

Portrayal of Depression in Emma Donoghue's Novel "Room"

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze the portrayal of depression found in the main character of Room novel by Emma Donoghue. This article used the depression theory by Paul Gilbert (2001). A qualitative method was used in conducting this study. This study has three statements of the problem; the causes, symptoms, and ways to overcome depression depicted in the Room. The results indicate that the main character experienced consecutive kidnapped, isolated, and abused. Therefore, the main character faced stress and trauma causing her depression. Consequently, the main character suffers sleep disturbance, loss of energy, and thoughts of death. However, she enables to overcome her depression by escaping from the isolated room and having a professional counsellor.

Keywords: *depression, stress, trauma.*

A. Introduction

Nowadays, many people still underestimate the issue of mental health. One of the issues of mental health is depression. In fact, depression is a major mental health issue that affects many people (Boriril, 2000, p. 1). According to Beck and Alford (2009, p. 8), Depression can be defined as a "specific alteration in mood such as sadness, loneliness, and apathy". Gilbert (2001, p. 4) states, "Depression affects our feeling, thinking, sleep, concentration, energy level, even our interest in sex". Health Analytics Asia published news that Pratusya Banerjee, a popular television Indian actress, committed suicide because of depression. It was declared that she was distressed over her failed relationship and had financial pressures that made her difficult to survive (Khurana, 2019).

Cases of depression occur in children, adolescents, and adults. An 11-year-old boy in Tasikmalaya Regency, West Java, died after being bullied by his friends on July 21, 2022. The child eventually became depressed and did not want to eat and drink (Rahadian, 2022). It means that depression still happens and will have a bad impact if not treated immediately. Elliot and Smith explained that a little depression is part of everyday life. But when sadness fills most people's days or worries fill their minds, that is not normal. They may have real problems with depression. Depression can affect the way people think, behave, feel, and socialize with other people.

Negative thoughts, fears, and worries that are not necessarily going to happen, and always feeling guilty about self are most indicative of a person's depression (Elliot & Smith, 2006, p. 26). When people are depressed, they will always feel worthless, hopeless, think negatively about something, and feel guilty for what they have done.

B. Method

In this study, the writer used a qualitative approach. Because the data in this study were analyzed from the novel *Room* by Emma Donoghue, this study applies the qualitative method in the non-numeric form. The method is library research. The writer collected information about depression from books, as explained by Walliman (2011, p. 71), that qualitative data is a data collection approach that cannot be measured or calculated accurately. Usually, this research is expressed in terms of words rather than numbers. The data used for the analysis was from the novel *Room* (2010). This study used this novel because it portrayed depression in the novel *Room*. The data were in a quotation from the text in the novel *Room* by Emma Donoghue. Moreover, *Room* was shortlisted for the 2011 Orange Prize and won regional awards (the Caribbean and Canada) of the 2011 Commonwealth Writers' Prize. Likewise, *Room* (2010) got four nominations for the 88th Academy Awards, including Best Picture. The data were collected from Emma's *Room* which relates to the problems of this study. The steps in gathering the data are as follows: Firstly, the writer collected the data by reading the whole contents of the novel repetitively. Secondly, identified the issue of depression in the novel *Room* (2010). Thirdly, the writer re-read the novel cautiously by took note and underlined the important points supporting the analysis. Finally, the writer started arranging the data into several parts based on the classification. The data were analyzed into the portrayal of depression in the form of quotations in *Room* (2010). After data were collected, Gilbert's (2001) theory was used to examine the quotation in the novel. Then, the data were classified into depression factors. All the data were described in the article.

C. Findings and Discussion

This chapter consists of the finding and analysis of the represented issue of depression portrayed by the main character, Ma, in the novel *Room* (2010) by Emma Donoghue. The data analysis that the writer used is from narration and dialogues that represent how depression is portrayed and how the main character deals with it. The causes of depression depict the main character as being kidnapped, isolated, and abused. Moreover, the depression symptoms of the main character are sleep disturbance, loss of energy, and thoughts of death and suicide. Thus, the main character plan activities to deal with her depression. The finding and analysis are divided into several sections in the following.

1.1 Causes of depression of the Main Character

Ma's depression is portrayed throughout the novel. The portrayals of depression by the causes represented in Emma's *Room* are being kidnapped, isolated, and abused. Further analysis of each cause shown by Ma is in the following.

1.1.1 Abused

Not only is the victim of the kidnap, but the kidnapper is also abusing Ma. While Old Nick isolates her, Ma experiences sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse.

In the morning we're eating oatmeal and I see marks. "You're dirty on your neck." Ma just drinks some water, the skin moves when she swallows. Actually that's not dirt, I don't think.

I have a bit of oatmeal but it is too hot, I spit it back in Melted Spoon. I think Old Nick put those marks on her neck. I try saying but nothing comes out. I try again. "Sorry I made Jeep fall down in the night." (Donoghue, 2010, p. 42).

In the quotation above, verbal abuse is seen in the statement, "I think Old Nick put those marks on her neck." It strengthens that the marks that are put by Old Nick are one of verbal violence to Ma. Furthermore, the quotation "Sorry I made Jeep fall in the night" reinforces that the cause of Old Nick did it all to Ma because of Jack's carelessness. Jack feels that the scar on Ma's neck is fine. Because of that, he realizes his mistakes and apologizes after seeing the fault.

Jack feels that he accidentally drops his toy car while Old Nick is sleeping. Automatically, it surprises him, and he thinks Ma purposely does it to hurt him. That is what makes him so angry with her and breaks her. Old Nick tried strangling Ma so hard that it left a mark on her neck.

Most women who experience verbal or non-verbal abuse cannot fight themselves. Even more, they do not know how to fight against it and its power. It can be seen in Ma's feelings when she got verbal abuse by Old Nick. She cannot help herself to do a resistance because she feels powerless and she is isolated. It makes her oppressed and scared. The quotation "I try saying but nothing comes out" proves that Ma does not want to talk to her kid. Victims of verbal abuse tend to become weak. She looks afraid because of her abuse experience. This is a sign of anxiety and stress. According to Gilbert (2001, p. 17), stress can make people biologically sensitive to depression.

Furthermore, abuse can be seen in the quotation, "The first time he opened the door I screamed for help and he knocked me down, I never tried that again." (Donoghue, 2010, p. 79). In the quotation, verbal abuse is done by Old Nick. The quote, "The first time he opened the door, I screamed for help and he knocked me down" shows that Old Nick abused Ma by dropping her when she is screaming and looking at him to open the door. Ma purposely shouted for help because she was really under pressure. People under stress usually experience panic, fear, and anxiety. These three things are triggers for depression. In addition, Old Nick dropped it because he is panicking and afraid that it would become suspicious and the centre of attention of people around his house. He is fearful that someone will hear Ma's screams, so he beats Ma down so she stops screaming. Old Nick's violent action makes Ma feel even more depressed and scared. She fears Old Nick will do something more desperate if Ma fights him. That is what makes her always have to obey the kidnapper.

1.2 Symptoms of depression of The Main Character

In this part, the depictions of the depression symptoms are seen in the main character. The symptoms are sleep disturbance, loss of energy, and thoughts of death and suicide as follows:

1.2.1 Sleep Disturbance

The first symptom that she experiences by Ma as a result of her depression are Sleep Disturbance. The main character in *Room* also pictured that she experienced significant changes in her life.

Furthermore, the symptom which indicates someone becomes depressed is shown in Ma's behaviour. It is seen in the quotation, "I couldn't sleep without pills." (Donoghue, 2010, p. 161). The quotation shows that the main character is suffering sleeping problem. The statement "I couldn't sleep without pills" strengthens that Ma has to take sleeping pills before sleep so that she can sleep. Difficulty getting to sleep is a signal of stress and worry. Based on Gilbert's (2001, p. 74) theory, people who are depressed might wake up early or find it difficult to sleep. Depression affects many aspects of people's lives, such as feeling, thinking, energy level, sleep, concentration, and interest in sex. It has many ways to affect the brain, one of which is the sleep system is disrupted. It happened to Ma for years.

On the other hand, there are some depressive conditions in which sleep is increased. It can be seen in the quotation, "I used to be scared to go to sleep, in case he came back," states Ma, "but when I was asleep was the only time I wasn't crying, so I slept about sixteen hours a day." (Donoghue, 2010, p. 79). The quotation authenticates that it is not only challenging to sleep, but the sleep of people who are depressed can also increase. It is shown in the quotation, "I slept about sixteen hours a day." Ordinary people generally sleep for 8 hours. But when a person is experiencing depression, their sleep can increase up to twice that of everyday people. The statement "when I was asleep was the only time I wasn't crying" is why Ma slept that long. Under constant pressure, Ma could not help but cry. After she knew that falling asleep made her stop crying, she chose to sleep for a long time.

1.2.2 Loss of Energy

The second symptom of depression is Loss of Energy. Another symptom of depression is loss of energy. It can be seen in the quotation, "Today is one of the days when Ma is Gone. She won't wake up properly. She is here but not really. She stays in Bed with the pillows on her head" (Donoghue, 2010, p. 48). From the quotation, depicts that depression causes a loss of energy. The statement "She won't wake up properly" strengthened that Ma lost interest in doing anything as usual. Gilbert (1999, p. 7) states that low mood is one of the most common symptoms of depression. It means that sometimes, depressed people feel tired all the time. They do that to recharge their energy so that they can do their activity again. Loss of energy can be seen when Ma will not wake up properly.

Furthermore, the quotation "She is here but not really" proves that Ma has no passion for life. She is there, but it is like she is not there. It is strengthened by the statement, "Today is the day when Ma is Gone." Ma acted like a dead person for not doing any activities that day, which is why his son said Ma is gone. "She stays in Bed

with the pillows on her hand” indicates that she does not want to be disturbed by anything. All she did was want to sleep without having to hear or see anything around him. Based on Gilbert’s (2001, p. 4) theory, depressed people do not have the motivation to do things because depression affects their motivation.

D. Conclusion

Based on the analysis from the previous chapter, it is concluded that depression is a mood disorder when someone is under pressure that negatively affects feelings, thinking, and the way they act. Depression itself is analyzed in *Room* novel written by Emma Donoghue. According to the analysis done in the fourth chapter, the statements of the problem and goals of analyzing depression are completed. After analyzing *Room* novel, the story is indeed containing the depression aspects experienced by the main character, including the causes, symptoms, and the overcoming of depression which is obtained to be analyzed by using the depression theory of Paul Gilbert.

In conclusion, the depression of the main character started when she was kidnapped. The main character who experiences depression is Ma. Some causes determine Ma’s depression. The causes that are found are kidnap, isolation, and abuse. Besides, Ma's depression affects her life. In the novel, the writer sees some symptoms of Ma's depression. The first symptom is sleep disturbance, the second is loss of energy, and the last is thoughts of death and suicide. Thus, the main character has planned positive activities, escaped from the room, and also had a personal counsellor to overcome her depression. It can conclude that depression negatively affects Ma's life. In analyzing *Room* (2010), this study used the depression theory by Paul Gilbert’s theory which describes portrayals of depression and ways to deal with it. Moreover, the writer suggests readers interested in this novel analyze it using various theories to discover aspects other than psychology. The writer hopes this study can provide information and contribute to English Literature students who want to analyze depression in the novel. Furthermore, the writer suggests the readers find the issue of depression in another novel or literary work.

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