

**PEER VICTIMIZATION IN JAY ASHER'S THIRTEEN REASONS WHY**  
**VIKTIMISASI TEMAN SEBAYA DALAM NOVEL "THIRTEEN REASONS WHY" KARYA JAY ASHER**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Peer victimization is a common issue in literary works. This study is conducted in qualitative approach of analysis of peer victimization and how it impacted the main character through the narratives in the Thirteen Reasons Why novel. The goal of the study is to analyze how Peer Victimization impacted the main character, Hannah Baker which is described using the theory of Peer Victimization by Finkelhor (2012) and the interpersonal theory of suicide by Joiner (2005). The result of this study shows that Hannah Baker is the victim who experienced all kinds of violent behavior caused by her peers including physical violence, sexual victimization, and psychological/emotional victimization. This study also shows suicide is one of the impacts of Peer Victimization that happens in the novel resulted from the thwarted belonging and perceived burdensome that the main character felt which produce the desire for ending her life. The effects of peer victimization vary on different cases and suicide is one of the prevalent solutions chosen by the character that depicted in literary works.*

**Keywords:** *peer victimization, violence, suicide.*

**ABSTRAK**

*Persoalan viktimisasi teman sebaya dalam karya sastra cukup marak. Fakta bahwa isu seperti ini adalah diskusi utama dalam Thirteen Reasons Why dengan jelas menunjukkan bahwa isu ini mengkhawatirkan. Oleh karena itu, makalah ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis viktimisasi teman sebaya dan bagaimana pengaruhnya terhadap tokoh utama, Hannah Baker. Masalah ini diteliti menggunakan teori peer victimization oleh Finkelhor (2012) dan teori bunuh diri antarpribadi oleh Joiner (2005). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Hannah Baker adalah korban yang mengalami segala macam perilaku kekerasan yang disebabkan oleh teman sebayanya, yaitu kekerasan fisik, viktimisasi seksual, dan viktimisasi psikologis / emosional. Lebih lanjut, penelitian ini memperlihatkan bahwa bunuh diri merupakan salah satu dampak dari viktimisasi teman sebaya yang terjadi akibat dari terhalangnya rasa memiliki dan ketidakmampuan menghadapi beban-beban yang dialami oleh tokoh utama sehingga membuatnya melakukan bunuh diri.*

**Kata kunci:** *viktimisasi teman sebaya, kekerasan, bunuh diri.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Addressing the global phenomenon of peer victimization, there are substantial literary works written discussing these social issues. Literary works reflect the social conditions; it gives a detailed preview of human experiences, allowing us to connect basic levels of desire with emotion. As a social product, literary works reflect human

society and the human relation such as their problems on daily basis, their relations with people they love or hate, and their relation with the world.

*Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher is a young adult novel published in 2007. It is the story of a young high school student, Hannah Baker. The fact that Hannah Baker is portrayed as the object of peer victimization is similar with many people in the world experienced today, particularly adolescent. This study focuses on the term of peer victimization, how the main character associates with it and how it impacts her. In terms of social psychology perspective, Allport (1985) opines that one person's thoughts, feelings and behavior are influenced by the imagined or actual presence of others (Allport, 1985). Essentially, social psychology is all about understanding how each person's individual behavior is influenced by the social environment in which that behavior takes place. Social psychologists typically explain human behavior as a result of the interaction of mental states and social situations. The way that we see other people and the way they think they see us can play a powerful role in a wide variety of actions and decisions.

Furthermore, aggression is behavior directed toward another individual carried out with the immediate intent to cause harm (Anderson & Huesmann, 2003). Different forms of aggression include physically harming another (i.e., physical aggression such as hitting, biting, kicking, clubbing, stabbing, shooting), hurting another with spoken words (i.e., verbal aggression such as yelling, screaming, swearing, name-calling), or hurting another's reputation or friendships through what is said to others verbally or digitally (i.e., relational aggression). Aggression may also be direct (with the victim physically present) or indirect (enacted in the absence of the victim; for example, smashing someone's property or spreading rumors about them). Social psychologists use the term violence to refer to aggression that has extreme physical harm, such as injury or death, as its goal. Thus, violence is a subset of aggression. All violent acts are aggressive, but only acts that are intended to cause extreme physical damage, such as murder, assault, rape, and robbery, are violent. Slapping someone really hard across the face might be violent, but calling people names would only be aggressive (Wayne & Craig, 2015).

Peer victimization is an umbrella term used to encompass several different facets of mistreatment and includes a broad spectrum of actions and behaviors from an overt,

noticeable, physical act of aggression, to a more understated, subtle, consistent occurrence of a social act of aggression (Feinberg, 2003). A child being repeatedly pushed by another child into a locker and a child having malicious rumors continuously being spread about them are both experiencing peer victimization. What differs is the delivery of that victimization.

Victimization can be defined as harm caused by other persons, in this case, peers, acting outside of the norms of appropriate conduct (Finkelhor, 2008). Most peer victimization is aggression, but some acts like the stealing of property or some sexual offenses, such as flashing, are not necessarily intended to harm, but rather are selfish and entitled acts that violate norms of appropriate conduct. According to Finkelhor, peer victimization are subcategorized into 2 dimensions: relationship context and the violative behavior that is involved (Finkelhor, 2012).

During adolescence, the peer group becomes increasingly crucial. Thus, being victimized by peers (i.e., being frequently teased/called names or excluded from social groups and activities) can represent a major source of stress, with potentially damaging consequences. Suicide is a kind of self-destructive behavior, which has negative effects on people, their environment, and the society. Suicide as a fact and in fiction has always been one of the most important philosophical, moral, ethical, and religious problems throughout history. Stincelli (2001) claims that suicide is the intentional act of taking one's own life, with a conscious awareness of both the effect and finality of the act. Its kind, methods, and approaches may differ, but humans started restoring to this practice as they realized it could provide an ultimate solution that life itself is unable to resolve.

Suicide or self-murder is prevalent in every society, and despite the factors held responsible for its prevalence, no exact cause can be given for its occurrence, as suicide is, after all, the result of a choice. Moreover, adolescent interpersonal problems with family, peers, and community are among the widely established risk factors for suicidal thoughts and behaviors (Czyz & Liu, 2012). Individuals with thwarted belongingness have an unmet need to belong which comes from a lack of frequent and positive social interactions as well as feelings of not being cared about by others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). They lack prominent connections to others and previously meaningful relationships have been strained or lost. Some individuals may have made attempts to belong, but various obstacles have prevented them from fitting in and connecting with

others. Thwarted belongingness can be applied to those individuals who are physically isolated as well as to those who have contact with family and friends. In many cases, the individuals who have frequent contact with others feel they are not genuinely connected to the group and that their contributions are insignificant at best.

On the other hand, perceived burdensomeness is the sense that the individuals feel they are a burden to others, do not contribute to a group, and pose a liability to the group's well-being or safety. Their feelings of an inability to make meaningful contributions to society also add the sense of burdensomeness and allow them to assume that their death is worth more to others than their life.

## **METHODS**

Methodologically, this paper employs detailed analysis on the main character, Hannah Baker, and other related characters, respectively. The characters' actions and utterances will be selectively used to support the arguments of this paper. Hannah's relationship with other characters will also be used as further explanations. The discussion of the characters is informed by several relevant theories such as peer victimization, violence, and suicide.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Most of the people who victimized Hannah are those who hold more power and have more popularity at school. Consequently, people who have a close relationship with her also participate on the whole deal of victimization that happened to her. One of her best friends is the one who starts all off the repercussions. This emphasizes that peer victimization potentially can happen to anyone regardless their relationship to each other.

### **Violence Behaviors Portrayed in *Thirteen Reasons Why* Novel**

#### **a) Hannah is the Victim of Physical Violence and Property Offense**

Physical violence is defined as physical acts intended to cause pain or injury and includes hitting, punching, kicking and hitting with objects to cause harm. Hannah experienced the physical violence one time when her own best friend Jessica Davis walked out on her because of the unfounded rumor she found at the school. Jessica slapped her on the face; she got jealous on Hannah because her boyfriend listed

Hannah as the best Ass and her as the worst one in class assuming Hannah has something going on with him. “She rose up beside her chair—glaring down at me—and swung. So tell me, Jessica, which did you mean to do? Punch me, or scratch me?” (Asher, 2007: 67). The lines describe the situation when the physical violence happened. With sarcasm, Hannah questioned “Punch me, or scratch me?” that could be implied on the real question of what and why actually Jessica did slap her for. Then Jessica answers “Hannah, I know the rumors” (Asher, 2007: 65). It means that other than the jealousy because of the “best ass and worst one” lists she also believed all of the rumors about Hannah at school and got mad at her because of it.

b) Hannah is the Victim of Sexual Victimization

The other violative behavior in Peer Victimization is Sexual victimization which is nonconsensual touching to certain parts of the body, as well as nonconsensual witnessing and exposure, and sexually demeaning verbal behavior (Basile & Saltzman, 2002). Hannah was being sexually harassed multiple times. She experienced it for the very first time when Alex voted her as the Best Ass in the freshman class. As she says on the tapes “But what happens when someone says you have the best ass in the freshman class? Let me tell you, Alex because you’ll never know. It gives people—some people—the go-ahead to treat you like you are nothing but that specific body part” (Asher, 2007: 44). She addressed that Alex’s list, opened her up to physical violence, even more rumors, and some unwanted sexual advances.

c) Hannah is the Victim of Psychological or Emotional Victimization

The first person who hurted Hannah emotionally was Justin Fooley. Justin was Hannah first kiss and one of the popular guys in school. After their first date, the whole school treated Hannah differently as Clay stated “I can still see Justin huddled among his friends at school. I remember Hannah walking by, and the whole group stopped talking. They averted their eyes. And when she passed, they started laughing” (Asher, 2007: 29). Since then, Hannah started to become the attention of the school as they are laughing and talking about her behind her back.

### **Hannah Baker is Fatally Impacted by Peer Victimization**

Hannah Baker was found dead in her house. She committed suicide by swallowing a handful of pills. Her suicide was the results of unbearable emotion and her way to escape feelings of pain, rejection, hurt, being unloved, and all the victimization

that happened to her which explained by the data found below supported by Joiner theory of suicide.

a) Hannah Thwarted Belongingness

Hannah frequently had a bad relationship with others. The first relationship she had was ruined because of betrayal and revenge. As she stated at the beginning of the story when Justin, her first kiss telling everyone at school about their date which started a bad rumor of her. She then emphasized “Betrayal. It’s one of the worst feelings” (Asher, 2007: 13). Besides the relationship with Justin, she actually had Alex and Jessica as her close friends. They were the new students in school trying to blend in, and they were comfortable with each other. Sometimes they spent the time together at Monet’s until Alex actually did not come anymore then followed by Jessica.

Regardless the lack important connections to her friend, people at her house also did not give her proper care. Hannah exposes:

“My parents love me. I know they do. But things have not been easy recently. Not for about a year. Not since you-know-what opened outside of town. When that happened, my parents became distant. There was suddenly a lot for them to think about. A lot of pressure to make ends meet. I mean, they talked to me, but not like before. When I cut my hair, my mom didn’t even notice” (Asher, 2007: 169).

Her parents were very busy because of the new business and she became forgotten, she did not get their attention and care she wants. The line “When I cut my hair, my mom didn’t even notice” implies her great disappointment. Cutting her hair short is a big transformation indicated her crave for attention and her desperation but no one noticed it including her parents, people that had the closest relationship with her. All of these made Hannah think that she really lost all of the meaningful relationships in her life.

b) Hannah Perceived Burdensomeness

Hannah always felt like a burden to others, she also thought that she was the cause of the bad thing that happened to people around her. The first time she felt really guilty was when she witnessed Jessica being raped. She told Justin about that:

“First, you started a chain of events that ruined my life. Now, you were working on hers. We both could have stopped it. Either one of us. We could have saved her. And I’m admitting this to you. To all of you. That girl had two chances. And both of us let her down” (Asher, 2007: 225).

Hannah implied that she hated Justin because he let Bryce come to the room but she also hated herself for just being still and doing nothing.

The guilt that she felt was so strong as she repeated “No, you’re right, you didn’t rape her. And I didn’t rape her. He did. But you...and I...we let it happen. It’s our fault” (Asher, 2007: 230). All of the circumstances could not dismiss the regret she felt because she thought that she was the one that ruined Jessica’s life. Another burden that she felt was when she was on the car driving by Jenny who caused the accident of knocking down the stop sign. As she recalled the accident:

“Well, that sucks”. Then you put your key in the ignition and...I stopped you. I couldn’t let you drive away. “Park it,” I said. “Please”. And then you told me to get out. In fact, you got away with much more than knocking down a sign, Jenny” (Asher, 2007: 230).

Hannah was dealing with several burdens that kept coming concurrently to her. These problems accentuated how hard her life at the moment was.

#### a) Hannah Acquired Capacity for Suicide

It seems that Hannah was determined to end her life as she could not handle her troubled life anymore. The first time she mentioned suicide was when she was in the peer communication class. She said that “I wrote a note to Mrs. Bradley that read: “Suicide. It’s something I’ve been thinking about. Not too seriously, but I have been thinking about it” (Asher, 2007: 169). It was just a passing thought at first; the line “not too seriously” indicates that she actually fears it and did not want to do it at first. She was just secretly screaming for help but no one manages to do that. The feelings got too strong as she questioned herself. She described:

“Or maybe I wanted someone to point a finger at me and say, “Hannah. Are you thinking about killing yourself? Please don’t do that, Hannah. Please?” But deep down, the truth was that the only person saying that was me. Deep down, those were my words. At the end of class, Mrs. Bradley

passed out a flyer called *The Warning Signs of a Suicidal Individual*. Guess what was right up there in the top five? “A sudden change in appearance.” I tugged on the ends of my newly cropped hair. Huh. Who knew I was so predictable?” (Asher, 2007: 173).

The quotation above is when Hannah was talking to herself, deep down she was contemplating her passing thought about suicide. No one got her signal and no one gave a hand to help her. The lines “Please don’t do that, Hannah. Please” implies about the way she convinced the negative thoughts to go away as she was trying to save herself.

Her suicide ideation was getting strong. After her mind was set, the next thing she did was to find a way to do it. She revealed her thought:

“... Agun? No .We never owned one. And I wouldn’t know where to get one. What about hanging? Well, what would I use? Where would I do it? And even if I knew what and where, I could never get beyond the visual of someone finding me—swinging— inches from the floor. I couldn’t do that to Mom and Dad” (Asher, 2007: 254).

The quotation shows that she was contemplating on how to do it and she still did have a passing thought to not doing it because of her parents. But her mind was already set. She declared:

“So I’ve decided on the least painful way possible. Pills. But what kind of pills? And how many? I’m not sure. And I don’t have much time to figure it out because tomorrow...I’m going to do it” (Asher, 2007: 255).

She decided to do it in a least hurtful way, but she really meant it. This time she also decided the precise time on how to do it.

“I won’t be around anymore...tomorrow. Tomorrow I’m getting up, I’m getting dressed, and I’m walking to the post office. There, I’ll mail a bunch of tapes to Justin Foley. And after that, there’s no turning back. I’ll go to school, too late for first period, and we’ll have one last day together” (Asher, 2007: 256).

It emphasizes that the decisions were made, her mind was set. She was already acquired her capacity to do suicide as she passed the fear and physical pain of death itself.



## CONCLUSION

This study denotes that most of the people that victimized Hannah were those who held more power and had popularity in school. Moreover, some people who had a close relationship with her also participated in the whole deal of the victimization. Hannah experienced all kind of the violative behavior. Moreover, sexual victimization was the kind of peer victimization that had the most significant effect on her because it was one of the things that initiated all the victimization and the substantial thing that made her commit suicide.

This study also reveals that the impact of the peer victimization that found in the novel was suicide. Hannah committed suicide by swallowing a handful of pills. Her suicide was the results of unbearable emotions and her way to escape feelings of pain, rejection, hurt, being unloved, and all the victimization that happened to her. In addition, Hannah also gave all the signs of thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness that made her acquire the capacity for suicide. In fact, the tapes represented Hannah's resentments which she felt against her peers and she thereupon used it as a revenge for them to realize their action and the repercussion that followed.

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