

Heart of a Marionette: Understanding the Nature of Child Neglect and Abuse

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ABSTRACT

This creative project is an epistolary novel in form of a diary of a young girl named, Caroline Kusnadi, who is usually referred as Carol. She is a daughter of a family of four, whose parents are divorced. She writes her diary entries while trying to survive her mother's and sister's worsening mistreatments toward Carol even though they know Carol's condition. In this creative work, I use child neglect and abuse my topic, and I propose to understand the nature of child maltreatments as my theme. With this, I can show the experiences of child neglect and abuse itself from the eyes of the victims. This story was created based on how Indonesia society does not pay sufficient attention and appropriate measures in protecting children's rights. This would be shown on how Carol's father, mother, and sister for not giving appropriate treatments for Carol who should have deserve more than she has.

Keywords: child maltreatment, child neglect, child abuse, epistolary, realistic fiction, slice of life

INTRODUCTION

Taking consideration of Indonesian' childcare activities and condition, I decided to bring up the topic to my creative thesis. Child maltreatment is a common occurrence in Indonesia. In according to a child rearing research conducted by Ogawa Junko on 2017 ((Junko, 2017), Indonesia is a typical multi-ethnic country with more than 300 ethnic groups having different languages and religions, with Islamic stands as the majority in the society. Still, regardless of their backgrounds, it is a common knowledge that Indonesian put importance in familial piety. However, as the time moves, tenuous family relationships start becoming major issue in Indonesia. Apparently, we can find that many mothers of less-privileged double-income families are unable to have enough time to play with their child because they are too busy, while mothers of rich families tend to leave their child in the care of a housemaid for most of the day and thus become unable to establish a proper relationship with their child, thus the issues of neglect have becoming more common. Child neglect depends on how a child perceives the parent's behavior; it is not how parents believe they are behaving toward a child. Parental failure to provide a child, when options are available, is different from failure to provide when options are not available.

To bring up this topic, I decide to write an epistolary work for my creative thesis. Epistolary writing is actually writing a novel, a story, or a poem in the form of a series of documents—mostly letters, or journal entries, newspaper clippings, book excerpts, or in more recent times, blog posts, text-messages, or emails. Epistolary writing began with novels documented through series of letters. Originally, epistolary writing began with novels documented through series of letters. Letters really do not seem like a big thing to us these days knowing full well that the concept of emails and text messages has simply taken over. Back in the past, when letters were actually a primary mode of communication, they were written with passion, sentiment, details, and emotions, which is why they have been an important literary device since centuries now. Return to our original topic, epistolary writing has incorporated letters, diary entries, and

newspaper clippings in it to give off a more personal feel to the story. Advocates of this style of writing say that epistolary writing engages the reader more, as compared to a story simply written in the third person, who makes it possible for reader to relate his or her personal feeling through the character's thought and emotion. This is why I thought this kind of writing style is suitable for expressing my main character's denials, internal conflicts, and rebellions.

In order to deliver this story, I decided to make a roughly 100-page epistolary diary of a young girl who is experiencing child neglect. It will be more effective for me to express the character's psychological pain and internal thoughts. The main character is a fourteen-year-old girl, named Carolina. She experiences child neglect from her mother since her father went away from the house. She has a twin sister, and her mother only cares about her sister and often forgets Carolina's existence. From the start Carol was born with a speech disorder; however, it turns even worse right after the divorce. Her bipolar mother would not talk to her since Carolina reminds her mother of her former husband. She cannot talk with many people since her mother always tell her not to come out besides going to school. Not being to cope with her mother's neglect, she decides to get a full-scholarship in order to get away from that house despite not being able to speak properly. Simply, the story will follow about Carolina who is suffering severe neglects from her parents, and how those neglects affect her life in society, which consist her relationship with her schoolmates, teachers, and her surroundings. This story will highlight the emotional and psychological states of Carolina as she tries to run away from her family.

APPLICATIONS

In this section, I would like to explain the theories that I use in making this creative work. I will apply the mental developmental theory of Determinant Parenting by Jay Belsky and Joan Vondra (Belsky & Vondra, 1989) to identify Diana's hatred toward Carol to the point of neglecting her, as well using Comprehensive Child Maltreatment Scale proposed by J. Higgins (Higgins, 2001) in order to determine Carol's regressing character as she keeps receiving maltreatments from her mother, Diana.

The Determinant Parenting – Cause of Child Maltreatment (Neglect & Abuse)

The determinant parenting is actually a theory specifically referring to the causes (determinants) of parenting methods. A model was proposed by Belsky and Vondra (Belsky & Vondra, 1989). Jay Belsky is a professor in University of California, and Joan I. Vondra is affiliated with University of Pittsburgh. These two are often involved many researches related to childcare, parenting, and child hood developments. In addition, the model below, which mentions the factors and influences of parenting methods or acts, has been the basis on many recent childcare researches.

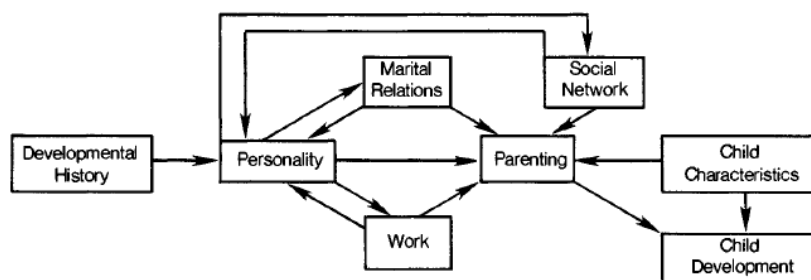


Figure 1. Determinant Parenting model

From the model above there are several factors that influences Parenting (method), however we can categorize it into two, which are parents characteristic, (Personality, marital relations, work burden, and social network) and child characteristic, and I shall explain it in order how these factors affect parenting method negatively, which leads to neglect and abuse.

1. Developmental history refers to the parent's background, such as their family, social, health, or psychological background, which shapes their Personality. Example: A young man was born and raised by a single father who kept yelling at him and taking drugs. There is a high possibility that man would do the same to his child later once he has one.
2. Marital Relationships. It is one of most common types of reasons for child maltreatment. A parent of a broken family or a divorced couple possesses a high level of stress, anxiety, and depression, which may be highly plausible affecting how they would do as a parent. Some worst case, they might show a direct hostility and a strong rejection toward the child (Belsky & Vondra, 1989). A simple example: A divorced mother may just neglect and confine a child inside the house while the mother is most likely having fun by herself.
3. Work burden is one of the most recent and common reason for a parent to neglect his or her own child. This is mostly happen in low-income or middle-income family who can barely meet their end. Most likely, it is because of the long work duration that makes a parent to neglect his or her child, or their low salary, which are not even enough because of the childcare.
4. Social Network. Parents' social network highly affects their personality and their childcare methods (parenting). Human beings are originally social creatures, thus they keep adjusting to their surrounding people whether they like it or not. If the parents mingle with people with troublesome backgrounds, it might affect heavily how they would treat and see their children as. Example: A gambling father might force his children to work for his gambling addiction, and that child has become his sole money bank, instead of his father's child who should be cared for.
5. Child characteristic is also the reason of parental neglect and abuse. Perhaps, that child is increasing the parents' burden due to that child's disability or personality. Example: A child who is in need of extra care due to an illness, or a child who cannot live to his parents' ideal. If the parents cannot stand them any longer, it is highly plausible that the parents might start not to care about their child anymore.

Further, from these explanations and the model above, it is clear that parents' developmental histories, marital relations, social networks, and work experience affect their individual personalities, and thereby lead to their childcare method (parenting) and affect their child's development. Thus, if the parental factors are not suitable, they might highly become the reasons of the acts of child maltreatment. Which is why, by applying this theory, I shall determine the reason why Diana neglect the main character, Carol.

From these five factors, I am going to use four of them, which are developmental history, marital relations, work, and child characteristic. Diana in this story is a single working mother with psychological disturbance. Her psychological disturbance was caused by her medical background(developmental history) of being raised under overly strict parents. The reason of her regressing psychological state is because of the stress, depression, and anxiety right after her husband divorced her and went away with another woman, which explains her problematic marital relation. Since then, she has to work twice as hard to provide for her two daughters. With her accumulated stress from her work, house-chores, family finance, her daughters' studies, her behaviors starts to change. During the first year after the divorce, she starts showing signs of partial dislikes toward Carol, who is need of extra care and attention due to her speech disorder. She cannot stand how she needs to be very patient when talking to her every time. However, as the years pass, she starts disliking Carol who is not as accomplished as Carnel. Carol is not academically accomplished as Carnel who keeps getting achievements and trophies from their school. Her dislike toward Carol reaches its peak when Carol still looking for her divorced husband whom she loathes so much. This work will cover how Diana grows even

more hostile, disruptive, and rejecting towards Carol because of her situation and psychological state, which undermine her behaviors.

Emotional Child Maltreatment in Corresponding Comprehensive Child Maltreatment Scale (CCMS)

Comprehensive Child Maltreatment Scale (CCMS) is a self-report measure of an adult's perception of his or her experience of various maltreating acts during childhood created by Daryl J. Higgins on 2001. Higgins is the director of the Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS), a nationally recognized center of research excellence in the field of child, youth and family welfare at ACU. Professor Higgins comes to ACU from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, where as Deputy Director he led the research program for research projects and research communication outputs across a broad range of issues relating to families in Australia. The scale describes the development of two parallel measures to assess multiple types of child maltreatment. I am going to use this scale to show how Diana's maltreatments toward Carol affecting Carol's emotional developments negatively to the point of having Carol socially impaired.

In an attempt to resolve the problem of focusing on only one type of maltreatment, Higgins was recommended the inclusion of subgroups of each maltreatment combination. Thus, he and his group made this scale to measure maltreatments based on their characteristic of frequency or severity.

CCMS Scale	Psychological consequences in children
Ridicule, shame, Threat, provocation	Rejection or Degradation Terrorizing (act of harm or self-harm)
Witnessing Family Violence Scale	Encouraging anti-social or promoting violence
Rejection, Neglect	Inability to properly express emotions, and inability to keep a conversation (speech disorder)
Isolation	Detached from human interactions, isolating self, socially impaired.

Figure 2. CCMS Scale of Emotional Abuse based on severity

The scale above refers how each level of maltreatments affect the children's emotional development, or simply it shows how the children reacts and become from receiving such maltreatments.

1. Level 1. If a child receiving mild verbal abuses, such as shamed, ridiculed, or so on by their parents, they will not be able to go against those. For children who still have no power in front of their parents, those words might shape their personality, which cannot trust their own potential as well developing low self-esteem.
2. Level 2. This refers to more severe verbal abuses, such as threats or provoke from parents. In addition to Level 1 consequences, the children might go too far to the point of harming themselves.
3. Level 3. Children see their parents as their role models. By letting children see the act of domestic violence, it would either instill the children fear, which cause fear of interactions or encourage them to copy their parents to commit violence.
4. Level 4. For children who are ignored and rejected by their parents, keeping up with a conversation would be very challenging to them. Because lacking of interactions with their parents, those children barely understand the idea or concept about communicating, which means to expressing emotions and

understanding others. As they grow up, they might still have difficulty in understanding their partner's intentions or even expressing their own thought. It is highly possible, a child receiving maltreatment in this level of severity to develop speech disorders.

5. Level 5. Confining a child means taking away every possibility a child has from the outside world. Without sufficient interactions from outside world, that child will grow in fear of the unknown of the outside world. In a prolonged duration, the child might become a shut-in who isolates himself from outside world out of extreme fear.

The psychological consequences become worse as the severity level increases, but they may still show consequences from lower level, in example, children suffering rejection (level 4) may still has consequences back when they were still suffering level 3 psychological abuse. However, there are several cases that the psychological consequences shown are not as severe as the level of the CCMS scale, but it is not possible to for the consequences to go far above the determined level. Simply, children suffering from level 2 abuse in CCMS may only show level 1 symptoms instead level 2 symptoms, but they still won't go higher to level 3 consequences.

Using the figure and the scale above, I am going to show Carol's behaviors and personality slowly regressing one at a time and slowly becoming socially impaired as the results from receiving neglects from her mother.

CONCLUSION

By applying Belsky's and Vondra's theory of The Determinant Parenting, I could finally give concrete answers of what are the causes of child maltreatments that happen in my creative work. CCMS, which was developed by Higgins, gave many references on my how the main character should regress as the story kept on moving. My main character may be fairly passive with regressing personality, but passive protagonist has the charm to evoke readers' sympathy, and it is a great approach to breathe fresh perspectives of passive characters especially in realistic fictions and slice-of-life fictions.

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