

## THE MAIN CHARACTER'S DEPRESSION IN JASMINE WARGA'S *MY HEART AND OTHER BLACK HOLES*

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### ABSTRACT

The topic of this research is the depression experienced by the main character in the Jasmine Warga's *My Heart and Other Black Holes* with the formulation problem on how the form of depression in the main character is and the efforts made by the main character to overcome the depression that she is going through. This research uses the descriptive analysis method with data analysis techniques in the form of a literature study using the perspective of literary psychology and a psychological review of depression and intrinsic elements such as character and characterization, plot, conflict, and settings. The results of this study are that the main character experiences a major depression with various physical, psychological, social symptoms, emotional and motivational symptoms, and some triggering factors that are psychological factors with several self-defense mechanisms and the main character's efforts in overcoming her depression.

**Keywords:** Depression; Main Character; Self-defense Mechanism; Overcome Depression.

### I. BACKGROUND

Literature that contains psychological aspects becomes an interesting study material, especially literature in the form of novels because usually, novels have very detailed characteristics and personalities of the characters so that it allows us to understand human behavior more deeply. (Minderop, 2018:3).

Talking about literary psychology, the contribution of Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic theory has received the most attention (Alwisol, 2009:13). The psychoanalytic theory deals with the function and development of the human mind, this science is a part of psychology that has made major contributions and has been made to human psychology so far. For this reason, Freud believes that psychoanalysis and literary works go hand in hand and complement each other to enrich each other (Minderop, 2018:11-16). Therefore, the discussion in this novel presents the study of the main character who

has a psychological disorder in the form of depression.

For thousands of years, depression has had many names both in medical and general works, earlier texts considered it "Melancholia" which for centuries was a term for emotional disorders (Lubis, 2009:22). While Sigmund Freud's personality psychoanalysis states that depression is a feeling of inadequacy, incompetence, loss of self-esteem, and feeling responsible for all bad events (to himself and his environment). According to Freud, the root of the problem is the loss of love in the Oedipus Complex, which makes people angry with themselves, because they lose love, from their parents, friends, and even their country (Alwisol, 2009:34-35).

Ktut Dianovina (2018) states that many mental health problems arise in late childhood and early adolescence. New studies show that mental health problems, especially depression, are the biggest cause of the burden

of illness among individuals at an early age. Depression is a major cause of illness and disability, with suicide the third leading cause of death. These data show that currently, more and more teenagers are experiencing depression.

Jasmine Warga's novel *My Heart and Other Black Holes* is a novel that tells the story of a 16-year-old teenage girl named Aysel who always feels the desire to die which causes her to be obsessed with suicide.

Jasmine Warga is a New York Times bestselling novelist, born on April 24, 1988, in Cincinnati Ohio. This novel is used as the corpus of this research because the story in the novel discusses the depression of a teenager who is obsessed with suicide and plans it with a suicide partner (his suicide friend). Therefore, the topic raised in this research is about psychological disorders experienced by the main character with aspects of depression. One's obsession with suicide, through the review on the main character of this novel, is interesting to analyze.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research used is qualitative research. According to Puji Santosa, qualitative research methods are defined as research that does not carry out calculations but prioritizes the quality, excellence, content, or content data and research evidence (Santosa, 2015:19).

The method that will be used is descriptive analysis. According to Prof. Dr. Nyoman Kutha Ratna, descriptive analysis is done by describing words which are then followed by analysis (Ratna, 2015:53). Data collection techniques were carried out to support the course of this research, so this was done using library research techniques (*Library Research*).

## III. RESULT & DISCUSSION

Aysel is a 16-year-old teenage girl who suffers from depression which results in an obsession with suicide until she finally finds a suicide partner website called *Smooth Passage* to strengthen her suicidal desire. This site is a suicide buddy site for depressed people who want to commit suicide.

Aysel lives in the state of Kentucky in the city of Langston, she also works at the telephone center of Tucker's Marketing Concepts (TMC), a telephone marketing company. School is a prison for Aysel, none of her friends want to talk to her. She even feels like she doesn't deserve to be anywhere because where ever Aysel goes, she always gets bad rumors, even at work, Aysel is always seen as a teenager who is gloomy and frequently gets scolded by her boss.

Day by day Aysel is getting more and more depressed, embarrassed, and sad, she feels that she cannot stand her life anymore, because she also never feels accepted anywhere, until she finally met Roman, a 17-year-old teenager who lived in the city of Willis, Kentucky, with deep depression of guilt and sadness because he was the cause of his younger sister's death. They had agreed to commit suicide on April 7th, at a towering hillside on the Ohio River rock cliffs, they thought it was a perfect place to kill themselves together.

At home Aysel still feels like she is in prison, Aysel's mother looks at her the same way everyone else looks at her. Aysel lives with her mother's new family because her parents got divorced when she was 1 year old. Previously, Aysel lived with her father, although she was happy living with her father, she felt that her father was easily angered sometimes like a mentally ill person.

Day after day they spent together, even though Aysel and Roman always talked about death, they felt more and more open to each other. Before they kill themselves Aysel wants to do her last wish which is to visit her

father who is in state prison, Roman agrees to that and accompanied her. The prison was very far from Langston so they stayed on the hill around the prison building by setting up camp. That night they got closer and talked to each other, even Aysel didn't feel the symptoms of depression that she had been feeling, and at that moment she felt that her suicidal feelings had changed with the desire to live.

In the morning, Aysel cannot see her father because he has been transferred to a mental hospital, Aysel and Roman return to the city. Roman knows that Aysel no longer wants to continue their plan, Roman convinces Aysel that he is not like his father who was a murderer, Roman looks at Aysel with hope, and for the first time, Aysel finds someone who can see her differently unlike the people who have been mocking, judging, talking about her, and looking down on her.

When Aysel feels that she has got her motivation back in life, Roman still wants to carry on with the desire to commit suicide without her. Roman realizes for a moment and wants Aysel to stay alive because he likes her and does not want her to kill herself, as well as Aysel, who believes that the depression they are experiencing can be overcome together.

At that time they also tried to consult with a psychiatrist. Aysel tried to build up the courage to talk about her depression and distress, then her mother realized that she should pay more attention to Aysel.

Based on the novel *My Heart And Other Black Holes* by Jasmine Warga, Aysel is described as the main character of the story who suffers from depression or severe depression, because when a person experiences severe depression, it leads to the desire to commit suicide. This is shown when Aysel's obsession with suicide is getting higher, she always visits the "Suicide Partners" website and finally manages to find a friend to commit suicide with named Roman

also known as FrozenRobot. It can be seen from the following statement of Aysel.

FrozenRobot has perfect timing. Maybe for the first time in my life, I'm lucky. This must be a sign from the universe that if the only time you get lucky is when you're planning your suicide, it's time to go. (Warga, 2015:11).

This depression is characterized by the presence of five or more symptoms shown over a long time.

In addition to symptoms of feeling suicidal, Aysel also experiences five other symptoms. Individuals who are depressed can show psychological, physical, and social symptoms. Emotional and motivational symptoms are also experienced by Aysel such as moody, prolonged sadness, sensitivity, irritability and offend, loss of enthusiasm, loss of self-confidence and loss of concentration, and decreased endurance (Lubis, 2009:21-27). However, Aysel's most common symptom is anxiety, for whenever she is in a crowd and remembers her father, Aysel will feel tension and anxiety.

Along with the symptoms of anxiety that continue to appear, Aysel also experiences psychological symptoms, and the symptoms are most felt almost every day wherever she is. Psychological symptoms are feelings experienced by people with depression such as loss of self-confidence and being always sensitive, easily sad, moody, and like to be alone.

Apart from psychological symptoms, Aysel also experienced physical symptoms, these symptoms are a disturbance in work and study. It can be seen when Aysel always visits the "Suicide Partners" website while working or studying at home. Another physical symptom is Aysel's loss of appetite.

Emotional symptoms can be shown when her emotional state changes, she used to be a cheerful girl who likes to sing but is now

an introverted teenager who no longer feels satisfied and is not interested in fun things the teenagers should do, including fashion. In this case, Aysel is not interested in fashion, she always wears the same clothes every day because she does not care about her appearance at all, it can be seen when Aysel said "*Fashion is the least of my concerns right now*" (Warga, 2015:142).

Of all the symptoms experienced by Aysel, she also experienced motivational symptoms which are symptoms of problems in mobilizing herself to carry out the most basic activities such as the physical symptoms that have been mentioned such as lack of appetite and sleep pattern problems. In addition, individuals who experience motivational symptoms will lose their motivation to live their lives as experienced by Aysel with her obsession to commit suicide.

Depression and symptoms experienced by Aysel certainly have factors that cause and trigger depression itself. According to Dr. Namora, the real cause of depression can not be known with certainty, but several factors have been found that can influence it. In addition to the unpleasant events experienced by Aysel, other factors can also support the cause of depression, such as physical factors, and psychological factors in the main character.

The first physical factor is genetic, in her days Aysel always thinks that there is a genetic factor that her father passed on to her because since Aysel was little she has always seen her father having the same disorder as her, such as easily mad, irritability, and sensitivity. It can be seen from Aysel's feelings when she thinks that she will become like her father.

I want to say that I know for sure that I'm different from my dad. That my heart beats in different rhythms, my blood pulses at a different speed. But I'm not sure. Maybe the sadness comes just

before the insanity. Maybe he and I share the same potential energy. All I know is that I'm not going to stick around and find out if I become a monster like my dad. I can't do that to my mom. (Warga, 2015:27).

It has been explained previously that Aysel always has anxiety about genetic factors, according to Dr. Namora, however, a person will not get depression just because his mother, father, or sibling suffers from depression, but the risk of developing depression increases, this usually happens because of a life event that triggers it. In this case, the unpleasant life events experienced by Aysel became the possibility that she was suffering from depression.

Another aspect of personality factors is the aspect of self-esteem according to Blascovich & Tomaka (1991) Self-esteem is one of the factors that cause individual behavior because self-esteem is an individual's view of his worth or how a person values and respects himself. . Meanwhile, Aysel is always despised by her boss at work, this situation hurts the self-esteem of the individual who is despised in the social environment by the treatment of her boss and the people around her which causes depression in the main character.

The last aspect is psychological factors, namely family environmental factors including the role of a mother because according to Dr. Namora there is proof showing that depression occurs in individuals who lose their mothers when they are young. In this case, because Aysel felt that her mother's expression had changed 3 years ago every time she saw Aysel's expression and frown, Aysel also felt that she had lost her mother's role at that time because she did not care and never asked how Aysel felt, even though Aysel needed the support. Aysel underwent all this time, so Aysel considered

Aysel's view the same as people looked down on her.

Even though Aysel, the main character of the story, experiences symptoms of depression for a long time, it is possible for her to perform self-defense mechanisms, to reduce what is happening within her. The ego defense mechanisms help to carry out this function while protecting the individual from excessive anxiety.

The first defense mechanism is Identification. Aysel performs an identification defense mechanism by reducing tension, by imitating people who are considered to be more successful in satisfying their desires than herself. In this case, Aysel managed to reduce her tension by identifying her idol, Mozart, with all of his classical music.

The sublimation defense mechanism is used by the main character when experiencing anxiety and difficulties in her social environment. When Aysel's self-esteem is hurt by her social environment, and she feels ashamed and sad, Aysel will use this self-defense mechanism. Sublimation is a compromise that vents her emotions or feelings on safer objects or activities, in this case, Aysel chooses activities related to music because she is always humming her favorite song. Aysel likes the feeling of being depressed by humming her favorite little classical music. *"I feel my skin starting to bruise under the weight of my body and I silently hum Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor.* (Warga, 2015:5)"

The decision-making mechanism was carried out by Aysel while at school. She had a physical group task that required two people in one group, then she got a group called Tyler. Aysel feels pressured by the ridicule because she knows that no one wants her in the group. Aysel performs a rejection defense mechanism, which is the concept of thinking about other people who have negative feelings toward her.

Aysel feels that she will bring a bad influence on the group, especially on Tyler, her group friend. Aysel is assigned to do the task and the submission is due on April 10, but she does not feel worried because according to the plan, on April 7th, she will commit suicide with Roman, which means she will be gone when the assignment is due.

The defense mechanism of denial is carried out by Aysel when she feels that she is getting better with Roman's presence. On one hand, Aysel states that she wants to meet her father in prison by confessing to Roman that it is her last wish before committing suicide, but on the other hand Aysel feels that she is increasingly doubting her decision to commit suicide.

Aysel also Regression when Roman talks about her father, she feels anxiety and then Aysel bites her fingernails, to make the situation comfortable as she always remembers the weeks before her father killed someone.

In addition to self-defense mechanisms, Aysel has also been able to overcome her depression gradually since she became friends with Roman, even the symptoms of depression have decreased. At one time Aysel was unable to meet her father in prison because it turned out that her father had been transferred to a mental hospital. Usually, Aysel will always think about her father's depression gene, especially with the fact that her father has a mental illness. That fact does not make Aysel's depression symptoms appear she was calmer because Roman was beside her.

The above explanation shows that depression can be overcome by opening up to a friend who is willing to understand the suffering, as in the case of Aysel, who eventually wants to open up to someone that happens to share the same feelings, a friend that can see it from the same point of view, a friend that understands the feelings of depressed people. The more often a



person opens up about each other, the lighter the thoughts and feelings will be.

When Aysel camped with Roman, Aysel realized that she had carried out a reaction formation defense mechanism where defensive actions were replacing the opposite impulse or feeling in consciousness, as Aysel experienced by replacing her sad feelings with happiness and replacing her feelings of suicidal obsession. She has the desire to live, it can be shown in Aysel's statement. "*He's no longer the person I want to die with, he's the person I want to be alive with*" (Warga, 2015:231).

After a long trip with Roman to visit her father in prison, Aysel returns home and builds up the courage to talk to her mother and explains her depression. "*My breathing is shaky and I take a few gulps to try to steady myself. I'm a sad mom. I'm sad all the time.*" (Warga, 2015:269).

From Aysel's statement, her mother realized and apologized to her, her mother regretted that she has never asked about her condition. Since then her mother promised that she would always be there for Aysel, and at that moment Aysel promised herself that she would fight her grief. This proves that the main character makes efforts to overcome her depression, besides motivating herself she will also try to fight her sadness. Even when Roman continues with the suicide plan, Aysel helps him by supporting and motivating him to overcome his sadness so he can start and live a new life with Aysel.

After all that she has been through, particularly with the obsession with suicide, Aysel now starts each day with hope and enthusiasm, which can be seen from her participation in school including building social interactions that she has always avoided before. This indicates that Aysel can overcome social symptoms.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion that has been described above, about depression experienced by the main character in Jasmine Warga's *My Heart and Other Black Holes*, the result is that the main character is a teenager who is suffering from major depression, namely severe depression with a high level of depression. Such depression is characterized by the presence of five or more symptoms, symptoms that are shown over a long period. The main character experienced it for three years with various symptoms and even the worst symptom is the obsession with suicide.

The symptoms experienced main character has more than five symptoms, as a result of the major depression she suffered, namely physical, psychological, social, emotional, and motivational symptoms with the worst symptom being as mentioned previously, an obsession with suicide.

The physical symptoms of the main character are disturbances in work and study due to the loss of focus, appetite, and sleep patterns. Psychic Symptoms, namely symptoms related to the feelings experienced by the main character, which is always feeling negative about herself causes her the feeling of being burdened.

The emotional changes and mood swings that the main character experiences are evidence of emotional symptoms, before Aysel experienced depression she was a cheerful girl and loved to sing. Of all the symptoms experienced by Aysel, the underlying symptom is a loss of feeling to do any activity such as eating, sleeping, interacting and the most fatal is the loss of motivation to live, which is the main reason she is obsessed with suicide.

In addition to the types and symptoms of depression, there are two factors causing depression according to psychological studies, namely physical and psychological factors. However, in this research, the researchers found that psychological factors were the

cause of depression experienced by the main character.

Psychological factors include the main character's introverted personality, pessimistic personality, and negative mindset. The mindset has a big influence on the cause of the main character's depression because she is not able to understand herself. The most important aspect is self-esteem, but on the contrary, the main character views, judges, and admits herself to be bad, she even states that everyone around her judges her negatively.

Another factor is the main character is a teenager who experiences unpleasant events because she is considered a child of a murderer, which is why she gets bullied in her social environments such as at school and work. The last factor is the family environment, her mother does not care about the main character, so she feels that her mother is the same as other people who think negatively of her.

The main character performs defense mechanisms in the form of Identification, Sublimation, Regression, Reaction Formation, Projection, and Objection. The self-defense mechanism used by the main character is to reduce feelings of sadness, anxiety, and depression, and also as an effort to overcome depression.

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