

Hellbound Saint: A Novel Exploring the Impacts of Domestic Violence on Children and Their Long-term Effects

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is a situation where abuse occurs in a household setting and witnessing it during childhood may lead to childhood trauma. Such trauma might linger until adulthood, and manifest in various ways including general or complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and psychopathic traits. This thesis will analyze the impacts of domestic violence using the complex trauma framework by Julian D. Ford and Christine A. Courtois. The creative work will be a psychological thriller novel, depicting Raisya and Yohan's trauma journey due to witnessing domestic violence during childhood. Raisya's trauma manifests as complex PTSD, while Yohan's manifests as psychopathy tendencies.

Keywords: childhood trauma, complex trauma, domestic violence, psychopathy, PTSD

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence refers to an abusive action that happens within a household, which can be physical, mental, or both, and may occur between partners or even from parents to their children (Rakovec-Felser, 2014). Several reasons such as depression, frustration, economic issues, or even witnessing domestic violence as a child can contribute as the causes of the violent action (Gillette, 2016). Being in this kind of household can physically or mentally affect both the victim and those in the surroundings badly, for instance, the children. Though not being the direct victim of the violent act, exposure to such conditions can damage children's emotional development and mental health and eventually make them suffer from childhood trauma (Thornton, 2014).

Fear, anxiety, and depression can emerge during childhood for those who grow up in an abusive house (Thornton, 2014). Children who witness domestic violence can grow as someone who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which later may cause one to develop trust issues (Rakovec-Felser, 2014). Not to mention that an abusive environment can also contribute to the development of psychopathic traits, a set of behaviors which are usually linked to people who are manipulative, impulsive, lack empathy, and can be connected to criminality (di Giacomo et al., 2021). Exposure to such violence during the critical development stages in childhood can foster psychopathic traits, potentially leading one to be harmful to others.

During 2023 to 2024, there were approximately 197,000 domestic violence cases which were reported in English and Wales (Clark, 2024). According to the United Nations entity UN Women, domestic violence cases in France have increased by 30% since March 2020 when the first lockdown of COVID-19 was started (Boserup et al., 2020). In Indonesia itself, the data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, shows that there are around 18,000 cases of domestic violence that are reported from January to September 2023 (Pramono, 2024). This proves that domestic violence is widespread and such a challenging issue to stop, which explains the urgency to spread awareness of the issue.

According to Oatley (2016), fiction can be the tool to understand other beings by discussing complex things of human life in different perspectives as they rarely have one single

outcome or solution. Hence, we chose a novel for the fictional work form as it is usually complex and long and it deals with human experience. Writing a novel allows us to delve into the characters' development, making it an ideal medium to break down the psychological impact of each character that affects the story.

We chose psychological thriller for the genre to convey the message of the story through the psychological side. The story later will explore each character's mind while the setting will incorporate tension, fear, and anxiety. The psychological thriller genre allows us to explore the psychological states of each character while also exploring the suspense of growing up in an abusive family. As this genre usually breaks up the psychological motivation behind every action taken, it matches the plot well with the genre and benefits the readers as they can feel the tension both from the genre and the background story.

The story will be about the journey of Raisya and Yohan's trauma and the intervention and support from their surroundings. They are two best friends who grew up in domestic violence households. Raisya is trying to bury her dark memory by focusing on her job being a police officer, while Yohan thrives as a quite well-known psychology lecturer and speaker amongst the university where he works. When brutal murders strike the town, Raisya and her team pursue the case until the evidence slowly points to Yohan as the main suspect, revealing his trauma has manifested as psychopathy.

In this work, we raised two questions: a) What impacts domestic violence Raisya and Yohan experience and b) How it affects Raisya and Yohan's life in their adulthood. The purpose and answers for those are: a) Raisya and Yohan experience constant fear, helplessness, confusion, and aggression during their childhood life due to their fathers' abusive behavior to their mothers and b) Domestic violence leaves traces on Raisya as an adult in the form of complex PTSD and trust issues over men in a relationship, while on Yohan in the form of psychopathic traits, manifested in callous, manipulative, and cruel behaviors.

The significance lies in the difference between the perspective of the analysis. While most academic works which analyze the impacts of domestic violence focus on the direct victims' perspective, like intimate partners, ours focus on the children's, the witnesses. We analyze the impacts of domestic violence on children and the long-term effects that might linger until adulthood. Additionally, this creative work uses the psychological thriller genre to offer both a harsh glimpse of the reality of growing up in a violent home and an entertaining escapism for those who resonate with its theme. To achieve the goals of this work, we intend to self-publish it through digital writing platforms so that it will reach a wide audience.

Theory and Methodology

This study uses the complex trauma framework by Julian D. Ford and Christine A. Courtois. Complex trauma refers to complicated traumatic stressors because they have additional complications. According to Ford and Courtois (2020), the characteristics of complex trauma are various: it can be a personal experience that involves relationship betrayal, when a child is harmed or abandoned by caregivers, or repetitive or ongoing events, which often begin in early childhood like domestic violence. Traumatic experiences that occur in childhood might form trauma that can last until adulthood and can result in the harm of mental or psychological disorders such as any form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or maladaptive behavior like psychopathy (Ford & Courtois, 2020).

Children in their developmental stage naturally seek trust and safety from their parents or caregivers. If the familiar setting, like family, becomes a place that forces children to be in a

constant state of alertness instead of being in a nurturing and safe space, they may feel unsafe, which can eventually lead to the development of childhood trauma (Herman, 2015). According to De Bellis and Zisk (2014), witnessing domestic violence is one of the common types of childhood trauma that can result in distress, any form of PTSD, or other behavioral issues.

PTSD is the result of an attempt to cope with an existential threat (Ford & Courtois, 2020). In domestic violence cases, as abusive episodes usually persist for years, it is categorized as a prolonged traumatic event and might result in the development of PTSD or even Complex PTSD (C-PTSD). Based on what Ford and Courtois (2020) argue, the repetitive and prolonged traumatic stressors and the experience of it without any relief usually result in more complex stress reactions that are usually called C-PTSD.

C-PTSD is not a separate or completely different diagnosis from PTSD but rather, they often co-occur. People with C-PTSD face the symptoms of PTSD with additional symptoms that are specifically exhibited by C-PTSD survivors. They are not only re-experience the trauma, actively avoid what might trigger the trauma, and suffer from heightened fear like the original symptoms of PTSD, but also the additional symptoms of C-PTSD such as unable to control their emotions, seeing self negatively; see themselves as vulnerable or damaged, and having difficulties to maintain or form relationships (Maercker et al. 2022; Ford & Courtois, 2020). Unlike PTSD symptoms that can come and go, the additional issues of C-PTSD are likely to persist even though the person is not facing traumatic stressors directly (Maercker et al., 2022).

Psychopathy, as another possible result, is a neuropsychiatric disorder which makes individuals who suffer from this disorder have poor behavioral controls, deficit emotional responses, lack of empathy and remorse, resulting in criminal behavior (Anderson & Kiehl, 2014). Children who have complex trauma history are often associated with aggression and other behavioural issues which can lead to them being labeled as psychopathic or callous (Ford & Courtois, 2020). Based on an examination done by Lewis et al. (2021), participants who are exposed to complex trauma have higher scores in psychopathology compared to those who are not exposed to trauma.

The traumatic stressors like witnessing domestic violence during childhood can alter the brain and body's self-regulation capacities like emotional and behavior regulation. According to Ford and Courtois (2020), when the stressors happen, the defensive system of the brain becomes dominant and shifts the brain's function into survival mode, which decreases the brain's ability to think, judge, or learn. If this mode remains dominant, it might result in emotional lability and impulsive behaviors, which can develop as psychopathic traits. Additionally, high exposure to violence during childhood or adolescence can result in emotional desensitization. Due to the repetitive exposure to such conditions, one's empathy and social behavior levels are decreased as a result (Mrug, Madan, & Windle, 2016). The brain system change and emotional desensitization are closely related to the development of psychopathy.

As for the methodology, this work employs secondary research by reading articles, academic journals, and books which can be found on the internet. The articles, journals, and books that are mentioned are widely known and belong to those whose works have already been evaluated and proved as credible sources. The research also included finding novels, movies, and dramas that shared a similar theme and topic with this work so we could get a better understanding and perspective about the chosen topic. At last, we brainstormed how to insert and structure the topic into the plot, about the characters and their roles, and what kind of conflicts each character will face throughout the story.

CONCEPT OF CREATIVE WORK

This creative work uses the psychological thriller genre as the story revolves around the human mind. According to Mecholsky (2014), this genre is primarily triggered by social and personal fear. In the story, the genre revolves around the trauma the two main characters got during their childhood that was caused by the abusive acts from the father figures. Since their memories play a big role in their characterization, through this genre, we would like to show Yohan and Raisya's thoughts, feelings, and traumas that are shown through their actions that contribute to the suspense of the story while also making intricate plots. We would also like the readers to delve into the characters' minds and psychological state upon undergoing life that is haunted by the past trauma caused by domestic violence that occurs in their family.

The point of view used in this work is the third-person omniscient point of view, the one where the author knows everything about the characters including their minds, actions, and feelings (Kirby, 2022). We will also use flashbacks, which are usually used to interrupt the chronological order and go to the past before the story begins to provide backstory or context of the character (Stephens, 2022), as we need to show how the main characters' prior life and how it affects their present lives.

This novel gets inspiration from a Japanese novel titled *Confessions* (Minato, 2014). This book explores how trauma and grief could lead someone to do planned revenge. The similarities lie in the use of flashbacks, the psychological thriller genre, and the exploration of trauma that will affect one's life even in the future after the traumatic event has happened. As for the differences, *Confessions*, Minato (2014) uses the first-person point of view, grief and trauma for the main topic, and explores how revenge and desire for justice are what move the story forward.

Genre Codes and Conventions

The characters in the psychological thriller genre are usually explored through their psychological state. They deal with psychological issues or imbalances which can put them in psychological and physical danger or make them the danger itself (Simpson, 2010). Our work adopts that, proved by the characters dealing with their childhood trauma from abusive households that still haunt their adulthood and results in two different outcomes for each character: complex PTSD and psychopathy.

As for the place, traditionally, the psychological thriller genre can take place anywhere as long as it creates the suspense atmosphere (Dukes, 2021). This work will also employ that, placing the characters in familiar places of their own such as houses, offices, police station, and schools. For the setting of time, this genre traditionally uses both past and present and our work employs that as well.

Finally, the events in this genre are typically filled with continuous threat and unexpected acts of murder, violence, and criminal activity while illustrating the characters' inner conflicts and emotional states (Samandarova, 2024). Adopting that, the atmosphere that surrounds the characters in the story will revolve around the suspense of constant threat and murder. Raisya and Yohan as children are put in dangerous circumstances as their fathers are abusive to their mothers and make them feel constant fear and anxiety. That event will make them suffer from childhood trauma which affects their adulthood; Raisya will be having inner conflicts between friendship and duty while suffering from complex PTSD and trust issues from

her trauma, while Yohan will be the antagonist who develops psychopathic traits and puts lots of people in danger.

Theme

The story takes themes about how domestic violence can cause a serious impact on children and may result in adults as psychological problems. To apply the theme, the two main characters in the creative work will witness domestic violence during their childhood and develop trauma because of it. The trauma lingers until adulthood, and it leads them to suffer from complex PTSD, struggling to form healthy relationships due to trust issues, as experienced by Raisya, and exhibiting psychopathic traits that occur to Yohan. The story will highlight the ranged impact of childhood trauma caused by domestic violence settings, and how it can differentially affect one's later life.

Plot

The three acts of the story begin with the introduction of the characters, mainly about the main character, Raisya and Yohan, through a murder case that strikes the town. It introduces Raisya as a 30-year-old passionate police officer in the Criminal Investigation Division and Yohan as a lecturer and a quite well-known speaker of Psychology major in a university. The first act will also introduce other characters like Raisya's teammates and Aiden, Raisya and Yohan's best friend.

The second act is marked with the detail of how Raisya's complex PTSD interrupts her daily life, as well as when the second murder occurs. Through dead-ends and frustrations during investigation, Raisya's team come to an assumption that the murderer seems to target the victims' families rather than the victims themselves. After the team collects more information based on the new assumption, the hints slowly lead them towards several suspects including someone unexpected—Yohan.

The story reaches its climax when Raisya gets the final hint about Yohan's dark past, and even witnesses Yohan murdering his own father. Aiden who also works on this case tries to warn Raisya about Yohan, but he is too late because Raisya is already standing in front of the blood pool that Yohan creates by his own hands. Despite being the cop who witnesses the crime, Raisya somehow understands why he acts like that, which contrasts with her "heroic" character. After Yohan's trial results in a possible death sentence, Raisya's mental state begins to unravel. Her unresolved trauma and her guilt in Yohan's capture begin to take their toll. Aiden, who has always been supportive, stands by her side through all her dark times, and by his consistent presence, Raisya finally finds her own reason to break the trauma chain.

Characters

Main Characters:

- Raisya / Caca (30)

Raisya has a balanced figure with an ideal height for a police officer and fair skin. She is an only child and naturally becomes a courageous and resilient individual. Due to her independent and tough personality, she hates it when others can see her vulnerability or pity her. While she adores both her best friends, Raisya deeply trusts Yohan as they share a similar pain, thinking that he is the only person who can understand her.

- Yohan / Jovan (30)

Yohan has a lean build and is quite tall compared to the average height. His black, doe eyes give him a friendly look, especially when he smiles. Yohan is an intelligent and charming individual who is a quite well-known lecturer and speaker in the psychology

field in a university he works at. All those good, manipulative traits polish his broken interior perfectly, hiding his villain self that is emotionless and apathetic. Despite his dark side, Yohan genuinely values his friendship with Raisya and sees her as the only person who has ever made him feel understood and less alone in his trauma.

Supporting Characters

- Aiden (30)

A bit shorter than Yohan, Aiden has a muscular but not overly bulky build. His dimples often show as he frequently smiles and laughs. Aiden grew up in a healthy, happy family that made him understand how to give love to people unconditionally. No matter how high and thick Raisya's wall she builds to protect her from being hurt, he still wants to learn about her to be able to protect and take care of her, even after more than ten years of loving her. That reflects his stability, consistency, and warm personality—a contrast to Raisya's. His job, as a reporter of a crime TV show, often leads to a clash with Raisya as a police officer, but they somehow always find a way to make up.

- Devan (32)

Devan has a balanced figure with a muscular build. He has a round face and a stern look, which makes him appear serious daily. He is a police officer and is one of Raisya's teammates. He is a helpful teammate, and though he is a bit impolite in his words, Devan is a good and responsible cop.

- Erwin (56)

Erwin is the head of the Criminal Investigation Division. His graying black hair makes him look a bit older than his actual age. He has dark tan skin, evidence of years of outdoor work. Erwin was the police who put Raisya's father in jail after almost killed Raisya's mother during his abusive episode. His sense of justice and intelligence in understanding humans' emotions makes him a good leader for his team.

- Danny (27)

The youngest member in the team and is the happy virus in the team. He is energetic and passionate about his job but still lacks experience, so he is still learning to improve his "police sense". He is more athletic compared to Devan and Erwin, so he is usually tasked to chase the culprit or do outdoor investigation. His short, dark brown hair usually left messy, and his big, round eyes give him a youthful and cheerful appearance.

Conflicts

The creative work will use two types of conflicts: man vs. self and man vs. man. Man vs. self-conflict usually occurs when people fight with their own moral values, their behaviors, and the reasons behind them (Nucci, 2018) and is shown through the trauma that the characters must endure during childhood until adulthood. For the man vs. man conflict, it is an external struggle where the characters deal with problems outside themselves; problems in the real world (Tobalase & Ogbonna, 2017) It is basically the conflict between the "hero" and the "villain", which occurs when both the main characters encounter each other during and after the murder case.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this creative work is to explore the impacts of domestic violence, especially on children who witness it. We used a complex trauma framework to discuss

thoroughly the impacts of prolonged stressors, which in this case is domestic violence. The framework is implemented in this creative work through both the main characters, who grow up in a domestic violence household which makes them suffer from childhood trauma: Raisya's trauma manifested in a complex PTSD and Yohan's is in psychopathy traits.

This novel answers the two questions. First, witnessing domestic violence during childhood can cause children to suffer from childhood trauma due to fear and helplessness. The fact that they cannot intervene in the abuse makes them stressed and the whole thing sums up as a trauma which lasts until they are adults. Second, later in their adulthood, the trauma manifested as psychological problems like complex PTSD and/or psychopathy traits

This work deepened our understanding about how trauma can literally affect some aspects of someone's life in a detrimental way. We learned that even though being indirectly affected by domestic violence, children who witness the violence might suffer from the long-term effects of it. It also taught us that despite experiencing similar events, each person might respond differently, so that the outcome of the trauma will also be different from one another.

As mentioned before, we are planning to publish the creative work separately to digital writing platforms to spread awareness about this issue. Since the beginning of the writing process of this work, we want to produce something that can represent someone's untold feelings or memories so that they can feel understood without sharing their pains.

Many discussions about domestic violence use the direct victims' point of view, usually the intimate partner. Hence, we suggest students or researchers analyze from different perspectives to differentiate with the majority. Additionally, choosing specific impact might be another good suggestion. It will be easier and less research time to find journals or academic sources that can support the arguments if the impact is specific.

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