learns unconsciously that their parent is unable to fulfill their necessities. It makes a child avoid people. Moreover, A child become a fearful person and view their parents as sources of fear because of the various maltreatments they have done. That is why it is called as fearful-avoidant attachment style.

The researcher finally concluded that continued maltreatment on child could influence a child's interpersonal interactions with other people, also known as young adults' attachment style. In this research, the influence of child maltreatment leads a child to become fearful-avoidant person, which is the person who wants affection, but at the same time they want to avoid it. They wanted to be loved, yet they have a fear that people will hurt her, so they depend on themselves. They also do not want to be wounded by being socially avoidant, and they do not want to be too intimate by having a friendship, relationship, or trusting others.

References

- Abbasi, Maryam Ajilian. 2015. "Child Maltreatment in the Worldwide: A Review Article." *International Journal of Pediatrics* 353-365.
- Bartholomew, Kim, and Leonard M Horowitz. 1991. "Attachment Styles among Young Adults: A Test of a Four Category Model." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Vol. 61) 226-244.

2020. *Breaking News Ireland*. September 25. <https://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/child-abuse-reports-reach-highest-level-in-year-1018975.html>.
- Chicchetti, Dante. 1989. "Definitional Issues in Child Maltreatment." In *Child Maltreatment: Theory and Research on the Causes and Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect*, by Dante Chicceti and Vicki Carlson, 3-36. United States of America: Cambridge University Press.
- Perrin, L. Miller Cindy, and D. Robin Perrin. 2013. *Child Maltreatment: An Introduction (Third Edition)*. United States of America: Sage Publications.
- Sullivan, Deirdre. 2016. *Needlework*. Ireland: Little Island Book.
- World Health Organization. 2020. *World Health Organization*. June 8. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>.
- Zgourides, George. 2000. *Developmental Psychology*. New York: IDG Books Worldwide.