

Uneasy Pursuit: A Screenplay Exploring an Untreated Schizophrenia and Its Impacts on One's Life

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ABSTRACT

Mental health has been overlooked in Indonesia for too long. Labels like ‘nuts’ and ‘insane’ are often associated with the matter, creating a stigma that undermines its significance. Therefore, this creative work intends to bring forth the urgency of mental health awareness, especially on women who are more prone to mental illness than men. The chosen topic is schizophrenia, which can result in fatal impacts, including suicide, if left untreated. The story follows Sandra, an Indonesian female police detective who unknowingly is battling schizophrenia while trying to catch a skilled mysterious criminal. After a series of regressions, she grows more miserable, reaches peak devastation when struck by grief, and tries to end her life. However, she manages to overcome the pain and, with the help of proper treatment, puts the illness under control. Conclusively, this work aims to highlight the importance of early treatment and awareness of mental illnesses.

Keywords: mental health awareness; women and schizophrenia; mental health treatment; suicide

INTRODUCTION

Despite its significance, mental health is disregarded in Indonesia. Mental health holds an irreplaceable value, for it determines humans’ emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Just like physical health, it can be disturbed by illnesses as well. Mental illnesses refer to health conditions that involve changes in emotion, thinking, or behavior, often associated with problems functioning socially (National Alliance on Mental Illness [NAMI], n.d.). According to the 2018 report, an estimated 12 million Indonesians above the age of 15 had depression, 4.3 million of whom are adults aged 25 to 54 (Basic Health Research [Riskesmas], 2018; Mastiyanto, 2021). Evidently, mental health is a matter that ought to be heeded. Yet, in Indonesia, it is overlooked. Plenty of people associate mental illness with the ‘nuts’ or ‘insane’ labels (“Perhatikan! Tak Boleh Asal Panggil ‘Orang Gila’ pada Pasien Gangguan Jiwa [Pay Attention! It Is Not Allowed to Call ‘Crazy Persons’ to Mental Health Patients]”, 2014). This stigma thus discourages the sick, making them refuse to seek medical help for their conditions (Hartini et al., 2018), whereas it is imperative to get mental illnesses treated. Therefore, through this creative work, hopefully, people can be more aware of the urgency of the issue.

Further, women are in bigger danger since mental illnesses are prone to attack them more than men. In 2018, it was revealed that nearly 12.1% of women had emotional mental disorders compared to 7.6% of men (Riskesmas, 2018). A psychology specialist argued that it is due to the rigid sociocultural values still being upheld against women in today’s society, where women are pressed to prioritize the well-being of their husbands and children over their own (Caesaria, 2021). Hence, naturally, the reaction to Indonesian women with mental disorders is negative; as exposed by a woman who had depression during pregnancy, the people around her could care less about her condition since they thought it would only hurt the unborn baby (Saputra, 2021). Moreover, one of the most detrimental mental illnesses that can attack women is schizophrenia. Affecting over 400,000 people nationally, schizophrenia interferes with a person’s ability to think, act, and perceive reality (Orrico-Sánchez et al., 2020; Peng, 2020). Also, since women tend to be more socially active, their schizophrenia may be less detectable, putting them in greater peril (Smith, 2021). Seeing how inconsiderate society is to women who suffer from

mental disorders, this concerning fact about schizophrenic women drives the writers to focus on the struggle of a woman with a serious mental illness, schizophrenia, in the story.

The creative work is in the form of a screenplay. Screenplay is a medium that conveys the essence of the narrative through visual descriptions, action, and dialogue in a coherent way (Ehlers, 2020). The main reason for that selection is because vivid visual descriptions through the flexible play of graphic shots are possible in a screenplay, and that element can deliver profundity, which can help make the message of the mental health issue resonate better with the public. Also, it has come to the writers' attention that the number of action-drama movies in Indonesia is very few, let alone ones with a mental health theme. And so, it is decided to implement action and drama genres into the mental health-themed screenplay. This genre combination, in general, is indeed rare, yet, one of the most popular mental health movies, *Fight Club*, incorporates the two genres and successfully becomes memorable in the audience's hearts. Hence, the writers believe that this decision is appropriate for the sake of the balance of the overall mood of the screenplay. The drama, which investigates human frailties, disappointments, hopes and dreams, and tragedies (Selbo, 2015), would provide the somberness of critical mental illness impacts, while the action, which demands feats of physicality (Selbo, 2015), would keep the audience entertained with all the captivating stunts.

The research method used for this work was secondary research. In order to fathom schizophrenia fully, a plethora of credible books, journals, and articles related to it was browsed. In addition, a movie called *A Beautiful Mind* was of tremendous help, for it offered deeper insights on schizophrenia and its portrayal. The creation of the creative work itself was based on the general-to-specific pattern. The steps started from deciding on the issue that was thought to be the most concerning, descended into brainstorming the ideas related to the story elements and picking out the most relevant ones, and ended with the writing of the screenplay. This work aims to explore the schizophrenia symptoms the main character, Sandra, undergoes, which are hallucinations, delusions, disorganizations, affective flattening or blunting, asociality, anxiety, and paranoia. The second purpose is to show that her untreated schizophrenia negatively affects her life by deteriorating her communication skills, causing consequential disturbances in her work, and inducing suicidal behavior.

Schizophrenia is a chronic mental disease that has long been around. It was first identified in the 19th century by Emil Kraepelin as dementia praecox, "a chronic illness starting in adolescence and early adulthood that led to an inevitable deterioration in behavior and functioning" (Marcsisin & Gannon, 2017, p. 6). The concept was then perfected by Eugen Bleuler, and in 1908, he coined the word schizophrenia (Marcsisin & Gannon, 2017). His diagnosis has since been officially acknowledged as the standard in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5). Schizophrenia causes deterioration in interpersonal relations or work performance over a significant amount of time (Glatt et al., 2019). Moreover, when women, who tend to be more socially active than men, suffer from schizophrenia, they are prone to have more excruciating symptoms like anxiety and depression, which may bring them to suicide (Smith, 2021). Based on a study done by Li and her colleagues (2016), women have two peak ages of onset, one between 25 and 30 years old and another one after 45 years old. Furthermore, Amador's (2003, as cited in Sue et al., 2017) research showed that those who have schizophrenia frequently lack awareness of the illness, caused by a condition called anosognosia. Therefore, the story employs those three facts — Sandra is a 29-year-old police detective who is an unwitting schizophrenic and thus faces disturbances and almost turns suicidal because of it.

The schizophrenia symptoms Sandra experiences are plentiful. The disorder's symptoms are divided into two, positive and negative, with the former including hallucinations, delusions, and disorganization symptoms. Hallucinations refer to perceptual disturbances occurring in the

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absence of external stimuli and may involve a single sensory modality or a combination of modalities (Marcsisin & Gannon, 2017). The hallucinations in this screenplay are visual and auditory. The visual one is when Sandra interacts with her deceased mother as if she is alive and well, while the auditory one is Sandra hearing her mother's false voices a few times, one of which brings her trouble. Next, delusions are fixed false beliefs that do not change even when shown evidence contradicting their validity, one of the types of which is persecutory delusion, the belief that one is being harmed by an individual or an organization (Marcsisin & Gannon, 2017). Sandra feels that she is being stalked and targeted by a dangerous man, who was a suspect she previously made unconscious. Finally, disorganization symptoms take the form of disorganized speech and grossly disorganized behavior, each involving an incoherent manner of speaking and inappropriate dressing, respectively (Marcsisin & Gannon, 2017). In the narrative, Sandra is shown to commit those on some occasions. Meanwhile, amongst the five negative symptoms Bitter (2020) stated, only two of them are applied in the screenplay: affective flattening or blunting, lack of emotion in expression and pitch of voice, and asociality, a decrease of willful initiation of social interaction. Sandra is known to be the lady who never attends any social gatherings and tends to react and speak with no emotion, even in situations that should have evoked some.

The creative work implements a typical course of schizophrenia, which consists of three phases: prodromal, active, and residual. The prodromal phase is the beginning of schizophrenic symptoms. Negative symptoms such as anxiety predominate in this phase (Hafner et al., 2003; Yung & McGorry, 1996, as cited in McGorry & Goldstone, 2016). Paranoid ideation, or paranoia, is also common in this stage (Yung & McGorry, 1996, as cited in Podesa et al., 2019). The regular occurrence of psychosis indicates the transition to the active phase of schizophrenia. In this phase, the patient exhibits both positive and negative symptoms more explicitly (Sue et al., 2017). Also, during this phase, feelings such as fear and loss are relevant factors for suicide (Ventriglio et al., 2016). Over time, the patient will enter the residual phase where the symptoms subside and are no longer prominent, albeit still present from time to time. Long-term studies have shown that many people with schizophrenia can lead productive lives, yet complete recovery is still rare (Sue et al., 2017). Even so, it is vital for schizophrenics to seek a cure as fast as possible since, according to Ventriglio et al. (2016), the delay in starting treatment may significantly contribute to increased suicide risk among schizophrenia patients.

The creative work mostly uses the two schizophrenia phases, prodromal and active. Both phases are the crucial ones that depict the severity of schizophrenia, therefore dominating the story. Sandra's anxiety and paranoid ideation essentially represent the prodromal stage. The anxiety arises whenever Sandra sees a yellow circular object that somehow reminds her of a terrifying incident that presumably involves her mother's suicide attempt. The other anxiety emergence is when she deals with things related to the culprit, who, as it turns out, has a connection to Sandra's mother and father. Her paranoia can be seen in the outburst catalyzed by the colleagues' poor decision. Time passes, and her schizophrenia worsens until it enters the active phase, where the symptoms mercilessly attack Sandra until she simultaneously realizes her condition and her mother's death. The despair from the recognition of her illness is amplified by the grief of losing her mother. It is so devastating that she feels completely lost and hopeless to the point where she considers ending her own life. It is understandable because, in that phase, Sandra is highly unstable. For the last stage of schizophrenia, the residual phase appears briefly in the ending since it is a vital element for the narrative's resolution. At the end of the story, it is revealed that her symptoms have receded after a certain amount of time, meaning Sandra has reached the final residual phase thanks to all the medicines and therapies.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Premise and Creative Principle

The premise of the screenplay is when a female cop with undiagnosed schizophrenia is assigned to arrest a sly and ingenious one-of-a-kind criminal who specifically attacks the male members of one family, she faces some hardships, triggering her illness, causing disruptions throughout the mission, and belatedly acknowledging her condition which then leads to excruciating agony. While for the creative principle, the writers would like to show what would happen if a woman with an untreated mental illness gets triggered even further by grief.

Pitch

- a. Sandra, a female officer with schizophrenia unbeknownst to her, is entrusted with capturing a mysterious criminal who is highly skilled.
- b. As the investigation unfolds, Sandra becomes more and more determined to arrest the culprit, for she keeps on catching the wrong suspects because of misleading clues left by the crook, also in the progress of which prompts her worsening schizophrenia, leading her to the discovery of the illness and eventually suicidal behavior.
- c. In the course of the final encounter with the real culprit, Sandra has a moment of clarity, which leads her to willingly receive the proper treatment and finally become at peace despite the resurgence of some symptoms every once in a while.

Synopsis

While replacing a fellow officer to deal with some trivial and absurd felons, Sandra feels the first schizophrenia symptom, anxiety, but is unaware that it comes from her schizophrenia. Afterward, she meets Emma, her old friend who now works with Sandra and her squad. The team is assigned a demanding bank theft case with minimal clues left at the crime scene, troubling their investigation and agitating Sandra's schizophrenia. In the meantime, Sandra's relationship with her mother seems to be very rocky. Emma introduces Sandra to her aunt, Alex. Sandra gets acquainted with her. Some days later, there are reports of two assault cases whose victims are closely related to the owner of the robbed bank. Sandra concludes that those three cases are all done by the same perpetrator due to a few identical clues. Also, out of the blue, Alex gives a tip to Sandra regarding the potential motive of the suspect. Sandra finds it strange for Alex to do so but dismisses the thought and focuses more on the new lead. However, the clues and the lead are not conclusive enough, which results in a broad suspect list and, thus, prolonged investigation progress. On the fateful night of capturing the first suspect, Sandra's auditory hallucination causes unplanned troubles with the suspect. Later, Sandra accepts a small help from Alex, only this time, she discovers more questionable details about Alex. The rocky first attempt acts as a catalyst to Sandra's schizophrenia — she starts displaying the symptoms more intensively, which no one but Emma notices. A few days later, Emma accidentally finds out that Sandra's mother is long dead and breaks it down to her. It turns out that the images of her mother all along are only Sandra's hallucinations. Sandra falls into despair and is taken to a psychiatric hospital. Her condition severely declines to the point where she considers committing suicide but stops when subconsciously and visually reminded of her mother's teaching on how suicide is the worst kind of crime. Although the intention is put aside, she continues to be dispirited. To cheer her up, Emma recalls the ridiculous cases Sandra faces at the beginning of the story. On account of the disorganization symptom, her brain somehow connects those cases to the suspicious oddities Sandra notices from Alex, the real culprit. Having escaped the hospital, Sandra confronts her, also discovering Alex's messy past relationship with Sandra's parents, ending with her killing Sandra's father. Alex tries to shoot Sandra but is stopped by Emma in time. The incident changes Sandra's mind in a positive way, and she finally decides to undergo the proper treatment.

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Characters

Main character:

- Sandra Tanadi

Age: 29 years old (in 2014), 6 years old (in 1991)

Sandra is of Chinese descent with pale white skin and straight hair. She is tall and slender but has firm muscles from all her routine workout sessions. As a critical and persistent rationalist, she often comes across as a stern woman who does not know how to have fun. Yet, that trait is what makes her such an excellent leader and detective. Her mother enrolled her in various martial arts classes when she was young, but ultimately she chose to focus on just one, karate, becoming the owner of the eighth-degree black belt. Her becoming a policewoman is also her mother's idea, which she willingly complies with because she values the occupation. She does not have a harmonious relationship with her mother as Sandra believes her mother is the one responsible for her father's death. She has schizophrenia but cannot recognize it herself.

Supporting characters:

- Melinda Tanadi

Age: 54 years old (in 2014), 25 years old (in 1985)

A Chinese descent woman who raised Sandra singlehandedly. She is hardworking and diligent, working several jobs a day when Sandra was little as she was the breadwinner. She quits her job to fulfill Sandra's request since Sandra is able to provide for both of them. But, the retirement only lasted for a week because she got a job as an extracurricular wushu teacher at the elementary school nearby their house. She was taught wushu at a young age by her father and developed an interest in martial arts. Melinda tried to pass it down to Sandra, but her daughter dislikes the sport. And so, she let Sandra choose another form herself by registering her in multiple martial arts classes. Unlike Sandra, she has naturally curly hair and short height.

- Emma Harianja

Age: 29 years old

A good friend of Sandra's back in high school, but lost contact with her when she studied music abroad. She decides to return to Indonesia and become a cop after being saved by one. Although she has completed the training from the police academy, she is still somewhat inept with her gun. By fate, she is assigned to Sandra's unit and rekindles the friendship with Sandra. She is incredibly attentive to those close to her, including Sandra. Her top priority is her family and friends — whenever they are in trouble, she would not hesitate to take care of them regardless of how occupied she is. As a woman of half-Chinese and half-Javanese, she has a medium complexion and big doe eyes. An interesting fact is that her singing voice can switch from heavenly to devastatingly powerful.

- Alexandra 'Alex' Harianja

Age: 49 years old (in 2014), 20 years old (in 1985)

A Javanese woman who possesses a muscular body, husky voice, and short hair. She is Emma's long-lost aunt, meaning Emma only knew about her existence recently. Alex is an intelligent lady, having an impressive record as the top mechanical engineering graduate of Universitas Indonesia. With a distinctive laid-back speech style, she appears as an easygoing individual, a trait that Emma especially adores. Alex holds Melinda's husband, Oei Tjong An, responsible for her father's death. He willfully denies Alex's insurance claim when she needs it the most, thus turning her into a rancorous criminal. The first crime she committed was shooting Tjong An during the New Order era. She then killed Tjong An's brother in 1994 and was imprisoned for twenty years. She

continues her terror strike on the descendants of the Oei family after her release but leaves no trace, making it difficult for Sandra to catch her.

- **Guntur**
Age: 25 years old
A bubbly Javanese man. As the youngest member of the squad, Guntur often voluntarily runs some small errands for the team. He is a sprightly man who has a liking for animated films, which exudes the impression that he is nothing more than a soft-hearted pushover when actually, he has the best combat skill among the five. His moves are swift and agile, supported by his short build.
- **Tirta**
Age: 27 years old
A stuffy Chinese descent man with a quiet demeanor. He has a big build and rock-hard muscles. He is very obedient to Sandra, executing each order in a collected manner. However, his taciturn trait does not automatically render him cold-hearted. He does display compassion with his limited speech, speaking of which, his resonating bass voice sets him apart from the men on the team.
- **Rangga**
Age: 32 years old
A Javanese man who trusts Sandra the most as a leader. He is quick to take the initiative during missions without hesitation. His aggressiveness comes out when interrogating, causing culprits to confess their crimes out of intimidation. Not in accordance with his eldest status, he is the one who goofs around the most among the five, and Guntur would play along.

Conflicts

The protagonist experiences external and internal conflicts, which are the primal kinds of conflict in fiction. The external ones are outside forces that prevent the characters from reaching their goal (Cook, 2020). In this work, the culprit is aware that Sandra is in charge and deliberately makes it even more difficult for Sandra with her clever and elaborate plans. Other than the obvious intent of not wanting to get caught, she also finds enjoyment in knowing all the frustration Sandra has to bear and considers it payback for Sandra's father's atrocious deed. Next, the internal conflict tends to be the battle of different elements inside the character. The struggles can manifest for the character in some ways, including questioning one's beliefs and values, getting stressed out from indecision, and grappling with an aspect of mental health (Puglisi & Ackerman, 2021). In this screenplay, after finding out the nature of her mental illness, Sandra is struck by a dilemma. She is conflicted about whether to live in constant pain or die to end the pain. Both sides are influenced by her mother, Melinda. Sandra wants to die out of torture seeing Melinda constantly but knowing she cannot do anything to fix the broken relationship she had with her. But at the same time, she stops her attempt when remembering Melinda's admonition regarding suicide. The second dilemma is whether to kill the culprit, Alex, while she has the chance or not. On the one hand, Sandra is furious at Alex's horrific crime, yet the police duty she holds in high regard makes her think twice before doing it.

CONCLUSION

This creative work, which takes the form of a screenplay, is created to explore the symptoms of schizophrenia and how the disorder impairs the afflicted individual's life when left untreated. Furthermore, it aims to urge people in Indonesia to become more aware of the disease and the significance of mental health. The narrative is built with the elements of the hybrid action-drama genre as well as the carefully implemented schizophrenia understanding, which reveals

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that most schizophrenics are unaware of their condition due to a lack of insight caused by the illness. Likewise, the main character of the screenplay, Sandra, is an unwitting schizophrenic. She is oblivious to all the symptoms of the disease, most of which are recurring, disrupting both her personal and professional life. The symptoms Sandra undergoes are hallucinations, delusions, disorganizations, affective flattening or blunting, asociality, anxiety, and paranoia. Ultimately, Sandra's untreated schizophrenia has wreaked severe havoc on her mind. It disarrays her communication skill and messes up her police work, but most importantly, the illness nearly drives Sandra to her demise. The ceaseless hallucinations of her late mother at the psychiatric hospital have left her in deep torment. At one point, Sandra loses all hopes and reasons to live. She is fortunately stopped by her subconscious compliance to her mother's wise wisdom on suicide, which is a little ironic since the very cause of Sandra's suicidal behavior is her mother.

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